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## Innocence as a Super-power: Little Girls on the Hero's Journey

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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### Abstract

A study of the power of innocence, particularly of innocent girl characters, and how innocence functions in their stories. Dorothy of Oz, Lucy of Narnia, and Chihiro from Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* are compared to discover just how their innocence works as their greatest strength.

### Additional Keywords

Baum, L. Frank—Characters—Dorothy Gale; Girls in fantasy; Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Lucy Pevensie; Miyazake, Hayao—Characters—Chihiro; Spirited Away (film)



INNOCENCE AS A SUPER-POWER:  
LITTLE GIRLS  
ON THE HERO'S JOURNEY<sup>1</sup>

DAVID EDERSON

**Introduction**

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR PLOTS IN FANTASY FICTION IS THE QUEST. From the ancient tale of Gilgamesh, to European fairy tales like "Jack and the Beanstalk," to *The Lord of the Rings* and the modern genre it has spawned, the story of a hero (or heroes) setting out to fulfill a daunting task is told over and over in countless variations.

Such quest stories are ultimately based on the archetypal myth of the Hero's Journey, as described by comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell, who identified common elements of many similar myths from disparate cultures in his influential 1949 work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.<sup>2</sup> Campbell's briefest summary of what he called "the monomyth" is this:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (30)

Campbell further delineates the mythic structure and its major variations thus:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark [...] or be slain by the opponent and descend in death

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<sup>1</sup> A slightly different version of this paper was presented at Mythcon 39, New Britain CT, August 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell is not the only one, but he is probably the most well-known and most frequently cited. Pearson and Pope cite three references: Lord Raglan, *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Dream*; Jessie Weston, *From Ritual to Romance*; and Dorothy Norman, *The Hero: Myth/Image/Symbol* (vii).

[...]. Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world [...], his recognition by the father-creator [...], his own divinization [...], or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain [...]. The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection [...]; if not, he flees and is pursued [...]. At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread [...]. The boon that he brings restores the world [...]. (245-246)

Many of these elements are found more in myths than in fairy tales; Campbell himself says, "Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle" (246), and that the road of trials "is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure" (97).

The quest story in ancient myths and traditional fairy tales almost invariably featured male protagonists, who relied on things like the use of force to defeat an enemy, or courage and daring in order to voyage to unknown lands and face dangerous opponents and hazardous circumstances. Often these heroes acted alone; sometimes they had companions but the hero was still the leader (Jason had his Argonauts, but none of them actually did anything on their own). Independence and individual initiative are also valued attributes of the traditional quest hero.

We generally consider such traits as physical strength, courage, independence and self-reliance, and the tendency to use force as "masculine" traits, as opposed to traits identified as "feminine" such as empathy, nurturance, connection with community, and negotiation.

(Note that in this discussion it is important to differentiate the concepts of masculine and feminine from the actual genders of male and female. Humans—and well-written fictional characters—contain both masculine and feminine aspects to varying degrees. Examining the social and/or biological forces which result in men and women exhibiting more or less masculinity and femininity is beyond the scope of this paper. What we are concerned with here is the concept of masculinity/femininity, and how that is expressed in symbolic ways in fiction through character and plot.)

Many scholars in recent years have discussed what a female version of the Hero's Journey would be.<sup>3</sup> Most of these tend to focus on stories featuring

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<sup>3</sup> See Palumbo, for example.

adult women as protagonists, or at least adolescents going through a rite of passage into adulthood. But simply putting a woman into the traditional hero's journey does not necessarily create a female version of the journey. For example, Sarah Connor in the original *Terminator* film and Ripley in *Alien* go through many of the archetypal stages of the journey, but one could easily imagine men in those roles and the stories would be essentially the same. It is not uncommon for women in modern stories to possess and use masculine traits like strength and fighting skills, whether the character is modern herself (Buffy the Vampire Slayer) or a re-imagined historical character (Xena, Warrior Princess).

It seems to me that a truly feminine version of the Hero's Journey must emphasize feminine qualities of the heroes, rather than merely the physical fact of being female. Since adult women have the option to draw on many masculine traits to help them in their quests, it is easier to see the feminine traits in the forefront of the hero's actions if we look to protagonists who do not naturally possess physical strength, fighting skills, or independence. This would be the very young female child.

To this end, I would like to examine three stories with little-girl heroes, and see how they might fit with, or differ from, the Campbellian archetype. There are many to choose from, of course, from Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* to L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* and Pullman's *The Golden Compass*. However, some of these girls don't really go through enough of a change in the course of their stories to be consonant with the monomyth, and some are not innocent enough at the start to enough demonstrate feminine attributes. I would also like to examine tales from different nations and eras, to show the universal applicability of this kind of story.

