From Folktale to Fantasy: A Recipe-Based Approach to Creative Writing

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ABSTRACT

In an environment of increasing strategies for creative writing "lessons" with varying degrees of constraints – ideas like the writing prompt, flash fiction, and "uncreative" writing – one overlooked idea is to work with folktale types and motifs in order to create a story outline. This article sketches how such a lesson might be constructed, beginning with the selection of a tale type for the broad arc of the story, then moving to the range of individual motifs which might be available to populate that arc. Advanced students might further consider using the parallel and chiastic structures of folktale to sophisticate their outline. The example used here – and suggested for use – is a folktale which informs both *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit* and which, therefore, is likely at least to a certain extent to be familiar to many writers. Even if the outline which this exercise generates were never used to write a full story, the process remains useful in thinking about the building blocks of story and traditional structures such as the archetypal "Hero's Journey."

Introduction

I teach on the Writing side of a Department of English and Writing Studies. I trained as a medievalist, but circumstances led me to a unit which teaches a range of courses from introductory creative writing to professional communication and rhetoric. In the fall of 2013, the local public school board contacted several departments in our faculty, asking if we would be interested in putting together some kind of programming for students in their Grade Five gifted itinerant program. I was put forward as the contact person, and we devised a set of seminars for a day-long event we called "Language Day." I decided to talk about Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, a work I could expect a few of them to know, and to talk about *The Hobbit* as a retelling of a folktale. In conducting this workshop over consecutive years, I discovered that the idea of a folktale "recipe" as a starting point for creative writing, at least as a small-scale lesson, was something that worked for the students, many of whom were reading books which would be considered fantasy (however one would define that difficult term). In subsequent years, a sophisticated version of this lesson was used in a graduate English course (with a creative option for the final project) and, most recently, as a full half-course in creative writing at the undergraduate level.[1] The lessons learned, in terms of motifs and structure, should be valuable to (creative) writers in any genre.

I borrow the adjective "recipe-based" from Kenneth Goldsmith, though he uses the term while discussing the "recipe-based art" of Sol LeWitt. Goldsmith's description of LeWitt's method is instructive: "Like shopping for ingredients and then cooking a meal, [LeWitt] says that all the decisions for making an artwork should be made beforehand and that the actual execution of the work is merely a matter of duty, an action that shouldn't require too much thought, improvisation, or even general feeling" (2011: 128-9). Unlike a recipe for food, however, which tends to turn out fairly similar fare, these recipes and propositions in fact generate distinctive final products, even if multiple versions of Goldsmith's *Day* (his retyping of an edition of the *New York Times*) would probably not interest many readers.[2] This writing exercise is obviously very different from what LeWitt and Goldsmith are advocating (and does not encourage or facilitate disengaged execution), but the analogy of a recipe remains useful.

If the terms "motif" and "folktale" are unfamiliar, I am working with the following definitions: a motif, in terms of folklore, is "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition. In order to have this power, it must have something unusual and striking about it" (Thompson 1977: 415). Generally, motifs are figures, items, or events. Motif indices, efforts to gather and classify motifs, ought to be tools a writer has at hand. The classic motif index is that of Stith Thompson, but there are excellent smaller indices focused on specific areas (see, for example, Boberg 1966 and Cross 1952). While motifs may appear in multiple unrelated stories, a tale-type index assumes that all the different versions of one tale type have "some kind of genetic relationship" (Thompson 1977: 416). In terms of folktale, then, a tale consists of a broad set of motifs, usually in a certain sequence, which has various realizations which are more and less true to the underlying type. In linguistic terms, one might think of the tale type as a kind of deep structure and the individual tales as different surface structures.

Context

Approaching creative writing with a model or recipe is not a new idea. In fact, attempts to communicate the essence of story have been around since at least Aristotle, who stated in his *Poetics* that "tragedy is mimesis of an action that is complete, whole, and of magnitude [...] A whole is that which has a beginning, middle, and end" (Halliwell 2014: 55). In a traditional three-act structure, beginning, middle, and end correspond to certain kinds of action, usually described with words like *situation*, *complication*, and *resolution*, though Joseph Campbell's *departure* (or *separation*), *initiation*, and *return* is really the same kind of structure (Campbell 1968: 49-243). As early as Horace, that structure had been modified to five acts, and most students of creative writing will be familiar with Freytag's pyramid (five acts) and contemporary reworkings of the pyramid in well-known texts such as that in Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction* (2019: 134-41), itself an influence on Stone and Nyren's seven-act model, which includes *ground situation*; *complication* or *inception*; *rising action*; *crisis*; *climax*; *falling action*; and *resolution* or *denouement* (Stone and Nyren 2005: 72-4). The most detailed model of this type, though developed for screenwriting, is Blake Snyder's "beat sheet." Snyder takes a three-act structure and turns it into fifteen beats, including with each beat the rough length of the section. Where earlier

structural models, however, hint almost not at all at the content of each act, Snyder's beat sheet affords glimpses of the sort of story it might underpin: *opening image*; *theme stated*; *set-up*; *catalyst*; *debate*; *break into two*; *B story*; *fun and games*; *midpoint*; *bad guys close in*; *all is lost*; *dark night of the soul*; *break into three*; *finale*; *final image* (Snyder 2005: 70).

