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TAFT BROOME: OK. Now, this should be the most interesting class of the semester. Parzival-- what do y'all think of Parzival?
[INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: We were discussing earlier, and we can't wait to hear why [INAUDIBLE]

TAFT BROOME: Why? Well, let's go-- let's do the facts, first. Let's tell the story. Let's just go back and forth, round and round, until we get it done. [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: Yeah, but we were starting in the beginning. And we were both struck by the fact that [INAUDIBLE] we still haven't met Parzival yet.

TAFT BROOME: Right.

[LAUGHTER]

AUDIENCE: So I thought that was interesting [INAUDIBLE] right?

TAFT BROOME: Uh.

AUDIENCE: I don't think it's a big deal. [INAUDIBLE]

TAFT BROOME: Well, I think what the author is doing there is emphasizing that the first principle of moral behavior is family. It's kinship. And that we have to know his lineage before we can know him. And whatever he does, I think there's another-- and that's a big difference between Parzival and Mallory.

This is your-- this is your King Arthur's legend in the first form, OK? This one here. That is that there's a lot of attention given to the morality of being a knight. But the first principle is-- first principle, I think, is kinship. And an interesting principle is that it's immoral to mistreat a kinship-- a relative, even if you don't know that this person is a relative. Remember that? You're not supposed--

AUDIENCE: Right, I mean, first of all, there's all this time spent on who his father is.

TAFT BROOME: That's right.

AUDIENCE: We know who his father is.

TAFT BROOME: That's right. And there's this big to do about all of these relationships. And you don't discover them immediately. You find out later.

So Parzival's father goes out, gets married, does a heroic deed, marries a queen as a result of it, thanks, gets tired of being a king, and goes back out on the road, so to speak. Marries again, finds no legal or moral problem in doing that because one wife was a pagan and the other one was a Christian.

Well, keep going. Y'all get in there. I want to hear more about these stories. You can and you can do it bullet-wise. Just, you don't have to go from the beginning to the end.

What were some of the things that struck you about this? Then we're going to tie it all in at the end, make sure we get the facts straight first. Name some of the things he did.

AUDIENCE: Gahmuret marries again. Herzeloide.

TAFT BROOME: Herzeloide.

AUDIENCE: Herzeloide. And I guess Gahmuret is gone by the time Parzival was born, he's dead.

TAFT BROOME: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: He dies in Baghdad [INAUDIBLE] and dies.

TAFT BROOME: And dies.

AUDIENCE: --a valiant death. His mother goes off [INAUDIBLE].

TAFT BROOME: Yeah, they are afraid that some other person might take over his property and do her and her child some harm.

AUDIENCE: And she doesn't want him to know about Gahmuret.

TAFT BROOME: She doesn't want him to be like his father.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

TAFT BROOME: Said, that's for me. OK.

AUDIENCE: And his father dies.

AUDIENCE: After he leaves.

AUDIENCE: After he leaves.

TAFT BROOME: Yeah, I didn't remember that. But I--

AUDIENCE: We know they're not totally there.

TAFT BROOME: Yes. Towards the end.

AUDIENCE: Parzival doesn't know about it until he meets with his uncle, the brother of a king of the Grail.

TAFT BROOME: The Fisher King, now let's talk about the Fisher King. Let's go into the Fisher King in some detail. When does he encounter the Fisher King?

AUDIENCE: I was looking for adventure again and needed a place to stay. Maybe referencing both of them. [INAUDIBLE] Five.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

TAFT BROOME: This is the Grail, the Grail King. And he doesn't know he's the Grail King at first. All he sees is the man out in a boat.

AUDIENCE: Right, it's Book Five.

TAFT BROOME: You can read quick portions of it. That's legitimate.

AUDIENCE: It was something like, He was wandering around [INAUDIBLE] and he runs into this Fisher King, which is in the middle of nowhere.

TAFT BROOME: Right,

AUDIENCE: And he's looking for a place to stay. And he uses the point-- here is this fortress. Go up to the wall [INAUDIBLE].

TAFT BROOME: Right.

AUDIENCE: And he didn't know he was the king at the time. He just thought he was a fisherman. So he goes--

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] there's this big deal.

