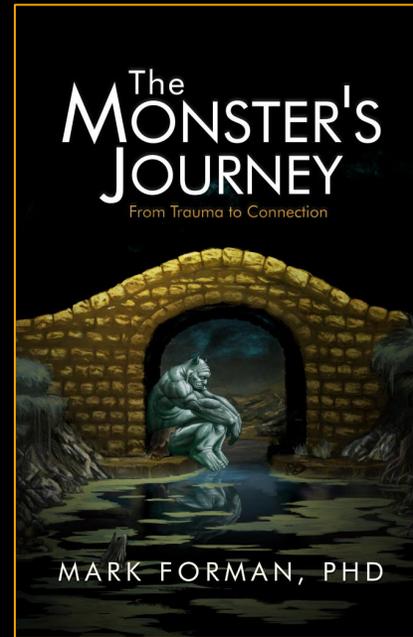
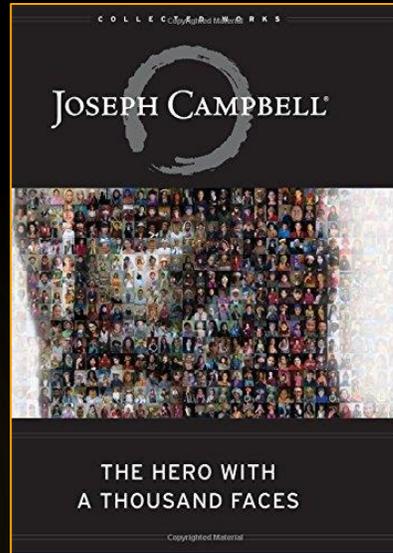
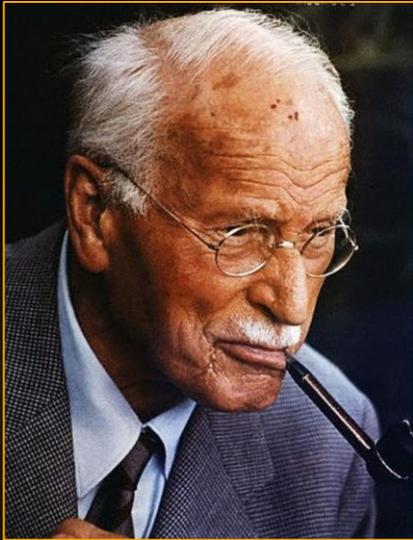




***ACEs and Archetypes:  
Understanding Therapeutic  
Narratives in the Treatment of  
Developmental Trauma***

***Mark Forman, PhD  
Licensed Psychologist***

# Archetypal Psychology and ACE Research



# A Bit About the term “Monster”

- It is not intended as a pejorative label
- It describes something about how early trauma survivors feel or fear about themselves – that they have become “monstrous”
- It describes the consequences of an introjection of aggression and neglect
- Not everyone with childhood trauma will identify
- Take what works and leave the rest

# Today's Talk



- Revisiting the Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) research
- Revisiting the Hero's Journey (1949) and its archetypal narrative
- Q: What can we say about archetypal narratives from a modern (or modern+) perspective?
- Q: Does the Hero's Journey motif work equally well for all?

# Today's Talk

- The answer: The Hero's Journey is still profoundly resonant but...
- There is a "cousin" motif that is more relevant to those with childhood trauma. This is what I call "The Monster's Journey"

# Developmental Trauma and ACEs

- Trauma is the persistent – though sometimes reversible – change to the mind and body that occurs as a result of overwhelming fear, confusion, or stress.
- Developmental trauma is connected to **ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs)**
- Developmental trauma is different from adult, shock trauma (PTSD)

# The Earthquake Analogy





# Developmental Trauma and ACEs

- ACEs have both mental and physical impacts later in life.
- There is a “dose-response” effect with ACEs.
- An individual who has experienced more severe and more types of ACE (**having higher ACE score**) will tend to have more severe mental and physical health outcomes later in life.



The Kaiser Healthcare  
Study of Adverse  
Childhood Experiences  
(ACES) – A Review

Table 2: History of ACEs Among 17,000 Kaiser Permanente Members Surveyed

| Category of Adverse Childhood Experience        | Percentage of Women Experiencing | Percentage of Men Experiencing | Total Experiencing |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Recurrent and severe physical abuse             | 27%                              | 30%                            | 28%                |
| Recurrent and severe emotional abuse            | 13%                              | 8%                             | 11%                |
| Sexual abuse                                    | 25%                              | 16%                            | 21%                |
| Emotional Neglect                               | 17%                              | 12%                            | 14%                |
| Physical Neglect                                | 9%                               | 11%                            | 10%                |
| <i>Growing up in a household with:</i>          |                                  |                                |                    |
| Household substance abuse                       | 30%                              | 24%                            | 27%                |
| A family member being imprisoned                | 5%                               | 4%                             | 5%                 |
| Household mental illness                        | 23%                              | 15%                            | 19%                |
| Parental separation or divorce                  | 25%                              | 22%                            | 23%                |
| The mother being treated violently <sup>i</sup> | 14%                              | 12%                            | 13%                |