Therefore I choose, from America in the early 20th century, L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*; from mid-century Britain, C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; and from Japan at the end of the century, Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.

### **Dorothy**

"I am Dorothy, the Small and Meek," says Dorothy upon meeting the "great and terrible" Wizard of Oz (Baum, 127). Indeed, Dorothy is about as innocent as they come. She trusts strangers and rarely perceives potential dangers; she loves her adoptive parents and her dog and her simple Kansas home. Yet she is a quest hero just as much as Odysseus or Beowulf.

Dorothy is not merely called to adventure; she is swept into it involuntarily by a force of nature. Yet we can see that there was some element of choice in this event. Rather than immediately joining her family in the storm

shelter, she ran after Toto instead, which put her at the mercy of the tornado.<sup>4</sup> Thus it was concern for another life rather than for her own that set her feet on her journey.

Also involuntary is her defeat of the first guardian, the Wicked Witch of the East. Dorothy's immediate reaction is to deny it: "[T]here must be some mistake. I have not killed anything" (22). And when the Good Witch of the North points out the Wicked Witch's feet sticking out from under the house, Dorothy's first impulse is to help her unintended victim: "Oh dear! Oh dear! [...] The house must have fallen on her. What ever shall we do?" (22). Although she is unwilling to take credit for the Wicked Witch's death, the Munchkins validate it as a true victory and hail her as a hero. The Good Witch of the North, the first supernatural helper/advisor, gives her a kiss of protection and the fallen Witch's silver shoes (which became ruby slippers in the movie).

However, this is just the opening event of her adventure; now that she is firmly across the threshold between Kansas and Oz, she immediately sets about dealing with her situation. Although everything around her is strange, she accepts it with wonder but without skepticism, as a dreamer accepts a dream. Not all heroes have this reaction, as we will see later. This gives further credence to the possibility that at least on an unconscious level she desired this adventure.

Her first act is to define the quest itself: she wants to go home. Home, in spite of the grayness of Kansas (as emphasized by Baum in the text<sup>5</sup> and by the use of black-and-white film in the movie), represents to Dorothy the desirable values of family, love, community and familiarity. Yet in order to find her home, she must accomplish a series of sub-quests, each of which leads to the next. First she must go to the Wizard and ask for help; then she must fulfill the Wizard's demand to defeat the Wicked Witch of the West; and when the Wizard eventually fails to help her, she must journey to the Good Witch of the South to ask for help.

Setting out along the Yellow Brick Road, she begins the "road of trials" phase of the story. True to the archetype, she meets friendly helpers along the way, in the form of the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion. Unlike helper figures of many other stories, these helpers become companions on the rest of her journey, rather than merely offering assistance and passing out of the story. But these are not merely companions in the sense of Jason's Argonauts; they are integral to the plot and theme of the book. Indeed, it could be said that on a symbolic level, the four friends represent four primary elements of one

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<sup>4</sup> This is referring to the original book version rather than the more famous 1939 MGM film. However, even in the movie, Dorothy's choices—especially those stemming from concern for her dog—led her into the path of the tornado.

<sup>5</sup> There are no fewer than ten uses of the word "gray" in the first three pages of the book.

character: the Scarecrow as cognitive reasoning (air), the Tin Woodman as emotion (water), the Lion as physical action (earth), and Dorothy as motivating will (fire). Seen in this way, the eventual outcome for each aspect—attaining the goal each most desired—represents a fulfillment and integration of the whole self.

Even on the surface level, the egalitarian bond between the friends emphasizes Dorothy's valuing of community and co-operation over leadership and self-determination. The story would have been very different in both theme and plot if Dorothy had assumed a hierarchical role with respect to the others. Indeed, for her to do that would have required her to be a different character altogether.

The trials along the first phase of the road are manifested as either natural obstacles (a deep gorge, a swift river) or living things of the natural world (hybrid beasts called Kalidahs, a wildcat, a field of soporific poppies).<sup>6</sup> Most of these are overcome by a team effort, such as combining the Scarecrow's ideas, the Woodman's axe, and the Lion's strength. The poppies, however, are dealt with in a different way, using what I call the Androcles motif, after one of the oldest and simplest expressions of this plot device.