TAFT BROOME: Yes, that's what I'm getting.

AUDIENCE: It seems like everybody knows about [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: Right.

AUDIENCE: But the other thing is, people come and they fault the king of the Grail. And I think in today's society, you would say, you could claim innocence because, I didn't know. I didn't know why you were there.

He sort of feels like, he feels guilty. He goes, I should have asked the question. And it's a little strange and I know it's cultural [INAUDIBLE].

TAFT BROOME: Yeah, I think the second. The way I look at it, the first principles of morality for him are kinship. And a second set of principles are chivalry, which are connected to it in some way. But, yeah, I want to delve into this question.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, the notion of admitting wrongdoing and wanting to atone for it, atonement is a major theme in this book that, to me, the mistake or the sin seems trivial. Not asking a question out of politeness is not a compelling sin to me or compelling wrongdoing. But it's what's used in the story. And Parzival feels very guilty about it and wants to atone for it, like, makes it his mission to make his way back to the [INAUDIBLE].

TAFT BROOME: OK, now, I don't know if you all read Joseph Campbell.

AUDIENCE: I never have.

TAFT BROOME: OK, the only reason I haven't assigned Joseph Campbell yet is that I can't figure out which one to assign because I'd have you reading four or five of them and watching this TV program where Bill Moyers, he does one with Bill Moyers called *The Power of Myth*. And he's a spectacular lecturer. And I've got some videotapes of his in his classes.

Well, for me, Joseph Campbell is one of my maybe top five, if you want to put it that way, scholars. Now, here's the big issue that Joseph Campbell makes out of the question. Campbell starts off with a poet by the name of T.S. Eliot. He got a Nobel Prize for literature.

And one of Eliot's pieces is called "The Wasteland." And in "The Wasteland," the wasteland is a place where everybody does what everybody else expects you to do. So you never break out and find your individual, what he calls bliss, what I call destiny. You never break out of that.

You're always, come in. You learn the rules. And you follow them, which is good 99% of the time. The question is, when do you break out? And by what reason do you break out?

Parzival really wants to be a good knight, I'm sorry, a competent knight. Just playing with words right now, good night, OK. And he's been taught very well. You remember his teacher?

And the teacher told him, virtually, when you go to somebody's house, you don't start quizzing them when you ask them questions. That's one of the rules of chivalry. And Parzival wants to be true to all of the rules of chivalry. But he's sitting there talking to his host, and his host is in pain. And the authors have made it clear that this is the worst kind of pain that a man can endure.

Now, actually, the worst kind of pain, I've had six physicians tell me that kidney stones are the worst kind of pain a man can endure. It's man's equivalent of a woman's childbirth, natural childbirth. Worse than pains in the arm.

I've had them. I know. But there is nothing fearful attached to kidney stones. I have not lost my manhood when I pass a kidney stone.

This man lost his manhood. And not only that, but the tip of that thing is still stuck in him. So then you ask yourself, if Parzival is going to lift himself up above the rules, now's the time to do it.

You've got a colleague sitting there suffering the worst pain they could ever suffer, and is going to die of it. The least you could do is say, oh my God, I feel sorry for you. Parzival didn't do it.

Now, there's another game that everybody plays, particularly parents. There are some lessons you cannot teach a child by giving them the answer first. You got to put the child in the situation.

Everybody does it. There are certain situations you get in where you just can't tell. If you're going to give a person some kind of a test, you can't tell them certain things.

Like for example, when I had my first test on the job, they couldn't tell me, oh, we got that covered in case you mess up. I had to believe that this was it. So they couldn't tell him to ask that question and that the result would be that he would become the Grail King. He had to break out of the rule and show that he was worthy.

So there's that big issue now with the Grail King. And Parzival felt bad that he missed a chance. He felt bad that he should have shown some compassion, at least verbally.

But the real issue is that this test was one of his fitness to be the Grail King. And the fitness was not measured in terms of obedience to the rules. The fitness was measured in terms of being quote unquote "above the rules."

There's a film called *The Cincinnati Kid*. It's the same theme as *The Hustler*, except that *The Hustler* was about pool, professional pool players. And *The Cincinnati Kid* was about professional card player.

