GLENDA HAMBLY
La Trobe University

The not so universal hero's journey

ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, Joseph Campbell's research into mythology has become a corner-
stone of the most influential and deeply entrenched model of screenwriting prac-
tised and taught internationally. Campbell's finding that the quest myth, the
hero's journey, is ubiquitous around the globe, across human time, and therefore
universal is constantly cited to prove the universality of what Robert McKee calls
'classical design'; the story of a protagonist facing obstacles in pursuit of a goal.
However, a close analysis of three of the myths and rituals, which Campbell cites
to prove his theory, demonstrate he misinterpreted the meaning of the myths.
Knowingly or not, he projected Anglo-Western storytelling and cultural values
onto Indigenous mythic narratives, which in fact have very different storytelling
norms and serve a very different purpose to the individualistic striving for self-
fulfilment which he identified. Given this, it is time for practitioners and teach-
ers to stop claiming that the hero's journey and by default classical design are
universal. Given the current struggle for inclusion of diverse, multi-cultural and
marginalized voices into mainstream storytelling, this corrective is well overdue.

INTRODUCTION

In the mainstream world of screenwriting, one model of narrative, 'classical design' (McKee 1999: 45), dominates. It is a cause–effect structure with an active protagonist who overcomes obstacles in the pursuit of a goal. The model has become deeply entrenched. It dominates screenwriting classes in academe. Students are taught classical design is the best way to tell stories; some teachers go further suggesting it is the only way. The confidence and trust in the model's unassailability stems from the argument that it is built on the work of Aristotle and Joseph Campbell, two great luminaries of narrative structure. Aristotle laid down the importance of causal logic and unity and the link between character and action. Campbell studied world myths and found one dominant, universal pattern: the hero's journey. He said it had dominated from the beginning of time to the present because it is intrinsic to the human psyche. Extra validation for classical design is provided by the overwhelming international success of Hollywood film that employs it.

This article focuses on one of the pillars of classical design; Joseph Campbell's claim that the hero's journey is 'universal'. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (*THWATF, 2008*), Campbell cites hundreds of myths to prove his theory. In this article, I examine just three of these myths; two belong to First Nation Australians, the Yolngu and Arrernte, the third belongs to the American First Nation Tewa. (Note: in *THWATF*, the Yolngu are called Muingin and the Arrernte, Arunta, but I use their contemporary names.) It is a very small sample, but if the 'universal' claim is disproved for just one of them, Campbell's claim is defeated. If his use of myth is proved to be flawed then it is appropriate for practitioners of his theory to stop claiming it is universal, with obvious ramifications for the way classical design is framed by academics in their classroom teaching practice.

The article begins with commentary on Campbell as a researcher and a man of his time, place and culture. An introduction to the cosmology and philosophy of the Arrernte, Yolngu and Tewa follows. Reviewing these First Nation peoples' world-view is a necessary first step in contextualizing and explaining their myths and rituals. A contrast is then drawn between how these three ancient cultures (and the anthropologists who study them) interpret their myths and rituals, compared to Campbell's interpretation of them as part of 'one, shape-shifting yet marvellously constant story' (2008: 1). Next I compare the different definitions of what constitutes 'good storytelling' in Anglo-Western and First Nation traditions. Why the difference exists and how it influences story content and structure is considered. Finally, the essential elements of Anglo-Western narrative structure are contrasted with Indigenous Australian narrative patterns.

CAMPBELL'S CRITICS

Criticism of Campbell's research is not new. He has repeatedly been accused of inadequate and biased research practices. For example, he is accused of reading his concerns and interests into myths, misrepresenting the myths he chose to substantiate his case, citing parts of myths to illustrate his argument while not applying his full pattern to even one myth and relying on written translations or retelling of myths in English rather than going back to Indigenous texts (Elwood 1999; Segal 1987, 1999; Sandler and Reeck 1981; Klapproth 2004; Toelken 2003). Most importantly, in terms of this article, he is

accused of removing the myths from their social and cultural context (Segal 1987; King 1990).

Understanding the cultural context of mythical narrative is crucial in explaining its origin and purpose because myths do not arise in a historical or cultural vacuum. Clifford Geertz argues, along with Max Weber, 'that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he has spun' (1973: 5). Culture are those webs, and 'men unmodified by the customs of particular places do not in fact exist' (Geertz 1973: 35). 'There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture' (Geertz 1973: 49). Campbell paid lip service to cultural specificity, to tribal and ethnic difference, but ultimately dismissed both. He believed them to be local masks that dissolve and become transparent to the underlying, universal archetype of the human character (Segal 1999: 140). In line with Darwin's opinion that all observation must be for or against some view, Campbell was 'for' a universal, psychoanalytic and mystical interpretation of myth, whether it really applied to the cultural narratives he cited or not. Myths, he believed, were archetypal dreams, expressions of ageless archetypes as relevant to a twentieth-century New Yorker as our cave dweller ancestors and the ultimate meaning of myth was really about one's profoundest identity, the innermost self, waiting to be found and realized. This biased, ideological starting point caused Campbell to ignore the meaning of myths as expressions of ways of life that differed from his own.