As Scarecrow and Tin Man are immune to the poppies, they are able to carry Dorothy and Toto to safety, but are unable to move the massive Lion and are unwilling to leave him behind. While pondering what to do, the Tin Man saves a mouse from a pursuing wildcat. The mouse turns out to be the Queen of field mice, and in gratitude she musters her people to provide the crucial help needed to save the Lion. Gratitude is an important part of this scenario, since the mice would never have helped the Lion, of whom they were terrified, if not for their feeling of obligation to the Queen's savior. Even then, the Scarecrow and Tin Man had to reassure them that the Lion, once awakened, would not eat them. It is also important to note that Dorothy was asleep through most of this transaction, so that the innocence of her spirit was not a factor; instead, the assistance of the mice was gained through a kind of trade—aid for aid. It is highly doubtful that the mice would have helped the travelers without a debt of gratitude being involved. This points up the effect that Dorothy's presence has on the tasks of overcoming obstacles.

Once the travelers reach the Wizard, they are confronted with an even less generous aid-for-aid proposition. "You have no right to expect me to send you back to Kansas unless you do something for me in return," says the Wizard. "In this country everyone must pay for everything he gets. If you wish me to use

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<sup>6</sup> In the book, the poppies are just a natural part of the landscape. The movie version makes them much more inimical, as they are placed there deliberately by the Wicked Witch of the West.

my magic power to send you home again you must do something for me first" (128).<sup>7</sup> Of course, later in the story we find that the Wizard was merely stalling and not really bargaining. Still, this represents an additional obstacle on the road of trials as well as the initiation of the next phase of the adventure.

The supreme test comes in the form of the Wicked Witch of the West. At this point, Dorothy is truly at the nadir of her trials. She is captured by the Witch, separated from her companions, and made to work as a slave. The last straw is the Witch stealing one of her magic silver shoes, which causes Dorothy's one and only expression of true anger. She throws a bucket of water on the Witch – normally a relatively impotent form of violence, but Dorothy had no way of knowing this was actually the only way to defeat the Witch. Mirroring her arrival in Oz, she kills a fearful enemy by accident, and the local residents (the Winkies this time) acclaim her as a hero and deliverer.

In this climactic scene, the film version accentuates Dorothy's innocent character even more; the movie's Dorothy threw water deliberately on the Scarecrow, who had been set on fire, and only accidentally on the Witch (*Wizard*, scene 47: "I'm melting!"). Baum's depiction of Dorothy being angry seems an anomaly in her character, which was depicted up until that time as unflinchingly caring and considerate.

The remainder of the story is taken up with the third phase of the Hero's Journey, that of return. Having defeated the worst enemy of Oz, the companions now expect to gain the boons they set out to acquire. Even though the Wizard turns out to be a humbug, he is wise enough to point out that three of the four already possessed what they thought they lacked; they only needed the confidence to recognize their strengths and believe in themselves. An extended denouement (wisely abbreviated in the film version) leads the four friends to the Good Witch of the South, who informs Dorothy that she too already possessed the means to achieve her goal – the silver shoes.

Thus the four-part hero has gained the four-part boon and is ready for the final return. The Scarecrow becomes the ruler of the Emerald City after the departure of the Wizard; the Tin Woodman has been asked to rule the Winkies; the Lion finds a forest whose animals want him to be their king. But what of Dorothy's return? The final chapter of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is only ten lines long, and all it says is that Aunt Em is overjoyed to see Dorothy and that Dorothy is glad to be home (261). Dorothy's boon to the world is not as overt as that of her newly-royal companions.

Other analyses of Dorothy's story offer possibilities of the meaning and value of her journey. Raylyn Moore sees a personal benefit: referring to the

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<sup>7</sup> Baum reversed this attitude in later Oz books, describing the economy of Oz as a kind of utopian Marxist vision where money was unknown and nobody ever paid for anything.



Hero's Journey aspect of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, she says, "Dorothy completes the cycle in that tale and returns to Kansas renewed, reborn, ready to grow up at last" (172).

Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope point out a more subtle effect on the external world:

Back on the Kansas prairie, Dorothy finds not greyness [*sic*] and hostility, but new life, fertility and love. Uncle Henry has built a new farmhouse, and he is milking the cows when she arrives; and instead of looking horrified and pressing 'her hand to her heart' in fear of the girl's exuberance, Aunt Em holds her in her arms and covers her face with kisses. Because she has become a hero, the world to which she returns is transformed. (71)

The returning Dorothy's effect on her world is thus seen to be the result of who she is and what she has been through, rather than the result of a magical object or healing elixir that Campbell mentions in his summary of the monomyth.

