On the Proverbial Road:
Journeys of Transformation in Narrative

ENG 220CL
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

~Robert Frost (1874–1963)
Trailblazers, pathfinders, adventurers, and even reluctant anti-heroes: When questers of any sort—whether willingly or unwillingly—take the road less traveled, why are we compulsively drawn to their tales?

In this course, prepare to voyage alongside the brainchildren of global storytellers from diverse eras on literal AND metaphorical/psychological journeys.

By engaging narratives in differing genres, including some in translation, and using a variety of learning strategies, such as close reading, students will both explore and consider the ubiquitous themes of overcoming adversity and transformation in characters who undertake roundtrip journeys from their familiar, ordinary worlds to unfamiliar, extraordinary destinations.
LEARNING OUTCOMES (COURSE OBJECTIVES):
As a result of taking this course students should be able to:

- Apply knowledge of literary devices and genres developed in ENG 122 to written analysis of literary works exploring the journey theme.
- Compare and contrast literary works.
- Identify and analyze latent and recurring patterns and motifs in the ubiquitous journey trope.
- Interrogate the SLU Core Value of “Personal Development,” in its manifestation as transformation, in the primary characters of monomythic narratives.
- Apply key precepts of critical thinking and the SLU Core Values to decision-making, i.e., the SLU QEP, to the theme of the journey in narrative.
The Universal Nature of this Theme May Incite Such Questions as:

- What is the historical relevance of the journey?
- What activity constitutes a journey?
- What criteria qualifies a sojourner?
- Have the basic components of journey narratives changed over time?
- What connections exist between the concept of the journey and all of our favorite stories?
- What is the contemporary relevance of the journey?
Course Buzz Words, i.e. Key Terminology That Should/Can Serve as Discussion Points:

- Monomyth: The Hero’s/Heroin’s Journey
- Sojourner / Traveler / Quester / Explorer
- Metaphors: The Road / The River
- Trials / Tribulations / Challenges
- Discovery / Epiphany / Turning Points
- Apotheosis / Transformation / Change
- Linear Thinking / Circular Thinking
- Growth / Personal Development

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The Hero’s Journey

Cross the Threshold or Meet the Challenge

The Return May be as Difficult as the Descent
The Proposal For (or, A Synopsis of) George Lucas’s Star Wars

- Luke Skywalker is an orphan living with his uncle and aunt on the remote wilderness of Tatooine.
- Luke is rescued from “aliens” by wise, bearded Ben Kenobi, a person who turns out to be a Jedi Knight.
- Ben reveals to Luke that Luke’s father was also a Jedi Knight, and was the best pilot Ben had ever seen.
- Luke is also instructed in how to use the Jedi light sabre as he too trains to become a Jedi.
- Luke has many adventures in the galaxy (which seems to be a strange place to us, the audience) and makes new friends such as Han Solo and Princess Leia.
- In the course of these adventures, he distinguishes himself as a top X-Wing fighter pilot in the battle of the Death Star, making the direct hit that secures the Rebels’ victory against the forces of evil.
- Luke also sees off the threat of Lord Vader, whom we know murdered his uncle and aunt.
- In the finale, Luke and his new friends receive medals of valour.
- All of this will be set to an orchestral score composed by John Williams.
The Proposal For (or, A Synopsis of) *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*

- Harry Potter is an orphan living with his uncle and aunt on the remote wilderness of Suburbia.
- Harry is rescued from the “Muggles” by wise, bearded Hagrid, a person who turns out to be a Wizard.
- Hagrid reveals to Harry that Harry’s father was also a Wizard, and was the best Quidditch player Hagrid had ever seen.
- Harry is also instructed in how to use a Magic Wand as he too trains to become a Wizard.
- Harry has many adventures at the Hogwarts school (which seems to be a strange place to us, the audience) and makes new friends such as Ron and Hermione.
- In the course of these adventures, he distinguishes himself as a top Quidditch Seeker pilot in a critical Quidditch match, making the final catch that secures the Gryffindor victory against the forces of the “evil” Slytherin.
- Harry also sees off the threat of Lord Valdemort, whom we know murdered his parents.
- In the finale, Harry and his new friends win the house cup.
- All of this will be set to an orchestral score composed by John Williams.
Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone

Harry
- Luke Skywalker is an orphan living with his uncle and aunt on the remote wilderness of Tatooine.
- He is rescued from aliens by wise, bearded Ben Kenobi, who turns out to be a Jedi Knight.
- Ben reveals to Luke that Luke’s father was also a Jedi Knight, and was the best pilot he had ever seen.
- Luke is also instructed in how to use the Jedi light saber as he too trains to become a Jedi.
- Luke has many adventures in the galaxy and makes new friends such as Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

In the course of these adventures, he distinguishes himself as a top X-wing pilot in the battle of the Death Star, making the direct hit that secures the Rebels’ victory against the forces of evil, Lord Voldemort.
- Luke also sees off the threat of Darth Vader, who we know murdered his uncle and aunt.
- In the finale, Luke and his new friends receive medals of valour.