Another approach to distilling the essence of story, though impossible to differentiate completely from the structural model, relates to the reduction of story to types. Some of these reductions are very familiar: there are only two stories (*someone went on a journey* and *a stranger came to town*; a widespread remark that may have begun with John Gardner; Burroway 2014: 167) or perhaps three (*man against man*, *man against nature*, and *man against himself*; Wilbur 2001: 65-85). Less well known are the "seven basic plots" of Christopher Booker (2004) and Blake Snyder's belief that all screenplays fall into ten types: *monster in the house*; *golden fleece*; *out of the bottle*; *dude with a problem*; *rites of passage*; *buddy love*; *whydunit*; *the fool triumphant*; *institutionalized*; and *superhero* (Snyder 2005: 26-41).

Other instructional guides, like Snyder's, also blend structural models and catalogues of story types. Ronald B. Tobias, for example, offers 20 "master plots," but for each plot shows how it must belong to one of only two types – "plots of the body" or "plots of the mind" (1993: 43) – all while generally adhering to variations of a three-act structure (particularly relevant here is the "Quest Plot," Tobias 1993: 71-84). Tobias comments that "each plot is different, but each has its roots in a pattern" and links those patterns to human behaviour: "These patterns are so basic to being human that they haven't changed in the last five thousand years" (Tobias 1993: 9-11).[3] John Truby takes a slightly different approach, suggesting that Aristotelian terms and three-act structure are not useful (Truby 2007: 3) and that plot is organic; in other words, plot must develop in a process from a story idea. Truby does list six plot types (2007: 260-66), but his focus is on "steps" of story structure. Truby offers seven key steps and 22 steps overall, but warns that the steps are not a formula, acting instead as the scaffolding which ensures the successful unfolding of the organic plot (2007: 39-40, 268). The steps work because they are part of a process that, as for Tobias, comes from human behaviour: "All stories are a form of communication that expresses the dramatic code," and Truby defines that code as "an artistic description of how a person can grow

or evolve," which is "embedded deep in the human psyche" (2007: 7).

At the same time as Tobias and Truby are suggesting a way to reduce story to a pattern or patterns of behaviour, other arguments for just one story-type are, at least on the surface, slightly less abstract, and clearly connect to the realm of myth and folktale. Here, we must recognize the work of Otto Rank and Lord Raglan, both of whom extracted a foundational heroic pattern from what might best be called myth (the Rank-Raglan "mythotype" has 22 points, from *the hero's mother as royal virgin* to *the hero's tombs* – see, for example, Hall 1989: 74-6). More widely known is the "monomyth" of Joseph Campbell, in which he describes the 17 plot points which are usually part of myth (using his *separation*, *initiation*, and *return* as the three acts into which the plot points fall). Though Campbell does not feature prominently in many writing textbooks, Christopher Vogler uses Campbell exclusively in developing a "mythic structure for writers." Vogler states that Campbell "exposed for the first time the pattern that lies behind every story ever told" (2007: 4), and that pattern is as follows:

1. Heroes are introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD, where
2. they receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE.
3. They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL, but
4. are encouraged by a MENTOR to
5. CROSS THE FIRST THRESHOLD and enter the Special World, where
6. they encounter TESTS, ALLIES, AND ENEMIES.
7. They APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE, crossing a second threshold
8. where they endure the ORDEAL.
9. They take possession of the REWARD and
10. are pursued on THE ROAD BACK to the Ordinary World.
11. They cross the third threshold, experience a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience.
12. They RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR, a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World. (Vogler 2007: 19)

In response to indices of motifs and tale-types, Vladimir Propp (1968) also developed a morphology of the folktale which includes seven *dramatis personae* and thirty-one different functions:

effectively, though each tale need not include every function (and indeed many include only a few), Propp demonstrated that all stories in what he called the "fairy tale" category of folktale had the same possible range of functions in the same order. The functions would be fulfilled by the *dramatis personae*, characters and things which can vary wildly while the basic function – for example, "the provision or receipt of a magical agent"; Function XIV – remains the same in all tales which include it. Propp's morphology also placed function in categories which designate the arc of the story: *initial situation, preparatory section, complication, donors, entry of the helper to the end of the first move, beginning of the second move, and continuation of the second move.* Propp's model was criticized for not being sufficiently abstract, though lauded for its recognition of the possibilities in reducing "a wealth of empirical or surface narrative events to a much smaller number of abstract or 'deep-structural' moments" (Jameson 1981: 120). A.J. Greimas takes Propp's spheres of action and functions and reduces them to six *actants* (Subject and Object; Sender and Receiver; Helper and Opponent), which are basically "bundle[s] of functions" (Greimas 1983: 218) that can be "manifested in discourse by several actors," just as one actor can "constitute a syncretism of several actants" (Greimas 1987: 107). The relationship of the actants can be diagrammed, and the relationships between pairs (the "semantic investment[s]") are "desire," "knowledge," and "power," respectively. What Greimas is working out is a sophisticated grammar of narrative, a system that is significantly more abstract than Propp's and that demonstrates even more clearly how discussions of story structures and types is very much a part of traditional structuralist concerns from Lévi-Strauss onward.