## Lucy

All of the Narnia stories feature children as protagonists, but Lewis seemed to have favored Lucy Pevensie. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was dedicated to her namesake, his goddaughter Lucy Barfield (Glyer 203), and in the first three books of the series Lucy is the viewpoint character more often than not.<sup>8</sup> Lucy also seems to have an especially close bond with Aslan.<sup>9</sup> Most importantly, it is Lucy who discovers the wardrobe and the land beyond it, so in a sense, at least *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is Lucy's story.

Lucy's "call to adventure" is obviously her finding the wardrobe and entering Narnia. Although the discovery is accidental, she willingly accepts it, unlike Dorothy, who is forced into her adventure. But like Dorothy, she quickly accepts the reality of this new and magical world.

Does Lucy encounter "a shadow presence that guards the passage"? If so, it is not an obvious one. The first being she meets is Mr. Tumnus, who offers her tea—hardly a menacing action. But we later learn that despite his basically

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<sup>8</sup> In scenes where several of the children are present, a viewpoint character may be defined as one whose inner experiences are most presented to the reader, through such verbs as "thought," "felt," "saw," "heard," "remembered," "realized," "wanted," etc. I have counted 53 such instances for Lucy in *Lion*, while Edmund has 30, Peter 20, and Susan 5. Similar preponderances of Lucy-centric narrative are found in other Narnia books.

<sup>9</sup> As Edmund says in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* "We've all seen him [Aslan]. Lucy sees him most often" (91).

good-hearted nature, he *was* a guardian of a sort: he (along with no doubt many others) had been charged by the White Witch to keep a lookout for any Sons of Adam or Daughters of Eve, and to capture and deliver them immediately. But Tumnus does not. Why? When it comes down to it, he cannot bring himself to do it. Just spending time with Lucy won him over and convinced him not to turn her in. He says, "I hadn't known what Humans were like before I met you. Of course I can't give you up to the Witch; not now that I know you" (14-15).

If that weren't enough, she also had an innate sense of Tumnus's goodness as well. She tells him, "I think you are a very good faun. You are the nicest Faun I've ever met" (14). And when he protests, "Would you believe that I'm the sort of Faun to meet a poor innocent child in the wood, [...] and invite it home to my cave, all for the sake of lulling it asleep and then handing it over to the White Witch?" she replies, "I'm sure you wouldn't do anything of the sort" (14). Although by this time Tumnus already had doubts about what he was charged to do, Lucy's belief in him helped clinch his decision. So in a sense, Lucy "defeated" this guardian, not by strength or cleverness or guile, but just by being herself. Her innocence was her power in this encounter, the power that prevailed. This is a very feminine power, the complete opposite of competing and striving.

The next phase of the monomyth involves tests and helpers. Lucy's first test is a test of faith, as she struggles to hold on to her belief in Narnia in the face of her siblings' disbelief and outright scorn. (In fact, Edmund treats Lucy so badly that he might be seen as another manifestation of the shadowy guardian.) Lucy maintains her belief and passes this test, perhaps *because* she is so young and not yet jaded by the "real" world; she knows what she experienced but does not know enough to think it was impossible. Unexpected help comes from the Professor, who uses logic to persuade Peter and Susan to accept Lucy's assertions as true, or at least not to dismiss them outright (37-40).

As for other helpers, of course her first helper is Mr. Tumnus himself, soon followed by the Beaver family, Father Christmas, and ultimately Aslan. The Beavers help the Pevensies, not out of reward for anything the children have already done (the Androcles motif), but out of belief in what they represent and what they are destined to become. Along with her siblings this time, Lucy again gains this help by simply being who she is. Similarly, Father Christmas—the very symbol of unselfish giving—helps them with gifts of power, emphasizing that "they are tools, not toys" (87); he gives weapons to Peter and Susan, but Lucy's special gift, the crystal vial of fire-flower cordial, bestows upon her another feminine power, the power of healing.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Susan also receives her horn, which represents the feminine attribute of communication and connection.

A power that Lucy already possesses is compassion. This should not be underestimated, for it is compassion for the captured Tumnus, along with her acceptance of responsibility for the situation, which determines a major plot direction. When Susan suggests going home, Lucy says, "We can't just go home, not after this. It is all on my account that the poor Faun has got into this trouble. [...] We simply must try to rescue him" (47-48). If not for Lucy's insistence, the story would have ended right there.