- All of this will be set to an orchestral score composed by John Williams.
Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone
Star Wars: A New Hope; Synopsis

- Luke Skywalker is an orphan living with his uncle and aunt on the remote wilderness of Tatooine.
- He is rescued from aliens by wise, bearded Ben Kenobi, who turns out to be a Jedi Knight.
- Ben reveals to Luke that Luke’s father was also a Jedi Knight, and was the best pilot he had ever seen.
- Luke is also instructed in how to use the Jedi light-sabre as he too trains to become a Jedi.
- Luke has many adventures in the galaxy and makes new friends such as Harry, Rolo and Princes Leia.
- In the course of these adventures, he distinguishes himself as a top X-wing pilot in the battle of the Death Star, making the direct hit that secures the Rebels’ victory against the forces of evil.
- Luke also sees off the threat of Darth Vader, who we know murdered his uncle and aunt.
- In the finale, Luke and his new friends receive medals of valour.
- All of this will be set to an orchestral score composed by John Williams.

Coincidence or Mysterious Master Plan?
The Hero’s Journey
(or, the “Monomyth”)

- “An Ordinary Day”
- Birth/Home
- Call to Adventure
- Refusal of the Call?
- Reluctant Hero
- Separation Phase
  (Discovery)
- Helpers/Amulet
  Supernatural Aid
- Cross the
  Threshold In
- Road of
  Tests/Trials
  The Belly of
  the Whale
- Special World
- Ordinary World
- "Consciousness"
- Ordinary World
- "Unconsciousness"
- Initiation
  Phase
  (Exploration)
- Helpers
  Allies/Enemies
- Supreme Ordeal
- Climax/Final Battle
- Master of
  Two Worlds
- Prep for Next Adventure
- Elixir
  Heal the Land
- Rebirth/Return
  Cross Threshold
  Out
- Flight or
  Rescue
- Refusal of
  the Return?
- Gift from Gods
  Ultimate Boon
- Marriage, Baptism, or Blessing

*Here, the hero must forego a significant change in character. Any lessons or new abilities to be learned are experienced here.*
Sample Thematic Choices for the Course:

- The Epic Journey of Old
e.g., Gilgamesh, The Odyssey, The Illiad, etc.

- The Victorian Era Journey
e.g., Moby Dick, Treasure Island, The Time Machine, etc.

- The Contemporary Journey
e.g., The Grapes of Wrath, The Old Man and the Sea, On the Road, etc.

- Le Voyage Fantastique
e.g., The Tempest, A Christmas Carol, The Hobbit, etc.

- The Child’s Journey
e.g., Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Peter and Wendy, etc.
Potential Challenges

- Instructors will need to be familiar with the journey concepts before attempting to teach the course.
- Short stories and poetry usually do not work well with this theoretical approach.
- Novel length texts should be assigned to be read in full (excerpts won’t work).
- Ancient texts (epics) are dense and more difficult for students to get through.
- Groupings of works with this theme can easily get overly “male” centric if you are not careful—turn it into a teachable moment.

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Potential Challenges (cont.)

- Because this course is built on theme rather than era, any lectures and assignments for this course should not be author-centric.
- In previous incarnations of general education literature courses, some instructors have relied on presentation assignments focused on writers’ biographies.
- That approach won’t work for this course—it is a text-centered course and the focus should remain on the analysis on the textual structures.
- With the sole exception of providing optional background material on C. Volger (author of the theory textbook), J. Campbell (the mythologist on whose Volger’s synopsis is based), and C. Jung, S. Freud, and V. Propp (whose work informs Campbell), contextual data should be kept to a minimum.
- The pedagogical emphasis for this course is simple: improve students’ critical thinking abilities by working on their analytical skills. In a nutshell, they are applying a theoretical concept to a text, something they may have never had an opportunity to do before.
- I think you will be surprised with the results and their creativity with this model once that grasp the concept.

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Finally, where possible, keep bringing the idea of the journey cycle back to them, where possible. Help them see the relevancy to their own lives.
Bon Voyage!