While the approaches listed here have much to offer in understanding of the essence of story, and, indeed, if the structuralist project were extended, to an understanding also of how story is told, their utility in the creative writing classroom is limited. The model I am proposing adopts a specific number of movements (or acts) and a range of motifs from a particular folktale type, thus avoiding an overly abstract or general set of instructions. This model thus incorporates both structural and typological classifications of story in a manner that can be scaled to the level of the students being taught. One benefit of using the particular tale I have chosen is that Tolkien's *The Hobbit* is a full realization of precisely this model. So far as I have been able to discover, this

particular approach has not been explored as a tool for teaching creative writing.

The Lesson: I. Content

The best known and most widely available folktale type index is that of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (*The Types of the Folktale* 1961) (AT numbers), though Hans-Jörg Uther has issued a more up-to-date index (*The Types of International Folktales* 2004) (ATU numbers). This lesson could be developed with any tale type in Aarne and Thompson, but I have taught this lesson with ATU 301 (known as "The Three Kidnapped [Stolen] Princesses") because it has a full set of movements (or acts) and a rich range of possible motifs (or content). Using ATU 510 (the basis for Cinderella) or ATU 333 ("The Glutton"; the basis for Little Red Riding Hood) would work just as well. ATU 301 consists of six movements: the hero [4] (by which is meant the particular characteristics of the hero of this type of tale), the descent, stolen maidens, rescue, betrayal of the hero, and recognition. Within these six features are further details of possible plot elements, here quoted precisely from Aarne and Thompson:

> I. *The Hero* is of supernatural origin and strength: (a) son of a bear who has stolen his mother; (b) of a dwarf or robber from whom the boy rescues himself and his mother; (c) the son of a man and a she-bear or (d) cow; (e) engendered by the eating of fruit, (f) by the wind or (g) from a burning piece of wood. (h) He grows supernaturally strong and is unruly.

> II. *The Descent*. (a) With two extraordinary companions (b) he comes to a house in the woods, or (b¹) a bridge; the monster who owns it punishes the companions but is defeated by the hero, (c) who is let down through a well into a lower world. Alternative beginning of the tale: (d) the third prince, where his elder brothers have failed, (e) overcomes at night the monster who steals from the king's apple tree, and (f) follows him through a hole into the lower world.

> III. *Stolen Maidens*. (a) Three princesses are stolen by a monster. (b) The hero goes to rescue them.

> IV. *Rescue*. (a) In the lower world, with a sword which he finds there, he conquers several monsters and rescues three maidens. (b) The maidens are pulled up by the hero's companions

and stolen.

V. *Betrayal of Hero*. (a) He himself is left below by his treacherous companions, but he reaches the upper world through the help of (b) a spirit whose ear he bites to get magic power to fly or (c) a bird, (d) to whom he feeds his own flesh; or (e) he is pulled up.

VI. *Recognition*. (a) He is recognized by the princesses when he arrives on the wedding day. (b) He is in disguise and (c) sends his dogs to steal from the wedding feast; or (d) he presents rings, (e) clothing, or (f) other tokens, secures the punishment of the impostors and marries one of the princesses. (Aarne and Thompson 1961: 90-1)

For each of these movements, the tale-type index includes a list of possible motifs, a list which sketches a broad range of possible variations in the tale.[5] That list can (and probably should) be supplemented by consulting Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature* and looking up the motifs listed in Aarne and Thompson (as one can then add closely related motifs which might not appear in extant versions of the tale).[6]

In a short workshop-style lesson, students can begin by listing the familiar elements of Tolkien's story. Which characters do they remember? What, further, are the major plot points of the story? It ought to be possible to discuss features of the hero (Bilbo) and his companions and the nature of their adversaries and to discuss where these might appear in the movements listed above. A one- or two-sentence outline of *The Hobbit* could be generated and compared to Tolkien's reconstruction of ATU 301 in *Sellic Spell*. It should immediately be apparent that kidnapped or stolen maidens have nothing to do with *The Hobbit*, and here students should see that certain movements can be left entirely out of the tale. Even for my youngest audiences, I demonstrated how Tolkien's primary source for *The Hobbit* is *Beowulf*, and *Beowulf* is itself a realization of ATU 301, a type which has many versions, the most intriguing of which are Old Norse-Icelandic prose texts such as *Grettir's Saga*. While the lesson is easier to understand and gains nuance with a knowledge of existing versions of ATU 301 (and longer exposure to the theoretical approaches outlined quickly above), my experience has been that it works for a group of ten-year-olds, about half of whom had some knowledge of Tolkien.

