

Creative Research L5: Sound And Moving Image

“Escaping Reality” by Jean Patterson

Introduction

In this dissertation proposal I will be exploring how and why a screenwriter teleports the audience into their story, why so many people want to escape the real world and what effect this has on people.

Escapism

“Escapism, I will argue, is human-and inescapable. There is nothing wrong with escape as such. What makes it suspect is the goal, which can be quiet unreal. And what is wrong with the un-real, with wild fantasy? Nothing, I would say, so long as it remains a passing mood, a temporary escape, a brief mental experiment with possibility.” 1.1

I believe that escapism is a vital part of human nature, it allows people to escape from their everyday lives and be transported into incredibly diverse worlds and situations that they may never have got to experience in the real world. Whether people use films, books or simply their imaginations to do this, it doesn't matter it all adds up to the same thing, that out of world or body experience. I believe we, as humans have this ingrained into us from birth, you see children playing with sticks, rocks, water and a wide range of different everyday objects that make up our environment and dismiss it but the children can be imagining something completely different to what you see. A stick can be a sword, a wand or a priceless artifact in the hands of that child, who's created a new reality to the one they know, all with their imagination.

And I don't think we lose this as we grow older, we simply use different methods of creating or experiencing the different worlds. Using films or books to immerse ourselves in a universe created by other people, I myself have grown up reading countless books alone in my room which might seem sad to some people but the difference was that I wasn't in that room. I was in the forests of Narnia, the battlefield of Orynth, the courtyard of Winterfell and anywhere else I wanted to go.

Just this week gone I walked out of a cinema in my hometown with hundreds of people I didn't know and yet we were all in that same universe that wasn't our own. Most of us were crying, laughing or simply standing their shocked because it was the end of something that we'd used to escape from our everyday lives for over ten years, it gave us a world where we could believe that extraordinary heroes exist.

“My desire to become a filmmaker began when I was eight years old and I saw the 1933 King Kong on TV. It's still my favorite film, and I love it because it's a wonderful piece of fantastic cinema that does everything a fantasy film should do: transports me out of the real world, shows me things, amazing and exciting things, that I know I'm never going to experience in real life, and locations that I'm never going to go to. I've always had a desire to make a film like that.” 1.2

But with the good, there also comes the bad. Yes, there is nothing wrong with escaping reality for a few hours but when people do it for so long, they begin to mistake fantasy with reality.

“When we have an aspect of our lives which we want to escape from, with enough repetition we come to view ourselves as a totally separate entity from the one that had negative traits or circumstances. This partial destruction of self and dissociation are common.

When we escape we may be trying to avoid spending time with ourselves. Escapism can be the opposite of mindfulness. Escapism allows us to numb ourselves to a reality we may not want to accept. This way we can avoid feelings of emotional pain.

Ultimately we are responsible for the decisions we take. Sooner or later we have to return to reality. Studies have suggested those who use escapism are often depressed. It seems if we don't deal with our issues, and we avoid them we could be at risk of developing a higher level of depressive symptoms.” 1.3

Often people that excessively use escapism to escape their own reality are hiding from issues or problems in their own lives. People who do this are often frustrated with their jobs or tired of seeing the bleak news in today's world of death, abuse and corruption. But in trying to escape these issues they are only putting them off until they eventually have to come back down to Earth and face them, often creating more problems or making the ones they are already struggling with worse.

“When people regularly engage in escapism behaviors – they are eroding their abilities to form social connections to other humans.” 1.4

Also some people create a world in their minds so believable that they abandon reality altogether, such as serial killer “Ted Bundy”, who managed to separate himself so entirely from his reality that he was able to lead two separate lives, one who portrayed a charismatic, charming young man to people the people around him and another part of himself that preyed on an estimated thirty innocent young women, raping and killing them, before going back home to his girlfriend as if nothing had happened.

Hero's Journey

“A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: The hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.” 2.1

The hero's journey, is the common template of a broad category of tales and lore that involves a hero who goes on an adventure, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory, and then comes home changed or transformed. We see these stories in everyday life from films, books, poetry and even our reality, we see soldiers coming home from war everyday changed. Some having experienced horrors so damaging that they physically and mentally can't function in normal society.

And even these damaged war hero tales are used in film, because the audience can easily sympathise and connect to their story, their journey and countless stories have been created to showcase these struggles as it is such a compelling journey of love, loss, honor, betrayal, freedom and war. And in doing this it gives normal people an idea of what soldiers have to go through each day and lets them imagine themselves as a hero. I'm sure we've all done it, watched a film or read a book that immerses us so far into that world that we start to imagine ourselves as a part of the story too, I do it all the time while reading. I imagine and dream that I can wield a sword against an army despite impossible odds, instill hope to a nation of people to rise up against a tyrant, shoot an arrow hundreds of yards to save a friend, fly on the back of a dragon or even be a dragon. All these different things I will never do but even getting the chance to imagine it, is enough.

Someone who puts these events into a more structured layout for screenwriting is Joseph Campbell who focuses on the many similarities between cultural myths and religious stories. And his studies resulted in what's called the monomyth. The monomyth is a universal story structure. It's a story template that takes a character through a sequence of stages throughout the story, beginning, middle and end.