The element of choice is noteworthy here. Other than a possible difficulty in finding their way back to the lamppost, there is nothing physically stopping Lucy and the others from abandoning the quest and going home. It is a combination of intangible factors that keep them on their path: the need to rescue Edmund, a feeling of responsibility to the Narnians struggling against the White Witch's oppression, and the spiritual nature of their love for Aslan (and his for them). These motivating impulses are different from those of Dorothy (and Chihiro, as we shall see), yet the qualities of compassion and responsibility bear similarities to the qualities of desire for community and family.

Lucy does undergo further tests in her adventure, but aside from the physical effort of the trek from the Beavers' dam to the Stone Table, and the mortal danger of the wolf Maugrim's attack, her tests are emotional rather than physical.<sup>11</sup> One can imagine her being significantly hurt by Edmund's betrayal—possibly more so than Peter and Susan were, for he was her older brother and she should have been able to trust him. Certainly her most devastating emotional blow was watching Aslan let himself be killed. Lewis spends several pages describing Lucy's and Susan's anguish at the scene (124-30). The tests of the hero being emotional and spiritual underline the feminine nature of this version of the Hero's Journey.

The sacrifice of Aslan may also be seen as Lucy's "supreme ordeal." If that is so, what is the reward gained? Certainly saving Edmund's life is a considerable reward; in addition, she and her sister and brothers all become kings and queens, which is as close to apotheosis as a fairy tale can reasonably attain. A personal reward for Lucy is that she is now perceived as a peer among her siblings, rather than merely the baby of the family.<sup>12</sup>

The return through the wardrobe at the very end of the book seems anticlimactic in terms of the quest archetype. They bring no boon back to England. In fact, very little is told of the children's lives after their return and before they re-appear in the sequel. The return phase of this version of the Hero's

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<sup>11</sup> I am disregarding the recent film version, which includes much more physical peril in order to fit the Hollywood standard.

<sup>12</sup> In fact, it could be argued that Lucy becomes the spiritual leader of the Pevensies in the next two books of the series.

Journey must be seen as taking place in Narnia rather than in England; the fulfillment of the prophecy leads them to the four thrones of Cair Paravel, which becomes their home in this world. Interpreted this way, they have indeed brought a tremendous boon to the world—they have freed Narnia from the eternal winter of the White Witch's reign, and provided it with wise and just rulership for many years.

### Chihiro

Most of the films of Hayao Miyazaki and his colleagues at Studio Ghibli feature protagonists, or at least major supporting characters, who are capable, active, strong-minded young females (girls or teenagers).<sup>13</sup> Almost all of these characters start out that way, but Chihiro in *Spirited Away* is an exception.

When we meet Chihiro at the beginning of the film, she is a sullen and whiny 10-year-old, upset because her family's move to a new town has uprooted her from her familiar surroundings and school friends. Taking a wrong turn and finding themselves at the entrance to a mysterious tunnel, the parents are keen to explore but Chihiro is afraid and tries to dissuade them. Choosing the less scary alternative of going along rather than waiting in the car, she clings annoyingly to her mother's arm all the way through the tunnel, and at every new phase of the exploration of what appears to be an abandoned theme park, she is reluctant and keeps wanting to leave. But unknowingly, she has already crossed the threshold of adventure; even back at the entrance to the tunnel, the wind was trying to blow her in and she found it "creepy" (0:03:50).<sup>14</sup>

Once inside, her parents are drawn by the smell of food, and sit down at a fully-stocked buffet and start eating, even though they have no idea who or what the food was prepared by or for. Chihiro displays a remarkably acute intuition about the situation, refusing to eat and saying, "Let's go! They're gonna be mad at us" (0:08:55). At the time, this seems like unfounded anxiety, but it turns out that she was exactly right. That food was not meant for humans, and eating it is indeed a serious transgression.

While her parents are distracted by the food, Chihiro's attention is drawn to an elaborate bath house on the other side of an ornate bridge. A young man appears and tells her to flee before she is discovered, and offers to cover her

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<sup>13</sup> Nausicaa in *Nausicaa of the Valley of Wind*, Sheeta in *Castle in the Sky*, Kiki in *Kiki's Delivery Service*, Mei and Satsuki in *My Neighbor Totoro*, Fio in *Porco Rosso*, Shizuku in *Whisper of the Heart*, Haru in *The Cat Returns*, San in *Princess Mononoke*, and arguably Sophie in *Howl's Moving Castle*.