To help them to invent outlines of their own, I provided them with a template (Figure 1) adapted from the six movements listed in Aarne and Thompson to make the tale more familiar:

	Motif 1	Motif 2	Motif 3	Motif 4	Motif 5	Notes
Section I *The Hero(ine)*						
Section II *The Hero(ine)'s Stuff/Qualities*						
Section III *The Complication*						
Section IV *The Descent*						
Section V *The Return*						
Section VI *Recognition*						

Figure 1. *The Skeleton Tale (the movements of ATU 301 adapted from Aarne and Thompson)*

I used the motifs from Aarne and Thompson (divided according to movement) and supplemented them with related motifs from Thompson's index. To include all six lists here would take too much space (see Appendix A for a fairly full version), but my technique in this workshop was to have students, template in hand, rotate through six stations (one for each of the sections above), each of which had copies of the motifs for just one of the sections. Key to this process was making sure that no student moved in a linear fashion through the six categories (thus ensuring that none could plan a version of ATU 301 in linear order of sections). Further, as with the folktales themselves, any feature may be omitted (as the "Stolen Maidens" are not part of *Beowulf*, *Grettir's Saga*, or *The Hobbit*). To give an idea of what this might look like, here are some of the motifs from "The Hero(ine)":

> L114.1-5: hero of unpromising habits: lazy hero; hero has lain motionless since birth; contest in laziness; spendthrift hero; unruly hero; cheater as hero; hero with disgusting habits

> B635.1: human foster-child with animal qualities: the bear's child: human child of man/ woman who marries a bear acquires bear characteristics

> F611.1: strong person's birth and rearing: child of bear that has stolen one parent; child of person and dwarf; child of person and forest spirit; child of person and robber; child of person and horse; child of person and giant; engendered by the eating of fruit; engendered by the wind; born from an egg; born from a noodle; struck by smith from iron; child of person and troll; child of a sea spirit

> F611.3: hero acquires strength: strength from magic object (D1335; D1830); strength from fasting for 12 years and eating nothing except earth; hero practices uprooting trees; jumps across river; beats giant challenger; tests weapons

In choosing motifs, as Propp observes about several of his folktale functions, the motif (or function) can be positive or negative. For example, the hero can react positively or negatively to the actions of the future donor (Function XIII), and/or, depending upon the reaction to the donor, the magical agent may or may not be transferred (Function XIV) (1968: 42-6). If one considers Bilbo Baggins in light of the above, one sees immediately that Tolkien adopts some motifs (invisibility from a magic object), is careful with some (instead of a bear's son, Bilbo is only slightly odd for potentially having fairy blood in his Took ancestry) and completely inverts others (Bilbo is in no way physically strong; that characteristic and many of the characteristics of the traditional hero of such a tale are given to Beorn). Ultimately, the motifs are suggestions: students should feel free to adopt, adapt, and invent their own motifs within the given structure.

The Lesson II: Structure (Advanced)

In discussing memorable features of *The Hobbit*, students may have remarked on the cyclical pattern (as the subtitle suggests, "there and back again") of the narrative as a whole and the way the story seems to be punctuated by battles against "monsters." Recent scholarship on *Beowulf* has recognized that the poet uses a repeated "narrative paradigm" in the monster fights, though not all elements are present in each fight (Orchard 2003: 142-3).[7] In other words, the three monster fights of the poem have a parallel structure, and tales of the type ATU 301 often contain multiple internal repetitions of the descent movement of the tale (or further to recognition). In constructing the basic form of a tale, writers should be encouraged to think about parallel sequences of events/motifs. Simple examples which most everyone will know are "The Three Little Pigs" and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Though the number need not necessarily be three (in *Grettir's Saga*, it is five), we most commonly see what has been called "The Rule of Three." Christopher Booker finds there are four different manifestations of the rule: "the simple or cumulative three" (each thing much the same); "the progressive or ascending three" (each more important, difficult, or valuable than the last); "the contrasting or double-negative three" (first two are inadequate or wrong); and the "dialectical three" ('the first is wrong in one way, the second in another or opposite way, and only the third, in the middle, is just right') (Booker 2004: 231-2). Propp and Tobias add that trebling can also be attributive ("three heads of a dragon") and can create "character triangles" (Propp 1968: 74; Tobias 1993: 58-66). In other words, all kinds of repetition and variation are possible at different levels of structure.

Both *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*, within sequences

of parallel monster fights, also have larger chiastic structures. These chiastic structures, from their first recognition in Homer, have also been known as "ring composition" or "ring structure," as their inclusion produces what has been called a circular effect, the "there and back again" of Tolkien. A more complex example might be the overall structure of *Beowulf*, which has been laid out most clearly by John D. Niles (1979: 930 [simplified and adapted]):

> A. panegyric for Scyld
> *Prologue* B. Scyld's funeral
> C. history of the Danes before Hroðgar
> D. Hroðgar's order to build Heorot
> *First Fight*
> *Interlude*
> *Second Fight* (each fight has elements in parallel and chiastic patterning)
> *Interlude*
> *Third Fight*
> D. Beowulf's order to build his barrow
> *Epilogue* C. history of the Geats after Beowulf
> B. Beowulf's funeral
> A. eulogy for Beowulf