Campbell interpreted myths from the sociopolitical-cultural viewpoint of a mid-twentieth-century, White, male American. Much has been written about the American roots of Campbell's mythic vision; the inspiration he drew from American romanticism, transcendentalism and Gnosticism, as well as American intellectuals, novelists and poets (King 1990; Spivey 1992; Gray 1992). In addition, his eccentric and partisan interpretation of history, belief in the value of the individual over 'mass society' – so strong in the West in the 1950s as the threat of Communism grew – and his sincere belief in the central heroic theme of America based on the individual and self-achievement – can all be seen as influences shaping his monomyth theory (Sandler and Reeck 1981; Elwood 1999). In the tumultuous post-Second World War era, Campbell's notion of a uniform human character reflected in a uniform narrative was a sincere attempt to demonstrate unity and enhance mutual human understanding. However, in his enthusiasm to prove that unity, he overstepped the bounds of objective research.

As previously stated, the first step in understanding Campbell's misuse of myths is to become aware of the unique world-view of First Nation cultures that he cites. This requires a brief summary of their cosmology, ontology and philosophy, which we move onto now.

INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIAN BELIEF SYSTEM

Indigenous Australian cosmology provides a cultural conception of people that extends them in time and space in a very different way to the western concept of the individual. Everything derives from *The Dreaming*, the name given to the period when the ancestral spirits moved across the formless land creating and shaping its land formations, rivers, mountains and deserts. As they journeyed, the spirits created all the people, animals and vegetation. They named the world and defined its order and rules. They taught the first people sacred and moral law, language and customs, the rules of kinship, marriage, social behaviour and land ownership. The oral transmission of these ancestral journeys

and the information contained within them are called *songlines*. Songlines were originally sung by the ancestors as they travelled on their creation journey and when performed by the Yolngu and Arrernte up to the present day, it is believed they connect the singers and dancers with the underlying creative living power of the ancestral beings. In summary, *The Dreaming* provides First Nation Australians with the essential framework for understanding and interpreting the world and their place within it.

Unlike Christianity, Judaism and Islam, The Dreaming is not an historical concept. It does not fit with the western norm of linear time; it has a vertical/cyclical direction where present, past and future merge. There are direct visceral links between the individual's body and their land. A person can be consubstantial with ancestors, creatures and places. Life is a cycle derived from the spirit world. A conception spirit must animate the foetus for a child to be born. On initiation the boy 'is ritually killed, then reborn as dreamtime power in the form of the lodge totem [that] becomes part of his psyche or spirit' (Meggit 1987: 123). On death, this spiritual essence returns to The Dreaming conception site, merging with the eternally existing pool of dreaming power, awaiting reincarnation in a future member of that totemic group. Thus, individual life cycles are being integrated within the all-encompassing cosmic scheme in which the present is being recreated through the ancestral past.

In addition to the individual's relatedness with the past, with land and nature, with everything animate, inanimate and metaphysical, the social system of kinship also re-enforces connectedness. The individual is related not only to extended family but to everyone in the tribe. The degree of religious belief, cooperation, exchange and relatedness, so intrinsic to traditional Indigenous societies, promotes a sense of shared rather than individual identity. The Gay'wu Group of Yolngu women describe this connectivity in *Song Spirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country through Songlines*:

> Gurrutu, kinship, binds Yolngu together with each other and the world. It is the pattern, the string, the raki, that binds us. It is so important to understand gurrutu, to understand songspirals [songlines] and what they mean. Gurrutu is fundamental mathematics, Yolngu mathematics – a structure, a pattern – that places us in a network of relationship, of obligation and of care. It is our map. Through gurrutu we know how we are related. It makes the Yolngu world […] This gurrutu is not only a blood relationship, but a place in a pattern of existence, a system of relationship […] And it's not just people. We are in relationship with place and with animals and all beings, including rocks and waters and winds. That's the thing with Yolngu culture, everything is whole, everything is one. We do our own djama, work, for the self. But really we are one big living thing.
>
> (2019: 81–82)

Armed with this knowledge of how Indigenous Australians view their world, we are now in a position to consider Campbell's analysis of Arrernte and Yolngu myths and rituals.

