

On Track 3, Simplified key text, Topic 9

Everybody needs a hero

Big-budget movies are expensive. They need international audiences to make money. So heroes who are instantly recognisable in different cultures are now in strong demand. This is why movie-makers love archetypes. An archetype is a character who appears again and again in myths and stories around the world. Archetypes resonate with global cinema audiences.

Here are three hero archetypes.

The warrior woman

Characteristics: Young, female, decisive and courageous. She is highly independent and possesses a clear sense of purpose.

Skills: Good with weapons. Good at martial arts. She is often underestimated by men because she is a woman. Big mistake.

Background: She exists in the stories of many cultures including the old Chinese ballad *Mulan*. *Mulan* is a warrior princess who fought against Mongol invaders. In the West, the ancient Greeks told tales of fearless female warrior tribes, known as Amazons.

Modern incarnations: Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, is a modern version of the warrior woman. She also appears in comic books as the Black Widow, and in the *Game of Thrones* novels as Arya Stark. Katniss Everdeen from the *Hunger Games* is another incarnation of the warrior woman.

The Lover

Characteristics: Young, attractive and restless. Usually male. He is a risk-taker. He likes beautiful women, but is unable to commit to one person. That is why he is a heartbreaker.

Skills: Charm and self-confidence. However, his pursuit of women means he can be lured into danger by a femme fatale (another popular archetype).

Background: The lover-hero appears in the Finnish epic *Kalevala* as the impulsive Lemminkäinen. In the legend of King Arthur he is the handsome Sir Lancelot. The lover-hero appears again in eighteenth century Italy, this time as the famous seducer Casanova.

Modern incarnations: James Bond is a modern version of the lover-hero archetype. The dark side of this character is seen in the modern vampire. He is deeply attractive to women but also dangerous to them.

The Mentor

Characteristics: Wise and knows about the world. Usually an older man with grey or white hair. Good-hearted, but uncompromising in the pursuit of his goals.

Skills: Magical powers, and he is a strong leader. He also has the patience to guide and mentor a young student.

Background: The wise old man appears in the *Kalevala* as Väinämöinen. In the legend of King Arthur he is Merlin the magician. The shamans in the myths of Northern America and Asia are also wise old men. They are in tune with the forces of nature.

Modern incarnations: Gandalf from the *Lord of the Rings* novels is a modern version of the mentor archetype. And so is Dumbledore, the kindly headmaster who takes Harry Potter under his wing. The *Star Wars* movies have two wise mentors – Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda who teach Luke Skywalker how to become a Jedi Knight.

Some film critics don't like seeing archetypes in movies. They say that these characters lack originality. They argue that filmmakers are simply cashing in on ready-made hero figures. On the other hand, maybe archetypes are important. They show us that after thousands of years, human beings haven't changed much.