In thinking about possible chiastic structures, note that elements are often antitheses or related only in general ways (a birth can balance a death; an order to build something can be a great hall or a great tomb). In Old Norse-Icelandic versions of ATU 301, the parallel fights lead to change: Grettir is the "hero" at first, but takes the place of the "monster" by the final fight of the saga; in *The Saga of Arrow-Odd*, each of the fights is actually against the same opponent, and the story ends precisely where it began. In *The Hobbit*, of course, the "fights" are very different, culminating in a battle with the dragon that is, at least for Bilbo, purely verbal. In general terms, as R.G. Peterson has pointed out, parallel and chiastic structures are effects which tend – consciously or subconsciously – to please human expectations of order or which exist "as expressions of [people's] inclination to use measure and symmetry to organize experience" (1976: 373).[8]

The Lesson: III. Outcomes

After choosing several motifs for each section of the template, writers should write a brief outline of the story they have generated. The writing of the outline will require adding some connective tissue. Working with this template and the motifs in Appendix A, 10-year-old writers generate outlines such as the following (although these examples do not incorporate the advanced techniques of repetition, parallelism, and chiasmus), and advanced writers generate outlines of incredible depth and complexity:

1. A girl found running with wolves had disgusting habits. She had a belt she gained through trickery, and the belt could cause illusions. One day, she dropped the belt and had to go back for it, but when she found it, a mist sprang up and she could only follow the sound of a distant drum. The sound led her to an underworld of serpents and their castle where there was lots of treasure. She could only escape by a spider's thread, but the spider demanded her blood, and she returned home wrapped up in the spider's web. She was only recognized because the belt buckle stuck out.

2. Once upon a time, there was a boy who was born when a horse ate an apple. He never had a home, and he wouldn't fight, but he found a ring that protected him against fire. When some malevolent dwarves started kidnapping people, he went to retrieve their souls, accompanied by twin girls. A ferryman took them to a land of rivers of fire and ice, where the boy gathered the souls, but the twins, who couldn't cross the fire, took the ferry back alone. The boy bent a young tree and shot himself over the water, arriving just as the twins who betrayed him were arranging a funeral for him.

3. There once was a girl with the most promising habits, but she was incredibly weak and so light that the wind would carry her away. Her mother gave her a sword which would fight for her all by itself. One day, she

heard that an ogre was attacking people on a nearby bridge, so she went to confront it. The ogre ran from her, and she followed it through a rock under the bridge. She found there a vault of secrets, but it was guarded by scorpions and scratching cats. Her sword kept them at bay while she took a secret, and she escaped with the help of a strong wind. When she got home, nobody recognized her or the sword, and the ogre went right back to attacking people on the bridge. At least she had that secret.

Conclusion

Kenneth Goldsmith, arguing for a new approach to writing in the digital age, rephrases Douglas Heubler and remarks that "[t]he world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more" (2011: 1); Christopher Vogler, writing about what he calls "mythic structure," suggests that one pattern lies behind every story ever told (2007: 4). What Goldsmith is arguing for is "uncreative writing," a process which might (very generally) be described as reworking existing texts; what Vogler is suggesting is that, in skeletal framework and archetypes, all stories are the same, meaning every writer begins with the same basic structure. Both offer thought-provoking considerations of the process, but both approaches, for different reasons, may not work in the creative writing classroom, either courting issues of plagiarism and appropriation or offering too few constraints to the creative process. However, if Blake Snyder is right that "'Give me the same thing ... only different' ... is what story-telling has *always* been about" (Snyder 2005: 44), then what sort of model might find a middle ground?

An approach that in a way combines Goldsmith's idea of reimagining existing texts and Vogler's notion of the one story is to use folktale motifs and folktale types as ingredients and models for story structure. Ideally, a writer would have to hand a tale-type index and a motif index, but the materials can easily be provided, as with the example of ATU 301, to create a stand-alone lesson that can be completed in a session of as little as 60 minutes. To enrich the lesson, students could read Tolkien's *Sellic Spell* and related fairy-tales such as *Dat Erdmänneken* ("The Gnome"; Grimm, Tale 91) or *Der starke Hans* ("Strong John"; Grimm, Tale 166), all tales which directly model the

instructions given here. With more time to evaluate the tale-type, the reading of *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit* could be added, full-length works which exhibit much selection, innovation, and sophistication in their execution of the model. Other prose texts of note are the Old Norse-Icelandic *Grettir's Saga* and *The Saga of Arrow-Odd*, and contemporary novelists such as Patrick DeWitt exploit some of the same basic narrative structures and motifs, as I have shown in a comparison of Tolkien and DeWitt (Fox 2020). The lesson would complement William Quinn's ideas about using *Beowulf* to teach creative writing (2014) and could resonate with Alison Habens' Ink:Well project, in which individual lives are mapped onto a "Hero's Journey" structure (2018), a study which could in turn be used as an entry into a discussion of writing process itself (Burroway 2014: 167; Valeri 2014; Vogler 2007: 293).