CAMPBELL'S ARRERNTE AND YOLNGU EXAMPLES

The very first ritual Campbell cites in *THWATF* is Yolngu. Terrified young initiates being readied for circumcision are told: 'the Great Father Snake smells

your foreskin: he is calling for it' (2008: 7). The boys run to their mothers trying to escape the inevitable moment when the men will take them to the men's ground where the great snake is bellowing. Campbell highlights the 'amazing' correspondence between the boys' trial and 'the moment the psychoanalysed patient begins to abandon his infantile fixations and to progress into the future' (2008: 6). To prove the link between the Yolngu myth and the unconscious, Campbell quotes a report from Jung about one of his patients: the patient dreamt a snake shot out of a cave and bit him on the genital area 'at the moment when the patient was beginning to free himself from the bond of his mother-complex' (2008: 7).

The Yolngu Snake ritual is referenced a second time in *THWATF*, along with an Arrernte circumcision myth, as evidence of the trials the hero faces once he crosses the threshold into the world of adventure. The particular trial the Yolngu and Arrernte myths illustrate, says Campbell, is the archetypal nightmare of having to deal with the ogre father. This trial is made real in 'the ordeals of primitive initiation' (Campbell 2008: 116). The high drama of the Yolngu Snake threat is repeated in a vivid account of a frightening moment in the Arrernte ritual when, at night, the initiate is lifted onto a shield to face the circumcision blade. Campbell applies a psycho-sexual Jungian interpretation to both myths. Following Geza Roheim – the first anthropologist to bring a psychoanalytic interpretation to field research – Campbell calls the Australian initiation rites 'a dramatized expression of the Oedipal aggression of the elder generation and a mitigated castration' (2008: 118). In *Eternal Ones of the Dream: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Australian Myth and Ritual*, Roheim equates the cutting off of the foreskin as the excision of the mother and Campbell agrees. The children are compensated for the loss of the mother, the female breast, by the male phallus, which becomes 'the central point (*axis mundi*) of the imagination' (Campbell 2008: 117, original emphasis). The important point here is that Campbell gave preference to Roheim's psychoanalytic interpretation of the myths over and above the findings of contemporary field anthropologists whose research Campbell also drew on for information about Yolngu and Arrernte initiation practices.

Campbell relied on Lloyd Warner's *A Black Civilization: A Social Study of an Australian Tribe*, first published in 1937, for details of Yolngu circumcision (the great snake calling for the boy's foreskin). Warner describes the *Djungguan* interclan ceremony, from which the great snake myth is drawn, in great detail. The initiates are sent away for a month before the initiation ceremony to meet and invite their more distant relatives to participate. The actual ceremony takes place over a number of days with the men singing song cycles from the Wakilak myth. This myth involves two sisters, one who has a child, the other pregnant, journeying north to the sea and naming the animals and plants along the way. When they arrive at Mirrirmina, a water hole and totemic well, the pregnant sister gives birth and some of her menstrual blood falls into the well. It flows down to where the *Yurlunggur*, the Big Father Snake lives. The Snake rises up, swallows the women, and then reaches high into the sky bringing rain that floods the earth. This is only part of the story, but it is sufficient for our purposes here, which is to concentrate on the section of the myth that Campbell references.

Warner makes it clear that everything in the *Djungguan* ceremony is linked to the Wawilak creation myth: 'The participants, mothers, women, men and initiates replay and embody the creation story involving two Wawilak women, two children and a python' (1958: 281). When the men take the initiates from

the women, they embody the snake or the flood. On the last evening before the circumcision, it is believed they have become the children of the Wawilak women. (Warner provides other graphic examples linking the myth to the ceremony he observed but I am omitting them out of respect for cultural protocol. Initiation details are often secret and not for the public realm. As First Nation people have pointed out, anthropologists have often failed to obtain informed consent in reporting on these ceremonies.) Warner explains that the initiates learn about the Wawilak story for the first time during the ceremony. The secret sacred information they are given signifies their advance to adulthood. The pedagogical and sociocultural significance of the Yolngu initiation rites is clear in Warner's research, but Campbell ignores it. Instead, he carefully selects out and concentrates on the one portion of the ceremony, which suits his universal hero's journey monomyth theory. He repeats the pattern with Arrernte mythology.

