

# From Parcival to Luke Skywalker

Review by Lucia McKelvey

## The Hero's Journey: The World of Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell's influences were many, but it is clear that Carl Jung was one of the most important. Towards the beginning of *The Hero's Journey*, a documentary of Campbell's life and ideas, Campbell says, "Now there is a moment in Jung's life when he realized what it meant to live with a mythology. . . . And he asked himself by what mythology he was living, and he found he didn't know. And so he said, 'I made it the task of tasks of my life to find by what mythology I was living.'"

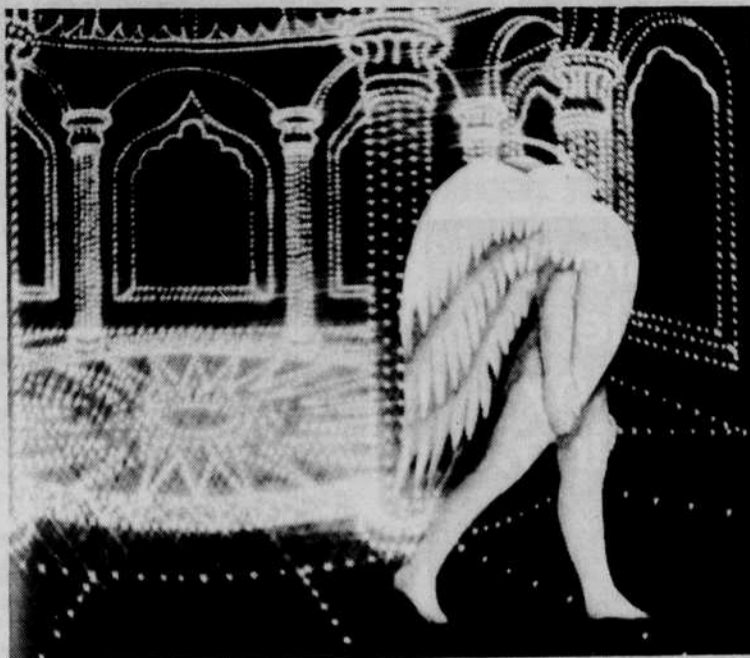
The narrator continues, "What does it mean to live by a mythology and why is it important? This man, Joseph Campbell, has spent a lifetime finding answers to these questions." Campbell quotes the philosopher Schopenhauer to give us one of his answers: "Life is, on the surface, simply unendurable." Therefore, says Campbell, to ease the pain and "put in accord with nature," we create myths.

Fascinated as a boy with Indian lore, he read everything he could find on American Indians. Growing up as Catholic and serving as an altar boy also influenced his early life. As a young man, however, he could not reconcile his Catholic teachings with science. As he was beginning to question the world around him, a chance meeting changed his life. In the early twenties, while traveling to Europe with his family, he met the Indian philosopher Krishnamurti on the boat. He was given a book, *The Life of Buddha*, by Krishnamurti, and was struck by the similarities between Buddhist and Christian stories. This started him on his lifetime research comparing the world's mythologies.

In 1949, Campbell's most well-known book was published, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Richard Adams, author of *Watership Down*, says, "A kind of chain reaction comes from his [Campbell's] discoveries that have reverberated out into writing novels, into psychiatry, mythology, anthropology, filmmaking, creative work. . . ."

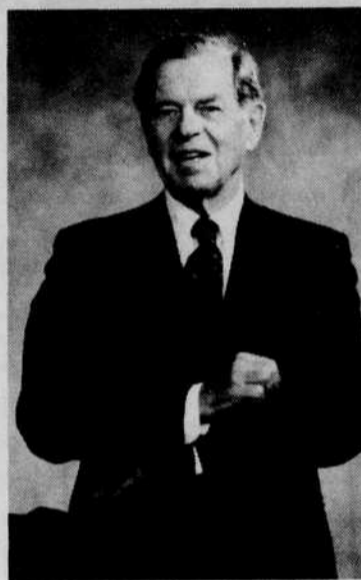
And one of America's most famous filmmakers, George Lucas, credits Campbell as an influence: "About ten years ago I set out to write a children's film, and I had an idea of doing a modern fairy tale. I stumbled across *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. After reading more of Joe's books I began to understand how I could do this. . . . There is a wonderful life force that comes through, the wit and the charm when Joe speaks, that as wonderful as the books are, don't capture the man." Scenes from Lucas' film *Star Wars* are used as an example of a modern version of the hero's journey.

Interviews with Campbell, archival footage, and his own home movies are interwoven to create a picture of a "hero" in his own right. In his mid-eighties, Camp-



ABOVE: *Paradise*, an animated film with brilliantly colored artwork, tells the gentle moral tale of a little blackbird who learns that fine feathers alone cannot bring happiness.

RIGHT: Joseph Campbell



bell is still clear-eyed, lively, alert, informative and entertaining. Part of his teaching method is to tell myths, in slightly up-dated versions, to show their relevance to the present. We hear him tell of the Indian maiden who made a pact with a buffalo because her tribe was starving. The story of the medieval knight, Parcival, is told in the context of finding "an authentic life." In medieval times, Campbell tells us, everyone was told how and what to believe and feel; the hero's journey such as Parcival's is the beginning of the individuation process, that is, finding the personal myth in contrast to the collective myth.

For all his optimism and humor, he does make it clear that we are missing something in our modern world, and that is a myth about planetary community. We therefore stay identified with our small "in groups." We lack a vision of one world. The state of mythology currently is like a "terminal moraine," full of rubbish, he says.

His solution—"celebrate the imaginative life." There one will find stimulation. In following one's own "bliss" there is integrity. Needs and wants must come from within, not from the state, the church, the school; otherwise we "capitulate to the devil."

Still active and creative, Campbell is currently working on a four-volume *Historical Atlas of World Mythologies*. Describing Campbell, psychologist James Hillman says, "No one in our century, not Freud, not Jung, not Thomas Mann or Levi-Strauss has so brought the mythical sense of the world and its eternal figures back into our ordinary daily consciousness."

### Paradise

Playing with *The Hero's Journey* is a beautiful complement to the story of one of the great intellectuals of the twentieth century. *Paradise* appeals to the visual and auditory senses like a bright impressionistic painting. It is a painting in motion. Produced by the National Film Board of Canada, it was nominated for an Academy Award for the 1984 Best Animated Film, and won first prize in the 1985 Los Angeles International Animation Celebration.

It is the story of a plain and ordinary crow who wishes to be something other than he is. He envies the bird owned by the emperor in a shimmering, shiny castle. In trying to get the emperor's attention, he pastes on bright feathers stolen from other birds, and ends up trapped in a cage. Besides telling a timeless moral fable, this short will dazzle the viewer with its exquisite color and movement as well as its exotic music.

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