And the film ends, I'm assuming that you all are going to watch the film, won't be disappointed by me telling you the end. No, y'all won't watch it because it's in black and white. I think it's in black and white. It might be color. Might be color.

But anyway, the film ends where the main character loses this card game. And he loses it to the old master. He's beating him up until the very end. And he loses all his money.

And he comes up to the master at the end and he says to him, says, why did you give up that game? He said that was against all of the rules of probability. Everybody knows it.

And the old man said, the question is not about making mistakes. The question about when to make it. In other words, he threw the guy off by throwing away that game. So once, when the time comes for you to break the rule, you got to know that this is the time and be prepared to suffer the consequences.

And Parzival wasn't willing to do that. And Parzival had to mature. How long was it? How many years passed between the time that he missed his chance at the time that he came back and became Grail King?

And he's looking for this thing all along. The castle disappears. Remember, he gets up the next morning and he hears the knights thundering out of the castle on their way away someplace. And he gets all dressed up and goes out to follow them. He can't find them.

He turns around to go back and the castle is gone. And he spends the next x amount of time to go back and find the castle. My calculation was 20 years.

I want you to take some time, if you dispute that, whether to give that some thought, maybe look through the book a little bit more. He was out there for quite a while. And after he has all of these exploits, then he has proved himself worthy.

AUDIENCE: I was trying to think of how old his sons were when they were reunited at the end. That would be a way to check. But I don't remember it saying.

TAFT BROOME: They never say exactly. And I didn't want to go get one of the Cliff Notes or anything like that to look it up. I just did not want to do that.

And so I went back and reading and taking the little pieces. And like I said, there is a good answer to that. If you go to the Humanities Department, they'll all know the number. But I didn't want to do it.

I wanted to have fun doing it on my own. And I want to leave that to you all. But my calculation was 20 years.

AUDIENCE: If it was 20 years, he didn't necessarily have any [INAUDIBLE] all the sudden. Oh, I should have-- I feel so awful. I should have asked more about this. I feel bad. I need to go back.

AUDIENCE: Like, other people told him that he messed up. Which is an interesting take on confession in terms of, he didn't have a self realization. He did internalize it eventually.

TAFT BROOME: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: But he didn't come to the realization [INAUDIBLE] told that he did wrong.

TAFT BROOME: Yeah, now, this is another trait of many mythic heroes. And that is, they all have at least one fatal character flaw, fatal. You read Oedipus. You go back to the Trojan Wars.

No matter who they are, they all have some very bad, bad is not the word, fatal is the word. Even if it doesn't kill them, it kills their careers. It does all of these terrible things. And is there a lesson in all of that?

Well I think one lesson is that if you're going to look for somebody to pattern your life after in any way, in any particular way, or if you're going to advise your children to be like somebody else, you're not going to find anybody that's perfect unless you got a religious bent. But you're going to find people who make mistakes.

And the heroes, at least all of the ones that I have read, are the ones who not only do great deeds, but make big mistakes. I mean, when they make a mistake, it is big, terrible to them, terrible to everybody around them. And I think that's the way it is.

If you play in the big game, you make big mistakes. You make big gains when you make them. But you make big mistakes too.

Yeah, let's talk about his character some more. Did he did his character change as he got older? Yeah, I think he did.

AUDIENCE: I mean, what frustrates me is the way he became a knight was by killing another knight in order to get his clothing.

TAFT BROOME: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: And I know that the trajectory in the book is that he is foolish, he's young, he doesn't know about knighthood. He thinks he needs to go to the knight to get the clothes. And then he matures. But the author doesn't think that murder to be the major flaw of Parzival's life. The major mistake is not a question of the king.

TAFT BROOME: Right.

AUDIENCE: I don't know. I don't know what we're supposed to do with that, just accept that he had to kill the knight?

AUDIENCE: It wasn't a heroic deed that made him become a knight, unless maybe it is somehow heroic and I'm missing it.