For information on the Arrernte, Campbell relies on the work of Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen's *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People* (1927). Spencer and Gillen describe four stages to full initiation, which they call the process of being admitted into the secrets of the tribe. The first stage is called *Throwing Up*, where the young boys are literally thrown in the air. Their bodies are painted with a totem design, their nasal septums bored for a nose ring and they move from the women's to the men's camp. A good few years later, the remaining three initiation stages take place over four and a half months. The circumcision reported by Campbell in *THWATF* (2008: 117) occurs late in *Lartna*, the first of the three. In the course of a ten-day ceremony, through dance and song, the men reveal the mysterious rites involving sacred totemic matters to the initiate for the first time. According to Spencer and Gillen, as well as symbolizing the break from childhood to adulthood, *Lartna* impresses on the initiates the deep importance of compliance with tribal rules and the superiority of the older men who know the mysterious rites. The ceremony culminates on the tenth day with the circumcision event described by Campbell, the terrifying moment when the initiate is lifted onto a shield to face the circumcision blade.

The next initiation stage, *Arlita*, takes place five to six weeks later when the boy has recovered from his circumcision. *Arlita* involves another very challenging, physical ordeal. (Again, I deliberately omit the details.) But still the boy's journey is not complete. Only when he passes through *Engwura*, the fourth stage, will he become what is called *Urliara*, 'a perfectly developed member of the tribe' (Spencer and Gillen 1927: 223). Large numbers of people, members of all divisions of the tribe, drawn from as far as 200 miles away gathered for the six-week-long *Engwura* ceremony, which Spencer and Gillen observed. The final hurdle for the initiates involved yet another physical trial. Once through it, they were allowed full admission into the most sacred secrets of the tribe. Spencer and Gillen comment: 'the natives themselves say the ceremony has the effect of strengthening all who pass through it. It imparts courage and wisdom, makes the men more kindly natured and less apt to quarrel', in short making him a 'good' man (1927: 223).

Clearly, the Arrernte's view of what makes a 'good' man does not equal Campbell's view of what makes a 'hero'. For Arrernte, youth, passing through initiation and being deemed 'good', involves receiving secret, sacred information, which allows him to become a full member of his community. For Campbell, the hero's journey is individual, and the knowledge he gains is self-generated. Campbell expresses a view of initiation that is rooted in the western

tradition, congruent with western psychologized notions of selfhood. From a First Nation Australian viewpoint, initiation is a collective achievement. 'No boy "becomes" a man; other men "make" him a man' (Stanner 1998: 7).

While Campbell insists the hero must return from his adventure and share his new self-knowledge with the group he left behind, he expects this 'new' knowledge will challenge the 'old' ways of the hero's community. 'It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse' (Campbell 2008: 337). Campbell believes the individual should be at one with the whole of humankind and the universe, not limited by allegiance to contending bands of 'totem-, flag-, and party worshipers' (2008: 134), 'prejudices of our own provincially limited ecclesiastical, tribal or national rendition of the world archetypes' (2008: 135). He rails against the 'god ridden bigotry' (Campbell 2008: 221) imposed by the great world religions, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, because they limit the possibility of their followers achieving their individual potential; the knowledge that divinity lies within them not outside them in a 'God'. He refutes the importance of all social and historical context, designations of birth date, sex, occupation, geography, nationality. These, he says, are mere 'costumes which we wear for a time on the stage of the world. The image of man is not to be confounded with the garments' (Campbell 2008: 332).

For traditional societies like the Yolngu and Arrernte, the 'garments' are all important. Their 'image of man' derives from a tightly bound cosmology created by ancestral beings, which sets the social structure of the group and the role of the individual. Campbell ignored the complex accounts of initiation provided by Warner, Spencer and Gillen. He cherry picked one dramatic moment instead, the act of circumcision, and defined it as a symbolic expression of the child's struggle to overcome his 'ogre father' and progress to a higher plane. He did this so he could say: 'It can be seen from a comparison of the figures of Australian ritual with those familiar to us from higher cultures, that the great themes, and their operation upon the soul remain the same' (Campbell 2008: 141). Driven by his zeal to prove 'the singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes and wisdom' (Campbell 2008: 28), Campbell misrepresented and misappropriated the Yolngu and Arrernte myths. 'Mythology', he said, 'is psychology misread as biography, history, and cosmology' (Campbell 2008: 219).

No doubt there is unity of human experience in the rite of passage of circumcision, which sees a transition from childhood to adulthood. It represents a significant transformational moment in the child's life, but for many cultures, this is only one aspect of its meaning. As we have seen, for the Indigenous child, initiation is the springboard to deeper sacred knowledge. The child begins to learn the nature of, and his place in, a social/cultural/religious system involving a dense web of ancestral and tribal/kinship ties.

I will leave the last word on initiation to Wanyubi Marika, a Yolngu leader. Marika went through a *Djungguwan* ceremony in 1976, and spoke of the experience in 2004 (Film Australia 2006: 40).