<sup>14</sup> References are to the American DVD of the film. Since the scenes are so long, timings are given in hours:minutes:seconds, and unless otherwise noted, quoted lines are from the English subtitles for the Japanese soundtrack (translated from the original Japanese by Linda Hoaglund and Jim Hubbert), rather than the English-dubbed script.

escape. Evening falls quickly and the theme park comes alive, populated with specters. Chihiro returns to where she left her parents but finds them turned into giant pigs, devoid of human sense and memory. Trapped by the sudden appearance of a broad river separating her from the way out, terrified of the fantastic spirit forms approaching her, she refuses to accept the situation developing all around her. "I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming!" she shouts (0:13:23), vainly trying to wake herself up. She urges the world around her to go away, to disappear, but she finds that she is the one disappearing. She is saved by Haku, the young man she met on the bridge, who gives her a bite of food that re-solidifies her and brings her fully into the spirit world.

Haku, like Lucy's Tumnus, is thus simultaneously the shadow guardian and her first helper. Also like the Tumnus/Lucy situation, Haku seems to want to help her simply because of her vulnerability and helplessness. Later in the story we find that Haku originally came to this world to learn magic from the sorceress Yubaba, but she stole his name and memory, so now he is simultaneously her apprentice, her henchman, and her captive. We can imagine that the Haku's "henchman" side and his "captive" side would have opposing impulses towards Chihiro. His empathy with her appearance in this scene—trembling and fearful—could be the deciding factor in Haku's "captive" side winning out over his "henchman" side. Thus, like Lucy, Chihiro turns her shadow guardian into her first helper without even trying, simply by being who she is.

Haku tells Chihiro what she must do to survive this new world and to rescue her parents, and shows her the way to the old boiler-stoker Kamaji, who seems at first to be an obstacle but turns out to be another helper (albeit a somewhat curmudgeonly one). Indeed, many of her encounters from this point on involve a helper/obstacle ambiguity: the grumpy maid Lin, who helps her get a job; No Face, who starts and ends as a friend but becomes a menace in between; the Stink God, who turns out to be a river spirit in distress; the witch Zeniba who is sometimes a ruthless opponent and sometimes a comforting grandmother. Even Haku is sometimes cold and distant, and is distrusted by the other bath house employees. It is only Yubaba, ruler of the bath house, who is a consistent antagonist.

Although she begins her journey frightened and resistant, Chihiro is motivated by the need to recover her parents – initially a selfish wish to be taken care of, but soon transformed into a determination to save them from their magically-induced swinehood. Like Dorothy, she just wants to go home, but the only way to do that is to proceed forward through the adventure; there is no turning back. Along the way, she comes to care for others in her new life, especially Haku, and this adds to her motivation.

Her first major challenge is to get a job in the bath house; this, she was told, was the only way for her to survive in this world. Actually, she unofficially

begins to work upon first meeting Kamaji: she takes pity on a little soot sprite struggling with a large piece of coal, and having picked up the coal, she is instructed by Kamaji to “finish what you start” (0:27:09) so she carries the coal to the furnace and throws it in, thus nearly joining the soot-sprite work force. However, Kamaji won’t let her continue to work there, so she must confront Yubaba and insist on being given work. Even though she is petrified with fear, she stands her ground as Yubaba rages at her and threatens her with “the worst, nastiest job I’ve got until you breathe your very last breath” (0:38:05). Although this demonstrates the beginning of her developing courage, the way the scene is portrayed strongly indicates that she only persists because the alternative is not an option; she is still in a more or less powerless position. But it is significant that her first attempt at working came about through her altruistic impulse to help a lesser being, rather than through doing what she was told to do, or manipulated into doing, by others.

After securing her place in the bath house, and therefore in the spirit world, her “road of trials” takes place almost entirely within the bath house, rather than an actual physical journey such as Dorothy and Lucy undergo. It is also more complex. One of her first tasks is to bathe a huge foul-smelling spirit that everyone refers to as a Stink God. In a straightforward quest story, she would overcome this obstacle and move on, but this scenario changes as it progresses. Clumsily falling into the bath with the Stink God, she sees what she thinks is a thorn sticking out of its side.<sup>15</sup> Her compassion and instinct to help another creature, even such a disgusting one, result in the entire staff turning out to help pull out the “thorn”—which is revealed to be a tiny percentage of a huge amount of trash and garbage. Once all this pollution is removed, the spirit transforms into a majestic River God, and gives Chihiro a boon in thanks. Not only is the Stink God transformed from menace to helper, but Chihiro’s task is transformed, and her successful surmounting of this obstacle results in the gift of a valuable tool that she will need in her future trials.