Students should, after completing this lesson, at minimum understand the concepts of motif and folktale and have a full outline of a story in hand. Limiting the discussion to motif and folktale, however, obscures the fact that this approach has much in common with theoretical and pedagogical discussions of symbol and archetype. Symbol, first of all, is a difficult term to define, at times functioning as a synonym for motif (where its added meaning is a function, usually, of repetition and intertextual significance) and even as a synonym for archetype. As Janet Burroway defines it, "a symbol is an object or event that, by virtue of association, represents something more or other than itself," making the whole of the writing process "symbolic" (2019: 193-96). Archetype, in contrast, is a term which enters literary criticism through the writings of C.G. Jung, and which in general suggests that certain characters, functions, and patterns are common to the human experience. Christopher Vogler defines archetypes as "ancient patterns of personality that are the shared heritage of the human race" (2007: 23), and Christopher Booker makes clear that archetypes are relevant at different levels of narrative: the "main archetypal complexes centre around the key roles played by human beings in the 'archetypal family drama'" and the "patterns shaping stories … are themselves archetypal" (2004: 707). What Joseph Campbell, Christopher Vogler, and Christopher Booker are arguing is that certain stories, story-patterns, and characters resonate with Jung's idea of the "collective unconscious,"[9] and this is substantially similar to what we saw Tobias and Truby argue (above).

The example of ATU 301, therefore, while on the surface an uncomplicated lesson about a folktale type and the possible motifs that might populate it, is also very much entangled with structuralist and psychoanalytic concerns. From a structuralist point of view, the approach might be argued to constrain creativity, but the psychoanalytic aspect of the archetype offers a way for the content of the story to retain meaning. Northrop Frye has been said to have felt that "each generation rewrites the stories of the past in ways that make sense for it, recycling a vast tradition over the ages" (Richter 1989: 644), and the key creative aspect to this exercise is the qualifying remark "in ways that make sense for it." John Cawelti's study of what he calls "formula stories" suggests the same thing: "the world of a formula can be described as an archetypal story pattern embodied in the images, symbols, themes, and myths of a particular culture" (1976: 16), and a simple juxtaposition of *The Hobbit* and *Beowulf* makes this point clear.[10] Tolkien's own study of fairy-stories puts it in different terms: readers and critics can reduce and find common motifs and patterns as much as they want, but in the end "it is precisely the colouring, the atmosphere, the unclassifiable individual details of a story and above all the general purport that informs with life the undissected bones of the plot, that really count" (2014a: 39).

Christopher Vogler, finally, stresses both the creativity and flexibility of his process: "The Hero's Journey is a skeletal framework that should be fleshed out with the details and surprises of the individual journey"; at the same time, "the structure should not call attention to itself, nor should it be followed too precisely" (2007: 19-20; see also Truby 2007: 269). Vogler, however, is working through a one-story model, and his approach is difficult to implement in the creative writing classroom, particularly with younger students. Using a folktale type and its motifs, while a process in which the same principles apply, allows for a lesson that can produce almost immediate results and that is, at the same time, a better entry point than previous guides to a full range of more expansive, more sophisticated, or more theoretical lessons.

Notes

1. I wish to thank, therefore, the students of the Thames Valley District School Board, the graduate students of English 9142B (Winter 2017), and the creative writers of Writing 4880G (Winter 2019) for their roles in developing and refining this model.

2. Still, the power of parts of this transcription, presented as poetry, is difficult to deny. See, for example, "Two Poems from 'The Day'" (Goldsmith 2009).

3. Tobias would seem to have been influenced by Georges Polti, who, in looking mainly at drama, devised thirty-six "dramatic situations" and links them to thirty-six emotions which "encompass all the savor of existence," "the unceasing ebb and flow which fills human history like tides of the sea, which is, indeed, the very substance of history" (1921:11).

4. The term "hero" here and throughout ought not to be seen as dictating gender, even though traditional examples of the tale have male protagonists. In teaching this lesson (and in the motif lists in Appendix A), I have made that clear.

5. As noted above, Thompson defines a motif as "the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition" (1977: 415), as if a motif were also unchangeable. Propp argues that motifs are not "monomial or indivisible" at all: the smallest indivisible units of the folktale are the functions of the *dramatis personae*. These functions are the "stable, constant elements" of tales, not motifs (1968: 13, 20-1).

6. The final volumes of Thompson's motif index (6.1 and 6.2) are also very useful, as they include an A-Z index where one can look up, for example, "bat" (the flying mammal) or "door" or "stupid"/"stupidity" and discover where these motifs occur. In effect, it offers another path to tracking motifs: a writer interested only in the "dragon" could work from that entry back to all the motifs in the index, thus finding a much larger range of examples than just those attached to a specific tale type.

7. Beowulf's fight against Grendel and then Grendel's mother is treated by Orchard as one narrative paradigm, even though the two fights have similar elements (and this is partly based on the two-troll variants of Old Norse-Icelandic versions of the tale). The dragon fight at the end has many other similar elements.