<sup>i</sup> Typical of many studies of family violence and trauma, this study did not assess for violence against the father. Large meta-analysis of studies (e.g., Archer, 2000) show that rates of domestic violence are almost exactly equal relative to the sexes. Following from this, there is likely an additional category of children who experienced trauma through witnessing the father being physically assaulted, either individually or as a part of a reciprocally violent relationship.

# Kaiser/ Adverse Childhood Experiences (US Statistics)

65% of persons had at least one ACE, including:

- 26% with one category of ACE
- 16% with two categories of ACE
- 10% with three categories of ACE
- 12% with four or more categories of ACE

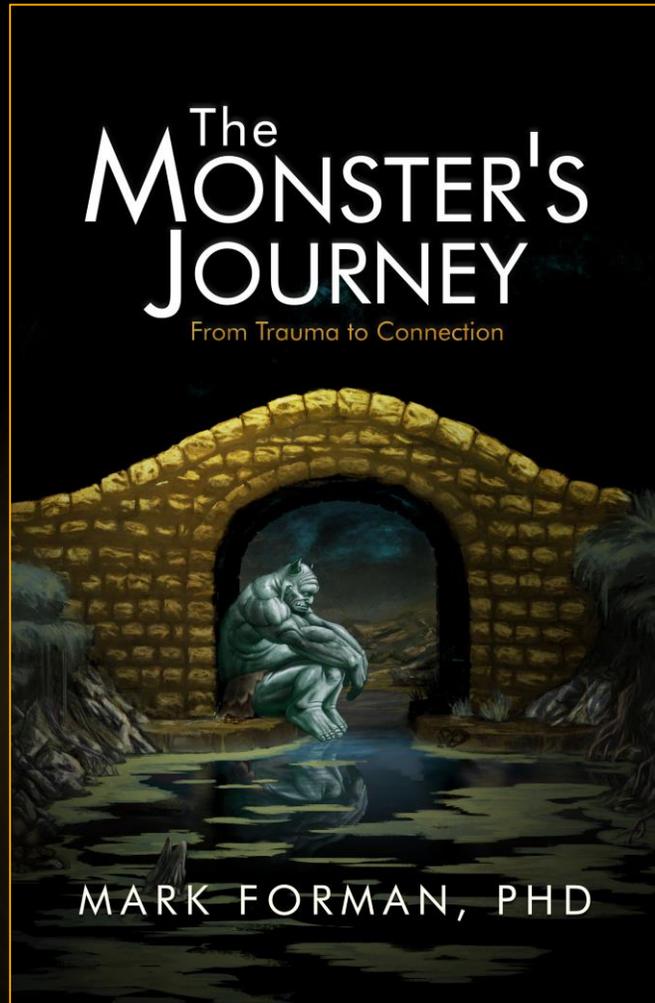
Potential  
“monster”  
territory

\*It is okay to if people identify themselves through the Monster lens even if they don't have high ACE numbers. Severity and perceived impact matter as well.

# Long-term Impact of ACEs include:

- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Illicit drug use
- Ischemic heart disease
- Liver disease
- Poor work performance
- Financial stress
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Smoking
- Suicide attempts
- Depression
- Unintended pregnancies
- Risk of sexual violence
- Poor academic achievement

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# Archetypes, The Hero's Journey & The Monster's Journey

# Principles of Archetypes

- The word archetype translates as “primitive model” from the Greek.
- Our most basic human psychological models – archetypes - are captured in stories.
- These stories are not static; they change as human cultures change and evolve (Ken Wilber).
- As human cultures evolve, their stories reflect relatively greater degrees of psychological complexity.