Her encounter with No Face is similarly complex. At first she takes it for a harmless, homeless spirit who is stuck out in the rain. Taking pity, she leaves open a door for it to enter the bath house. Once inside, it initially tries to help her, but eventually succumbs to its own gluttony (abetted by the greed of the bath house employees who unquestioningly take the fake gold it creates), becoming a rampaging demon whom only Chihiro can stop. She has to do this simultaneously with another urgent task, that of saving an injured and spell-

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<sup>15</sup> Another kind of reference to the Androcles story. This is not the only classical allusion in *Spirited Away*: the Stink God sequence is reminiscent of Hercules’s labor of cleaning the Augean stables, and Chihiro’s parents being turned into pigs has obvious resonances with the Circe episode in *The Odyssey*.

poisoned Haku. She accomplishes both with the aid of the River God's gift, as well the strength of her love for Haku and her innate moral sense which puts No Face in his place.<sup>16</sup> The River God's gift is a small piece of food, and by feeding a piece of it to Haku and another piece to No Face, she heals them both: Haku chokes and spits out the evil spirit bug that Yubaba was using to control him, and No Face regurgitates all the food and people he had eaten since arriving in the bath house, reverting to the harmless shadow he was in the beginning. In these two acts, Chihiro displays the twin skills of nurturing and healing, both feminine attributes.

Chihiro's penultimate challenge is to journey (physically this time) to see Yubaba's twin sister Zeniba, apologize on Haku's behalf for his theft of Zeniba's magic seal, and beg for the spell on Haku to be lifted. Again the transformation theme is played out, as she finds Zeniba's cozy country home and warm grandmotherly personality to be the complete opposite of Yubaba's. Like Dorothy, she learns that what she was seeking was already within her power—Haku is freed from his spell of bondage to Yubaba by a memory buried in Chihiro's unconscious mind, which is brought to her consciousness by a process of recognition (Napier, 186).<sup>17</sup> This gives him back his true name and his identity as the spirit of a river Chihiro had once fallen into.

Her final task, upon returning to the bath house, is to solve Yubaba's riddle: identify her parents among a crowd of pigs. Correctly sensing that none of the pigs before her are her parents, she wins her freedom and that of her parents, and is allowed to return home. This is another feat of recognition which demonstrates a high degree of intuition and emotional intelligence on Chihiro's part, and is achieved partly (possibly solely) because she now has a calmness of spirit and clarity of mind that enables her to see through Yubaba's trap.

A couple of factors contribute to Chihiro's state at this point: first, she has befriended Yubaba's giant baby, thus gaining some emotional leverage against Yubaba. Secondly, her visit with Zeniba, Yubaba's physically-identical but temperamentally-opposite twin, has changed her view of Yubaba. The twin aspect of Yubaba/Zeniba serves as a metaphor for positive and negative aspects within a single person; after Chihiro has had a positive experience with Zeniba, she is more likely to be able to see Yubaba as a person rather than as a demon. Because of these two new developments, she is no longer afraid of Yubaba, and can address the pig puzzle calmly without emotional stress which could interfere with her intuition.

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<sup>16</sup> Anime critic Susan Napier says, "she scolds No Face for its uncouth behavior (thus offering it a moral framework that the greedy bath attendants had failed to provide)" (185).

<sup>17</sup> We might think of "recognition" as a combination of observation (receptivity to information) and the intelligence to process the received observations effectively.

The ultimate boon she gains from her journey is a new confidence and maturity. In a bit of dialog added to the final shot of the English-language version, her parents try to sympathize with her feeling scared of a new home and new school, and Chihiro replies as they drive away, "I think I can handle it" (2:00:40). Even though this moment is wordless on the Japanese soundtrack, and there are indications that Miyazaki's intent was for her to not consciously remember her time in the spirit world,<sup>18</sup> the implication is clear: her normal world has been transformed from a depressing anxiety-filled one into one which she knows she can master.

Of the three heroes under discussion, Chihiro is the one who is the most dramatically changed by her experience. From her first moments in the spirit world, when she is so afraid of an outside staircase that she descends by sitting on the stair and inching down one step at a time (0:21:00), to a scene in the middle of the story, when to help Haku she races along a rusty pipe hanging on the outside wall (1:15:24), to a climactic confrontation with the horrifyingly ravenous No Face in which she shows no fear at all (1:30:47), Chihiro makes tremendous strides in developing courage and confidence. Her adventure begins with her crying for Mommy and Daddy, and ends with her calmly and brilliantly saving her parents from their spell and leading them home.