> That law was hard and also the spirit, spirit went in. We felt we were in another world. But we felt we were accepting that initiation law. When we were getting our face painted, and they put the red ochre on us, and put on those special armbands and headbands we were told that they were what the Two [Wawilak] Sisters used to put on their own children. And that is going back to the law and culture.
>
> (Film Australia 2006: 41)

Now we move to the other side of the globe to the Tewa of New Mexico and examine how Campbell represented one of their key myths.

THE TEWA WATER JAR MYTH

Campbell references the Tewa myth, 'The Water Jar Boy', three times in *THWATF* to illustrate different stages in the biography of the hero. The myth tells the story of a young Pueblo woman who when helping her mother mix clay for pottery, feels a splash of water on her leg and miraculously falls pregnant. She gives birth to a jar and within twenty days the jar grows big and is able to talk. (For Campbell, this part of the myth illustrates how 'the child of destiny may have to face a long period of obscurity' involving 'extreme danger, impediments, or disgrace' [2008: 280]). As he matures, the water jar boy wants to know who his father is. When his mother cannot tell him, he sets off for a spring where he meets a man. At first the man, Red Water Snake, repeatedly denies he is the water jar boy's father, but then acknowledges he is and takes the boy down into the spring. (Campbell describes this section of the tale as a symbolic example of the tests the hero must endure [2008: 297]). Inside the spring, the boy is warmly welcomed by his extended family. When he returns home to his mother with the news that he has found his father, she grows sick and dies. The water jar boy decides to return to the spring where he finds his mother alive. His father reveals he organized her death so they could all live together in the spring. (This, conclusion, Campbell says, echoes 'the symbolism of salvation' [2008: 309]). It is worth noting that there is another twist in the myth, which Campbell omits. Deeply regretting he is not like the other children, the water jar boy persuades his grandfather to take him hunting. While chasing a rabbit, the jar hits a rock and a normal big human boy emerges from the wreckage. The boy, not the jar, travels to the spring to find his father.

The Tewa reading of this myth is completely different to Campbell's. As with the Yolngu and Arrernte belief system, which draws no distinction between all the phenomena of the physical world, the ancestors and the humans they created, the Tewa see all elements of existence including clay, rocks and plants as alive. 'Each breathes the breath of life and participates in the overall cycle of give and take' (Naranjo 1996: 187). According to Tessie Naranjo, the meaning of 'The Water Jar Boy' symbolizes this interconnectedness; the unity of all things, the motion, spirits, people, plants and animals that flow in and out of each other (1996: 187). Pottery links directly to Tewa cosmology. The notion of container is crucial to the Tewan world-view. The lower half of their cosmos is a pot, which contains life. It is the womb of the mother. Every step in the pottery-making process (digging, coiling, smoothing, burnishing, polishing and firing) involves praying and talking to the clay. This is directed to *Nung-quijo*, Clay-old-lady, who is considered alive. If loved and nurtured she will respond in kind, acting favourably for the people.

In Tewa philosophy, the values of connectedness and reciprocity between the living and non-living are conceptualized as pathways of energy, *powaha*, that circulate and radiate in multiple directions from the underworld to the sky, from the four sacred mountain peaks that bound the Tewan world to the heart of the earth. The connection between people, villages and landscapes is exemplified in the open plaza space of a pueblo (a settlement consisting of multi-storeyed adobe houses), which contains a *kiva*, a semi-subterranean structure where ceremonial activity takes place. The Tewa believe a tunnel extends from

the *kiva* into the heart of the earth and from that earth navel flows the *powaha* that connects all the entities of the world. According to Tewans, Tito Naranjo and Rita Swentzell, acknowledging and establishing a harmonious existence with this interconnected world represents 'the ideal beingness of the Pueblo culture' (1989: 258).

The Tewa see themselves as literally born of the earth. Their creation myth begins below a lake. Emerging from there into an 'unripe world', the first people relied on animals and spirits to help them find their way. As with the Wawilak sisters, these early relationships structure the whole of Pueblo cosmology and ontology. The Tewan anthropologist Alfonso Ortiz explains:

> A Tewa is interested in our own story of our origin, for it holds all that we need to know about our people, and how one should live as a human. The story defines our society. It tells me who I am, where I came from, the boundaries of my world, and what kind of order exists within it.
>
> (1991: 32)

The Tewan ancestral past ordains a complex social structure; six categories of human existence, three human and three supernatural. Upon death, the soul of each human category becomes a spirit of its linked supernatural category. The souls of the people who occupy the highest position in the social structure, the Made People, travel backwards along the original migration path, returning to the lake of emergence. The profound link the Tewans have with the earth and water resonates in the story of 'The Water Jar Boy'. It is typical of the way the belief system of the Tewans and Indigenous Australians influence the content and structure of their narratives. Before moving on to look more closely at other examples of this, it is worth making some general points about Anglo-Western storytelling (which Campbell believed was archetypal and universal) and the type practised by First Nation cultures.