# The Story of Stories: The Hero's Journey

- The Hero's Journey describes the most pervasive/universal archetypal theme (the "monomyth") found in story
- This motif goes back through oral tradition at least as far back in writing as The Epic of Gilgamesh (2100 BCE)
- The Hero's Journey has three main phases: 1) Separation, 2) Initiation, and 3) Return

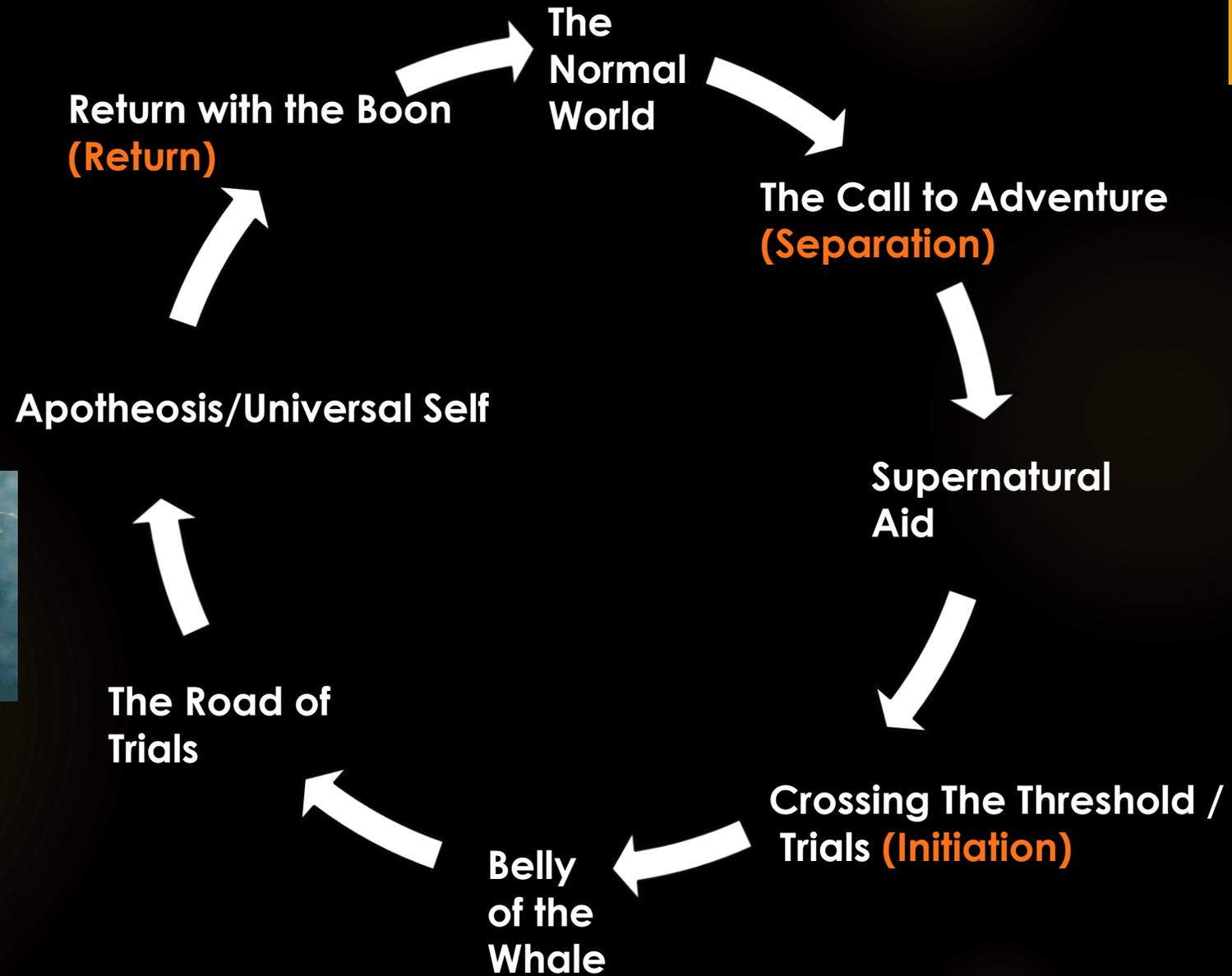
# The Story of Stories: The Hero's Journey

- It describes the central path of psychological and spiritual development for most “normal” persons.

# The Monster's Journey: The Path of the Traumatized

- The Monster's Journey is an analogue of the Hero's Journey.
- A Monster is a person who, early on, due to trauma, has lost their innocence and sense of connection to the normal world of persons, activities, and relationships.
- Given their vulnerability as children, they internalize/introject a severe and negative view of self

# The Hero's Journey

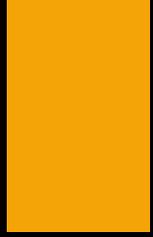


# The Monster's Journey





# Types of Monster's Journeys





Anger (fight)

Fear (flight)

Freeze

Fawn



## The Alien's Journey

Primarily dissociative (flight and freeze). Often the person feels they don't belong on the planet or on "this plane" of existence.