### Conclusion

Psychiatrist Jean Shinoda Bolen, author of *Goddesses in Every Woman*, draws parallels between the Campbell model and the inner journeys of many of her patients. In describing her patients' childhoods, she says:

As heroines, they were not strong and powerful demigods like Achilles or Heracles, who in Greek mythology were stronger and more protected than mere mortals (like comic book superheroes or John Wayne characters). These children, as precocious human heroines, were more like Hansel and Gretel, who had to use their wits when they were abandoned in the forest, or when the witch fattened Hansel for dinner. These children were like the rabbits who followed a vision to a new home in Richard Adams's novel *Watership Down*: they were small and powerless, sustained by an inner myth that if they endured and kept on, they would make it to a better place later. (279-80)

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<sup>18</sup> The Internet Movie Database says, "Does Chihiro remember her experience? Not according to Hayao Miyazaki. The source is an interview with him in the film pamphlet sold in theaters during the film's first run in 2001." I have not been able to verify this source.



Note that Bolen emphasizes the weakness of the characters in her examples, and that they had to use intelligence and faith rather than strength and power. This describes Dorothy, Lucy and Chihiro as well.

The three stories we have discussed exemplify the kinds of quests that embody feminine, rather than masculine, approaches to dealing with difficulties. The hero may enter her adventure willingly or unwillingly, may find it easier or more difficult to accept her new reality, may encounter physical or emotional dangers, but there is a commonality of the qualities displayed by these three girls that differ markedly from the (male) super-hero on a similar adventure. Let us look at these qualities.

The qualities that helped Dorothy on her quest were due to her gentle and loving nature: willingness to help others (even those who turn out to be evil), placing community and co-operation over individual accomplishment, and concern for her loved ones.

For Lucy, it was her spiritual strengths, compassion, healing ability, responsibility, and a willingness to endure emotional tragedy.

For Chihiro, it was intuition, recognition, emotional intelligence, helping the weak, moral rectitude, valuing others, seeing the good in even the most repellent, nurturing, healing, and being willing to apologize (accept responsibility) on behalf of another.

All three received help along the way, sometimes as reward for their altruistic acts of helping others, but frequently just because they were small, helpless, and innocent.

Each had to face (directly or indirectly) a powerful witch, representing a negative aspect of femininity, what Jung would call her shadow self. Each prevailed through perseverance, faith, and the help of her friends.

Each quest ends with a similar reward. Bolen says, "What happens at the end of the myth? [...] Note that after proving her courage and competency, the heroine does not go riding off into the sunset by herself, like the archetypal cowboy hero. Nor is she cast in the mold of the conquering hero. Union, reunion, and home are where her journey ends" (294). Pearson and Pope put it more simply: "The treasure the hero claims at the completion of the journey is herself" (223).

In beginning the quest, each hero must not only enter the new world, she must also leave behind the old, which may have been gray, dull, oppressive, or anxiety-ridden, but was home nonetheless, familiar and at least to some extent comforting. This represents a loss of a kind, which can be traumatic to a greater or lesser degree. Dorothy loses her home; Chihiro loses her parents; Lucy loses her brother Edmund. Bolen says, "Will the heroine in the woman emerge or survive the loss? Or [...] will she stop her journey at this point? If she goes on, she will be choosing the path of the heroine" (289). As my acquaintance Gene

Stoneman says, "It seems to me that the characters transform into heroes the moment they accept the adventure and begin to engage in the challenge with a sense of playful adventure. This is the person that we all secretly wish to become" (29 July 2008).

Stoneman (9 July 2008) also points out a parallel to Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*: "Size matters not," says Yoda to Luke Skywalker (1:10:26). As we have seen, neither do gender and age when it comes to the successful completion of the Hero's Journey. What does matter is acceptance of the quest and determination to complete it. Even the weakest, most vulnerable character may become a hero in her own right. Where an archetypal masculine quest hero may have super-powers such as strength, invulnerability, and physical prowess stemming from his experience and worldliness, the attributes that become the equivalents for the archetypal feminine hero come from the innocent side of her spirit – love, compassion, nurturance, and healing.

The Hero's Journey can be seen as a template for the coming of age of the protagonist. We have all been through this; we have all felt vulnerable like the innocent female child, and we have all had to face difficulties of many kinds. Some may require masculine types of solutions, like physical combat, but in modern life more and more of our challenges are social and emotional. Fantasy stories like these may actually be more relevant to what our psyches go through in the real world than any super-hero slugfest could ever be. And among bewildering and threatening complex forces, whether in fantasy or reality, the innocence of these little girls may indeed be a super-power.



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