AMERICAN FIRST NATION NARRATIVE

American folklorist Barre Toelken describes the organization of European/American culture as linear in contrast to circular Native American culture (2003: 11). People travelling in a straight line, he says, are seen as individual, separate beings with individual rights and responsibilities and an obligation to think and act independently. They are admired for achieving their personal potential, for following their own path. Native Americans, on the other hand, stand 'in the middle of a vortex of forces exerted in concentric circles' (Toelken 2003: 39) represented by immediate family, extended family, clan and the whole ecological system in which they live and function. As a consequence, concepts of inclusion, balance, symmetry and relationship abound in native narrative. Campbell brushed these concepts aside in his determination to find: 'the patterns and the logic of fairy tale and myth', which he said, 'correspond to those of dream' (2008: 219). The final step in his specious logic was to link dream, myth and ritual link back to 'initiatory images so necessary to the psyche' (Campbell 2008: 7); i.e., the images encapsulated in the hero's journey.

According to Toelken, whereas a European/American reader will look for cause and effect meaning in a native folk tale that ends with 'and that's how the bear lost its tail', a Native American will not read it as a story of bear physiology. They understand it to be a dramatization of cultural values, an enactment of a bear failing to act appropriately, which causes him to lose his tail.

The bear tale reflects on correct cultural obligations and behaviour offering a Native American listener insights into the value of their cultural system.

Toelken enunciates a difference in the overall dramatic patterning of stories among Native Americans in the South West (where the Tewa live) and the North West of America. In the South West, the standard dramatic number for constructing narrative is four. (Perhaps a reflection of the importance of the four sacred peaks that contain the Tewa world.) In the North West, the standard number is five. Thus, a Lummi story of five sisters who turn into birds has a repetitive pattern. On five separate occasions, each of the sisters picks huckleberries and decides to eat them rather than share them with everyone else as they should. All five girls then turn into birds – who everyone knows can be relied on to always share their pickings with their young. The moral lesson of sharing over selfishness is dramatized in the tale. To a western consciousness repeating the story five times is boring, but the Lummi understand the repeated actions to be a sign of consequence.

As explained earlier, the Tewa myth of origin, their emergence from under the lake, represents a charter for Tewa social and ritual life. It also shapes the structure of their myths and folktales in stark contrast to the classic western pattern. Characters journey downward as if back to the lake of emergence rather than up in order to reach the climax of desired success (Prewitt Edelman 1974). In western literature, ascension symbols are understood to have an ameliorative value. They are emblematic of spiritual evolution. A protagonist first descends figuratively or otherwise into some situation of conflict where the greatest pain and obstacles are faced. (The 'tests' the protagonist must face in Hollywood's Act 2.) Then, through some development, the hero rises to a triumphant conclusion (Act 3's climax and resolution). According to Campbell 'the deeds of the hero in the second part of his personal cycle will be proportionate to the depth of his descent during the first' (2008: 276). (Act 2's 'dark night of the soul'.) The architecture of Tewa stories is the inverse of this. Reflecting the Tewan world-view, 'triumph' is achieved through descent. Believing they come from the earth and return to her after death, and that everything of consequence comes from 'below', stories must end in descent for good to be actualized. Thus, 'The Water Jar Boy' ends with the boy descending into the spring to live with his reunited family.

AUSTRALIAN FIRST NATION NARRATIVE

Geza Roheim, on whom Campbell relied for his psycho-sexual interpretation of Australian circumcision myths, had this to say about Indigenous narrative:

> The field worker in Australia records innumerable variants of narratives of a very peculiar type. These stories, variable also in length, are exceedingly monotonous to the European or American ear. Very frequently this is no plot, no episode to speak of. An ancestor called so and so originated at such and such a place and went to another place where he went to sleep and therefore the place is called sleep.
>
> (1945: 1)

Roheim's value judgement was based on an Anglo-Western conception of what makes a 'good story'. Labov has identified key elements in western narrative structure in his (American) research into the characteristics of face-to-face storytelling. A story begins. Who, what, when and where are

delineated. A complication/problem (the plot) arises, which the protagonist must deal with creating momentum for the story, and the question for the listener of 'what happens next?'/'what happens in the end?' Finally, the problem and the question are resolved by the protagonist, usually satisfactorily. Narrative structure in the western tradition is tripartite – unlike the four- and five-part Native American templates discussed earlier. Aristotle first identified the beginning, middle and end structure as complication, turning point and resolution. Campbell described the hero's journey as separation, initiation and return. Sid Field elevated three acts to the holy grail of screenwriting. This is the Anglo-Western version of a 'good' story well told, but as Roheim observed, Indigenous Australian narrative follows a very different pattern.