1. The Ordinary World - Before a would-be hero can enter the special world, he must first live in the ordinary world. The ordinary world is different for each of us—it represents our norms, customs, conditioned beliefs, and behaviors. In *The Hobbit*, the ordinary world is the Shire where Bilbo Baggins lives with all the other Hobbits—gardening, eating and celebrating—living a simple life. Novelist J.R.R. Tolkien contrasts this life in the Shire with the special world of wizards, warriors, men, elves, dwarfs, and evil forces on the brink of world war.
2. The Call to Adventure - The Call to Adventure marks a transition from the ordinary world to the special world. The hero is introduced to his quest of great consequence. Fear of change as well as death, however, often lead the hero to refuse the call to adventure. The ordinary world represents our comfort zone; the special world signifies the unknown. The hero resists change initially but is ultimately forced to make a critical decision: embark on the adventure or forever remain in the ordinary world with its illusion of security.
3. Cross the First Threshold - In one sense, this is the point of no return. Once the hero shoots across the unstable suspension bridge, it bursts into flames. There's no turning back, at least, not the way in which he came. The first threshold marks a major decision: "I'm going to travel around the globe." "I'm going to transform my physical health." "I am going to write

a book.” “I’m going to master the flute.” “I’m going to realize my true nature.” This first breakthrough is a feat within itself; however, it is but the first of many turning points.

4. Trials, Friends, and Foes - Along the hero’s journey, the main character encounters many obstacles. Some people may try to stop you along your quest—possibly saying you’re unreasonable or unrealistic. These dream-stoppers are often cleverly masked as friends and family who appear to have positive intentions but hinder your development nonetheless. Your ability to identify obstructions on your path and align with supporters along your adventure is critical to your mission’s success. Because few people complete their hero’s journey to mature adulthood, most people will unconsciously attempt to sabotage yours.
5. Magical Mentor (or the Mentor with Supernatural Aid) - Generally, at an early stage of the adventure, the hero is graced by the presence of a wise sage. Personified in stories as a magical counselor, a reclusive hermit, or a wise leader, the mentor’s role is to help guide you. Think Obi-Wan, Yoda, Gandalf, Morpheus, or Dumbledore. Sometimes cloaked in mystery and secret language, a mentor manifests when the hero is ready.
6. Dragon’s Lair - The next significant threshold is often more treacherous than the first. Entering the villain’s castle or the evil billionaire’s mansion, this second major decision usually puts the hero at significant physical and psychological risks. Within the walls of the innermost cave lies the cornerstone of the special world where the hero closes in on his objective. For a man, the innermost cave represents the Mother Complex, a regressive part of him that seeks to return to the safety of the mother. When a man seeks safety and comfort—when he demands pampering—it means he’s engulfed within the innermost cave.
7. Moment of Despair - No worthwhile adventure is easy. There are many perils on the path to growth, discovery, and self-realization. A major obstacle confronts the hero, and the future begins to look dim: a trap, a mental imprisonment, or imminent defeat on the battlefield. It seems like the adventure will come to a sad conclusion, as all hope appears lost. But hope remains and it is in these moments of despair when the hero must access a hidden part of himself—one more micron of energy, strength, faith, or creativity to find his way out of the belly of the beast. The hero must call on an inner power he doesn’t know he possesses.
8. Ultimate Treasure - Having defeated the enemy and slain the dragon, the hero receives the prize. Pulling the metaphorical sword from the stone, the hero achieves the objective he set out to complete. Whether the reward is monetary, physical, romantic, or spiritual, the hero

transforms. And often, the prize the hero initially sought becomes secondary as a result of the personal transformation he undergoes. Perhaps the original quest was financially driven, but now the hero takes greater satisfaction in serving others in need. The real change is always internal.

9. Homeward Bound - Alas, the adventure isn't over yet. Now the hero must return to the world from which he came with the sacred elixir. Challenges still lie ahead in the form of villains, roadblocks, and inner demons. The hero must deal with whatever issues were left unresolved at this stage of the journey. Taking moral inventory, examining the Shadow, and performing constant self-inquiry help the hero identify weaknesses that will later play against him.
1. Rebirth & The Champion's Return - Before returning home—before the adventure is over—there's often one more unsuspected, unforeseen ordeal. This final threshold, which may be more difficult than the prior moment of despair, provides one last test to solidify the growth of the hero. In this final stage, the hero can become master of both worlds, with the freedom to live and grow, impacting all of humanity. Returning with the prize, the hero's experience of reality is different. He is no longer an innocent child or adolescent seeking excitement or adventure. Comfortable in his own skin, he has evolved and is now capable of handling demands and challenges. 2.2

Storyworld

"All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language. No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

The term "storyworld" is used to describe the "universe" within which a film, tv show, game or comic is set.

Wonderland, Narnia, Neverland, Hogwarts, Westeros, Middle Earth, Gotham City, Jurassic Park, and a galaxy far, far away.

All of these fictional places have become real in the minds and hearts of their millions of viewers or readers. These storyworlds were created to entertain people and that's what they've done but in doing it so well, they created a generation of people who dream. People who dream of these places and wish with everything they have for them to be real, because who doesn't want to live in a world with kickass heroes, dinosaurs and the vastness of space to explore. It's all a pretty escape from our everyday lives, to imagine and dream.

I myself wish I could create a storyworld that brings people together from all walks of life, to enjoy and dream of a better world and who knows maybe one day I will. And maybe I won't, maybe I'll have to settle for using other peoples creations to take me to another universe and place and to be honest, I don't think that will be settling at all.

Reference

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