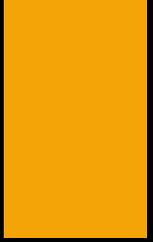


## The Mutant's Journey

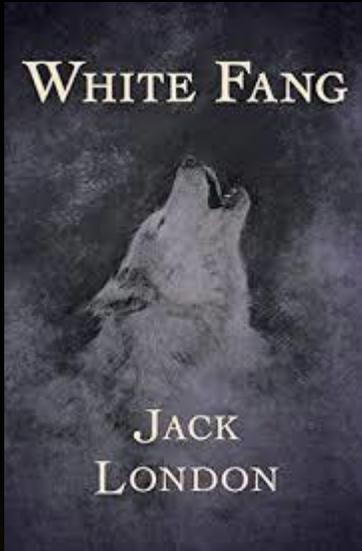
Depending on the story, potentially a reaction to later, childhood or teen trauma in which there is a conscious recollection of "before"

# The Gifts Of Trauma: Intensified Talents or Psychological Qualities

- A heightened capacity to understand others (an empathic gift)
- A heightened capacity to work with others' pain (a gift of healing)
- A heightened vision of goodness (a gift of morality)
- A heightened sense of creativity (a gift of imagination)
- A heightened capacity to persevere (a gift of focus)
- A heightened spiritual or psychological drive (a gift of depth)



# Some Examples in Stories



# White Fang: Story Structure (Three Owners)

Gray  
Beaver



Beauty  
Smith



Weedon  
Scott



Fatherhood  
/Guard  
Dog

Loss of  
Innocence

Peak Alienation/  
Traumatization

Meeting the  
Healer

Redemption  
Through Giving,  
Generating  
Connection



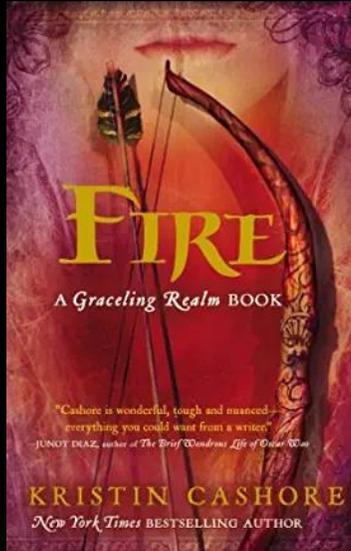
Under the tutelage of the mad god [Beauty Smith], White Fang became a fiend. He was chained up in a pen at the rear of the fort, and here Beauty Smith teased and irritated him and drove him wild with petty torments. . . . He now became the enemy of all things, and more ferocious than ever. To such an extent he was tormented, that he hated blindly and without the faintest spark of reason. (pp. 83-84)”

— White Fang (by Jack London)



“[Scott’s] hand descended. Nearer and nearer it came. It touched the ends of his upstanding hair. He shrank down under it. It followed down after him, pressing more closely against him. Shrinking, almost shivering. He still managed to hold himself together. It was a torment, this hand that touched him and violated his instinct. He could not forget in a day all the evil that had been wrought him at the hands of men.”

— White Fang (by Jack London)



# Fire: A Story of a Female “Monster” and her (narcissistic, addict) Father

Sometimes, appearing at her door after months away, [her father] brought women with him, or the traders who dealt his animals and drugs . . . Sometimes he spent the entire visit strung out on the poison of some plant; or, completely sober, he had strange, arbitrary, gloomy fits of temper, which he took out on everyone but Fire. Other times he was as lucid and lovely as the high notes Fire played on her flute. She dreaded his arrivals, his brassy, gorgeous, dissolute invasions of her quiet life. And after every one of his departures she was so lonesome that music was the only thing to comfort her. . . . (p. 53)

## Additional Notes re: The Monster's Journey

Themes can be combined (monsters who are also aliens etc.).

Sometimes wild animals are used as proxies for monsters (e.g., *White Fang*).

Sometimes human characters are used and their process of “monsterization” is a transparent psychological process in the story (e.g., *Ender's Game*).



# Attitude of Recovery

- Be open to many forms of self and relational therapies.
- The treatment is: **Everything**
- Be accepting that total recovery may not be possible.
- Think critically about “just so” advice that is absolutistic; instead, the path will wind.



# Attitude of Recovery

Understand the dimension of time: Lessons take longer.



## The Work of the Monster

Accepting that you are worthwhile as a human being, just as you are. Embrace the gifts you received via the trauma.

Without the gifts the pain can be overwhelming.



# The Work of the Alien

Accepting that the world has value despite its flaws. Life and other people are meaningful, even if they disappoint sometimes. You can learn to trust and “be here” if you develop discernment.

# The Unhealed Monster/Alien/Mutant

Some monsters etc. remain unhealed.

The monster that that does not heal may act out against others, or remain self-destructive over time.

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