These differences are precisely described by Daniele Klapproth in *Narrative as Social Practice: Anglo-Western and Australian Aboriginal Oral Traditions*. In order to determine the difference of form and function in the two traditions, she analysed thirteen of the most popular traditional western fairy tales and 62 traditional Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara narratives. (These two clans come from the Western Desert. The Central Desert Arrernte are their neighbours.) Klapproth chose fairy tales because she wanted to compare folk narratives originating in the oral tradition in both cultures. Her aim was to compare 'apples with apples'.

Klapproth found common structural elements in the thirteen fairy tales, which include 'Beauty and the Beast', 'Cinderella' and 'Snow White'. All have a main protagonist who arouses audience empathy and interest. All face and overcome obstacles and dangers, succeed and achieve wish fulfilment. Each tale is focused on the individual and his/her attainment of happiness. There is no collectivity. The tales are concerned with the processes of individuation, renewal and innovation, the characters' psychological development and their final attainment of personal autonomy and happiness. (Disappointingly, they also perpetuate the gender role where women find personal fulfilment with dependence by falling in love.) Klapproth argues that the narrative structure in these tales helps us understand ourselves as individuals in Anglo-Western society; a modern individualistic western self, which has to perpetually construct and negotiate identity within an intrinsically alien world.

It is important to remember that the concept of 'self' as an essence, the centre of personal identity, is a relatively novel idea in the history of world culture. It began in the late seventeenth century with the Enlightenment and has been so successfully adopted as a concept it is now taken for granted in the West. However, as Geertz observed in the 1970s: 'the Western conception of a person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic centre of awareness […] [is] […] a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures' (1974: 31). It is antithetical, for example, to the view of personhood in East Asian societies where people are more socio-centric and more likely to define themselves by their roles and relationships rather than through the 'I' lens (Haidt 2013: 113). Chinese collectivism emphasizes active cooperation and the necessity of individual sacrifice for the greater good (Greene 2013: 81).

As we saw earlier, the role of the individual in First Nation Australian society is not to struggle in isolation for oneself, but to be a responsible and constructive member of the group. Rules of kinship and reciprocity enforce close cooperation as a guiding principle. Happiness and fulfilment lie in interdependence not independence. Klapproth found a reflection of these core values in the First Nation narratives she studied. In contrast to Anglo-Western

storytelling which has a hierarchically built structure focused around a core problematic, First Nation stories have a flat or level structure. There is no main protagonist or problem solving or resolution in the western sense. Character focus shifts across a number of characters. There are multiple points of view. Causal connection is not explicit. The story forms no meaningful whole at the level of plot. Klapproth summarizes the specific differences as follows:

Anglo-Western	Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara
Conceptualizing the world as fundamentally individualistic.	The daily journey of characters. (The movement from camp to camp reflects the society's semi-nomadic lifestyle.)
Individual's role is to pursue a goal to resolution and closure.	Negotiation of culturally relevant concerns.
Based on problem solving.	Retracing as an alternative to resolution.
Individual as protagonist.	(Retrospectively discovering and understanding the meaning of the story. A discovery process of 'coming to see'.)
	Shifting character foci.

Table 1: Common elements of narrative structure in folk narratives.

A Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara story, translated and analysed in great detail by Klapproth (2004: 219–80) but told in brief summary here, will help bring these points into focus. *Tjitji Maluringanyi* (A Child Transforms into a Kangaroo) is the story of two brothers, an adult and a boy, who are travelling. They set up camp and sleep. During the night the boy turns into a kangaroo. He finds other kangaroos and jumps onto a mother kangaroo who is carrying a joey. He rides her, hitting her with a stick. In the morning the older brother wakes his sleepy younger brother. The elder brother sees kangaroo tracks and droppings around their camp and wants to hunt the animal down. As they hunt, the boy leads his elder brother to a dead kangaroo whereupon they light a fire and eat it. The same thing happens the next night: The younger boy turns into a kangaroo, jumps onto a mother kangaroo and hits her with a stick until she falls unconscious. The next day he leads his older brother to the dead kangaroo and they eat it. The exact same thing happens on the third day. They travel on, and on the fourth day before sunset they see smoke rising in the distance, which tells them they are nearing their parents' camp which is their destination. The two brothers fall asleep by the fire. The boy again turns into a kangaroo and comes upon some wild dingoes. In a tense chase sequence, the dingoes run down the kangaroo and kill it. The older brother wakes the next morning, finds the younger brother gone, follows his tracks and discovers him dead. He buries him, travels on to his parents' camp and tells them what has happened.