8. For a more in-depth discussion of repetition and how it might function in narrative, see Brooks 1984: 99-101.

9. Blake Snyder also discusses archetypes, though specifically with respect to character (2007: 57-59). For an introduction to the application of Jung to literary study (with discussion specifically of Booker), see Leigh 2011.

10. "Formula" is another difficult term, particularly as it invokes oral-formulaic studies. Theories of formulaic composition are important for the medieval texts mentioned here and could inform this model in useful ways (see Fox 2020a).

Appendix A: The Six Lists (adapted from Aarne and Thompson)

These lists could be used as they are. However, in situations where students have access to the *Motif Index*, they should encouraged to look up they motifs in which they are interested. For example, looking at B631 generally would generate a rich list of possibilities for a protagonist's origin from human/animal relationship. Searching around D1076 (the magic ring) offers an amazing range of magic objects.

Section I: The Hero(ine)

L114.1-5: hero(ine) of unpromising habits: lazy hero(ine) (hero[ine]) has lain motionless since birth; contest in laziness); spendthrift hero(ine); unruly hero(ine); cheater as hero(ine); hero(ine) with disgusting habits

B631: human offspring from marriage to animal

B635.1: human foster-child with animal qualities: the bear's son: human son of woman who marries a bear acquires bear characteristics

F611.1: strong person's birth and rearing: child of bear that has stolen one parent; child of person and dwarf; child of person and forest spirit; child of person and robber; child of person and horse; child of person and giant; engendered by the eating of fruit; engendered by the wind; born from an egg; born from a noodle; struck by smith from iron; child of person and troll; child of a sea spirit

F611.2: strong person's suckling: suckled by animal; suckled by mermaid; suckled by seven mothers; suckled by giant

F611.3: hero(ine) acquires strength: strength from magic object (D1335; D1830); strength from fasting for 12 years and eating nothing except earth; hero(ine) practices uprooting trees; jumps across river; beats giant challenger; tests weapons

F610: remarkably strong person: has strength of "x" number of people; breaks everything he or she touches; must be chained except when in battle; so heavy that no horse can carry the hero(ine) all day

Section II: The Hero(ine)'s Stuff/Qualities

D810-859: acquisition of magic object: gift, through trickery, found, lost, recovered (many motifs here)

D1335.1-17: object gives magic strength: food; rice/grain; heart of enemy eaten; fighting animals eaten; drink; blood as drink; iron glove; belt; ring; dagger; flask (whatever one drinks from it); bathing in magic cauldron; axe; medicine (charm); song; hammer; staff; apple; garment

D1830-1836: magic strength: by bathing; by touching earth; from helpful animal; from demon; waxing and waning of strength (places; times)

D1076: magic ring: animal recovers lost wishing ring; disenchantment by ring; magic ring tells how another fares; oracular ring; permits owner to learn person's secret thoughts; gives warning; warns of poison; magic ring awakens in the morning; reveals guilt; gives health; renders invulnerable; causes illusion; causes forgetfulness; causes continued sneezing; protects against fire; prevents losing one's way; restores speech; brings good luck

D1081-1097: magic weapons: magic sword (large or small at will; sword turns on owner when untruth is uttered; gives weakness; gives invulnerability; causes magic sleep; cures disease; produces wind, fire, smoke; cuts stone and fells trees; can only be moved by the right person); magic spear (spring breaks forth where magic spear strikes ground; gives omen; warns of danger; gives beauty or ugliness or either at will; spear stuck in river bed stops water; spear speaks); magic arrow (creates island; indicates desired place, path, etc.; locates fish; summons water spirit; sets fire to target; provides ascent to upper world); magic bow; magic cudgel (helps recover magic object; gives victory; attacks by itself); magic battle-axe (stone axe conquers enemies)

Section III: The Complication

G475-478: ogre attacks intruders: in house in woods; on bridge; terrifies people who flee and are drowned; kills noisy children

H1470-1471: vigilance tests: watch for devastating monster (that lays waste to the land; youngest alone succeeds); watch for thieves in the king's garden

F451.5.2: malevolent dwarf: ungrateful dwarf; dwarfs steal from human beings; steal magic objects; steal food and drink; exchange children in cradle; kidnap mortals; punish; play pranks; curse weapons and treasures

that they are forced to give

F102: accidental arrival in lower world: hero(ine) shoots monster or animal and follows it into lower world; sound of drum followed into ghost town; boy follows nut into lower world

N773-776: adventure from following animal (ogre; dwarf) to cave (lower world); adventure from returning for forgotten item; adventure from pursuing enchanted animal, thieving birds, thieving creatures of any kind; light seen from tree lodging place at night leads to adventures; adventures from trying to strangle oneself in tree

R11: abduction by monster (ogre); prince(ss) abducted by monster; abduction by demon

D1361.1: magic mist of invisibility: demons cause impenetrable fog; magic mist separates person from his or her companions