A western reader is likely to react to this story as Roheim did when he complained about the lack of plot and monotony in Indigenous narrative.

The point of *Tjitji Maluringanyi* seems opaque to a western reader, its content confusing. There is no logical cause-effect progression, no incremental build in the narrative, no climax. The action in the story seems unmotivated, the repetitions redundant. In contrast to western narrative, the causal connections are concealed and mysterious. It is up the audience to discover its meaning, but to do so requires a knowledge of kinship obligations.

The key to understanding the structural form of *Tjitji Maluringanyi* lies in its sociocultural function. It is a cautionary tale of what happens when the sanctioned social order is violated. The uninitiated younger boy's night exploits are transgressions, which enable him to take over the lead role in the hunt the next day. This reverses the correct relationship between the two where the initiated adult brother should lead. Catastrophe, in the form of the death of the younger brother, is the unavoidable consequence of the violation of their rights and responsibilities in their kinship roles.

Stories like *Tjitji Maluringanyi* prepare children for the more serious training they will receive as they progress through initiation and adulthood, participating in more and more ceremonies, gaining an ever deeper understanding of cultural knowledge. The stories convey values about social and moral behaviour and relatedness. They are linked to The Dreaming and the manifestation of the spiritual dimension of the land. They reflect a preoccupation with the well-being of the community and the sacred responsibility of maintaining the balance of the societal and cosmic system. In essence, the narratives have a completely different philosophical function from the one Campbell imagined for story and his mythical hero.

CONCLUSION

Around 25 years ago, Joseph Campbell's research into myths became one of the pillars of screenwriting. The surge of interest in his monomyth theory began when George Lucas cited *THWATF* as the catalyst for his script *Star Wars* (1977). The unexpected success of the early 'blockbuster' films transformed Hollywood from a domestically focused business into a global one. Campbell's claim that the quest myth, the hero's journey, was universal, provided a very useful marketing tool in boosting this industrial transition. 'As Hollywood action pictures swept the world, producers were receptive to suggestions that the quest myth had cross-cultural reach. The journey idea lent a universal resonance to ordinary adventure plotlines' (Bordwell 2006: 34). Screenwriting gurus Christopher Vogler and Robert McKee solidified a primary position for Campbell in screenwriting theory by fusing the hero's journey with Syd Field's three act structure. Campbell's confident claims of universality enabled them to claim universality and existential value for their newly amalgamated Hollywood model of screenwriting. McKee named it 'classical design' and said it was 'a mirror of the human mind' (1999: 62). Vogler said the hero's journey was 'nothing less than a handbook for life, a complete instruction manual in the art of being human' (1996: ix). Hollywood's marketing genius, financial might and control of distribution and exhibition no doubt played a major role in the successful export of classical design, making it the most popular screen narrative form internationally. Since then screenwriters around the world have adopted the model, confident they are tapping into humanity's storytelling DNA, continuing the tradition our 'caveman' ancestors began as they sat around the campfire telling each other stories. However, as

this study of Yolngu, Arrernte and Tewan mythology indicates, Campbell assertion of universality is heavily flawed.

Unknowingly or not, Campbell interpreted myths from an American, White, Western psychoanalytic, individualistic perspective. He colonized other ways of thinking and made them his own. He did this from a passionate and positive belief in the oneness of human experience and the ability of the individual to find self-fulfilment. But Campbell's wish for the world to be one does not reflect the truth of its diversity. In a world that is becoming ever more globalized and homogenized, respecting narrative diversity, particularly of marginalized people, is more pressing than ever.

Screenwriting academics who choose to privilege Hollywood's classical design above any other can claim it is the most popular screen narrative form internationally, but they should not continue to claim it is universal. The convenience of having a template to rely on makes teaching easier but students need to be taught that diversity exists in storytelling as well as life. At a time when diverse, multi-cultural voices are at last being heard, this corrective is well overdue.

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Dr Glenda Hambly is an independent producer, writer and director. Her latest feature documentary, *Homeland Story* (2019), tells the past and present story of a Yolngu Homeland in North-East Arnhem Land, Australia. She has a Ph.D. in screenwriting studies and has lectured in screenwriting at RMIT and Monash Universities.

Contact: School of Humanities and Social Sciences, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria, 3086, Australia.
E-mail: roguegh1@bigpond.com

ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6930-4104