Section IV: The Descent

F601: extraordinary or skillful companions: perform hero(ine)'s tasks; help in suitor tests; betray hero(ine); rescue hero(ine); brothers, twins, triplets, etc.; (transformed) animals

F92-98: pit entrance to lower world: through hole made by lifting clumps of grass; person swallowed up by earth and taken to lower world; through opening rocks; through mountain; through cave; water entrance (some kind of water barrier like a waterfall, a river, etc.); boat; ferryman; well; perilous path; rope; descent on animal

F80-81: journey to lower world: physical features of underworld (castle; darkness; dead [A671-679]); descent to lower world of dead; quest to hell for magic object; to get dead person's heart; to visit deceased; to retrieve soul; to get treasures

A670-689: the lower world: torment; north; fire; doorkeeper; horrible sights, smells, sounds; rivers of fire; rivers of ice; fiery nails; islands in a sea of fire; fiery chains; toads; wolves; gnats; scorpions; scratching cats; beings born in the lower world have long bodies and hang with long nails to walls; river; guardian at the bridge; hounds; ship of the doomed; dark puddles; foul odours; world of serpents; place of all obscure knowledge (home of secrets); prison for souls without bodies; vault for stolen objects, stolen qualities, stolen necessities of life

Section V: The Return

K1931: impostors/companions abandon (or kill) their companion and usurp his place

K677: hero(ine) tests the rope by which he or she is to be pulled up (discovers treachery by weighting it with stones); rope is cut and hero(ine) falls; impostors abandon rope, abandon hero(ine), usually letting the rope drop; hero(ine) hides in treasure box and thus circumvents plot to leave him or her below

K963: rope cut and victim dropped: cutting rope to kill ogre who is climbing the rope to reach his victim; dupe persuaded to climb rope, which breaks; thief climbing rope discovered and rope cut

K1932-1934: impostors claim reward (prize) earned by hero(ine): false head of monster proof; identification by shred of clothing, etc.; impostor forces hero(ine) to change places with him/her; impostor (demon/ sorcerer) takes place of king

D2135: magic air journey: by cloud; by carpet; by magic object

B542: animal carries person through air to safety: eagle carries person to safety; helpful eagle; animal saves person from death sentence; eagle carries off abandoned child; transformation to eagle to carry person to safety; person sewed in animal hide carried off by birds; bat rescues person from height; escape on a flying horse

F101: return from lower world: up steep slope; by being slung by a bent tree; on an eagle; on a vulture; escape by magic; escape on miraculously growing tree; ascent on an animal; escape on horse of lightning; escape by a spider's thread; person returning from lower world brings something along unintentionally

B322: helpful animal demands food (eagle [animal] must be fed part of the hero[ine]'s flesh or an eye or asks for a tooth or a finger)

Section VI: Recognition

K1816.0.3.1: return in disguise as slave, servant, stablehand, etc.; at wedding, feast, important event

T68.1: prince(ss) offered as prize; prince(ss) offered as prize to rescuer or person responsible for fulfilling task

N681: hero(ine) arrives home just as a loved one is marrying another; as funeral is being held; prophecy of

future greatness fulfilled when hero(ine) returns home unrecognized (parents serve him/her)

H150-151: circumstances of recognition: attention drawn and recognition follows; attention drawn by magic object(s) and recognition follows; recognition by ability to perform marvels; attention drawn by helpful animal's theft of food; attention drawn by hints dropped by hero(ine) while dressed as slave, servant

H80-83: identification by tokens: tokens of royalty (nobility) left with abandoned child; identifying token(s) sent with messenger; rescue tokens: some proof that hero(ine) has succeeded in rescue/task

H94.1-11: identification by ring (baked or cooked in food, dropped in wine, on the wrong person's finger, name on ring)

H111: identification by garment of some kind

Q262: impostor(s) punished

L161: lowly hero(ine) marries prince(ss); tasks assigned suitors; humble disguise; prophecy

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Walking Between Worlds

in defence of experiential research

Kevan Manwaring

ABSTRACT

This article explores the benefits and challenges of experiential research for a PhD novel in the contemporary fantasy genre and how this has significant qualitative impacts upon the "early drafting" stage of the creative process (Neale 2018). Drawing upon the extensive field research undertaken in the Scottish Borders, with its rich palimpsest of oral tradition, traumatic historicity, and touristic gilding, the article shows how this informed the emergent multimodal approach, resulting in a transmedia novel – one that 'performs' the liminality experienced according to a reader-response model. The Scottish Border ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer' (Roud 219: Child 37) is used as a map – both in the field trips to associated locations, and in the creative-critical process itself. Within the ritualised landscape of the ballad three roads offer three ontological choices for not only the protagonist, but also the researcher-writer. Layered over this is Walter Benjamin's three-step model of the musical, the architectonic, and the textile. How does one negotiate the various tensions of different disciplines? How does one avoid displacement activity in a protracted research project that embraces different modes of enquiry? When and how does one 'return' from this crossed threshold? And in what form can one's findings withstand critical scrutiny, while retaining faith with the initial vision, the demands of the narrative, and the expectations of the reader?