TAFT BROOME: No, I wouldn't call that heroic because there was nobody else's interest at stake that he was protecting. There's a scene, I'm trying to think of it, in the film, this is one of my favorite films. I'm trying to think of what-- I think it was *Robin Hood*, one of the Robin Hood movies where Robin Hood gets into the sword fight with this knight. And he doesn't know it's Richard.

And they're fighting. And Richard goes with a lunge. And Robin Hood steps out of the way. And Richard gets his sword stuck into a tree.

Now they're fighting to the death. This is serious. And Robin Hood, I think it is, puts down his sword and goes helps him pull it out of the tree.

He got an opportunity to stab the man in the back. But chivalry says, you don't do that. So they got these rules of chivalry. Well, I think if you follow the rules of chivalry, there's something about it that is hero-making in it. It helps you get there.

I don't think that there was a heroic deed. But it gets you into a mindset that there's something that's higher than you. I mean, if you're going to kill a man, you don't kill him by stabbing him in the back or certain kind of things. You just don't do these things.

What about his half brother? You see any point to the story of him and his half brother? Fee or fees, that's the best pronunciation I can get out of it.

AUDIENCE: Well, he certainly seems essential to Parzival's eventual saving of the Grail Castle and of the Fisher King. They go there together in the end. And you could probably argue that if he hadn't met up with Feirefiz, he wouldn't have gone. [INAUDIBLE]. the importance of family.

TAFT BROOME: Why do you think the author made this bizarre characterization of Feirefiz as being patched black, like a Pinto horse. That's sort of bizarre. Why would an author just do that? I mean, why would an author do that? That was not [INAUDIBLE]. But why would the author do that?

Well, I tell you what I think. Well, I'll tell you what Joseph Campbell says. And then I'll tell you what I think, which is almost the same thing.

This author wants to reconcile the pagans. And the only thing that's going to impress Parzival, in terms of reconciliation, is kinship. So I think what he's trying to say is that Feirefiz is half black, half white, which he was.

AUDIENCE: Half pagan, half Christian.

TAFT BROOME: But the key issue was, pagan versus Christian, and that the two of them became the best of friends at the end. So I think the author was trying to say that these are the early Middle Ages and the Dark Ages, that all of this hatred between Christians and pagans gotta go. And he tries to do it in the most compelling way with somebody like Parzival make [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: So Parzival accepted Feirefiz as he was, black and white, half pagan, half Christian, but actually all pagan in practice.

TAFT BROOME: In practice.

AUDIENCE: He accepted him as his brother. But in the end, for Feirefiz to have the wife that he wanted, to lead the life that he wanted, he had to be baptized and renounce the paganism.

TAFT BROOME: That's right. He still had to be baptized.

AUDIENCE: So they reconciled as brothers and as friends but--

TAFT BROOME: Now--

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

TAFT BROOME: Well, let's dig into that one. At the time civilizations were created around the world independently of one another, it was motivated by two things. Number one, well, it was motivated by the weather. Yeah, I mean, it was a time when there were these grasses that could sustain a large population.

And we have the wheat cultures in the Middle East, the rice cultures in the East, the corn cultures in the Western, in the Americas, in the Western Americas. They could sustain large cultures. And the cultures did not have to be nomadic or semi-nomadic. They could stay in one place.

The other thing was that around that time was that human beings had figured out how to herd animals. So instead of going out hoping you see one one day and killing it and hoping it doesn't kill you. You can just herd the animals right along and take one whenever you get ready.

So you have two kinds of cultures. You have the herding culture. And you have the agrarian culture. Herding is still moving around. The agrarian is separate. The herding cultures are kinships societies.

Civilization was made up by different kinship groups. It was a multicultural society. So the rules of social order for a poor civilization we're more strict, or stricter, or social order was more problematic for culture, for civilized cultures, than it was for nomadic herders herding cultures because all you did was obey your father and your father obey your grandfather. You obeyed your mother. And mother obeyed her grandmother.

But when you've got different families living in the same place, how do you keep them in order? And here's how they did it, religion. So they invented great priesthoods. And the great priesthoods found it increasingly difficult to keep the social order.

So what they did was they had to find ways of keeping people anchored to an idea that was compelling on them and the shaman, with his insights into unconscious, just became not very compelling any longer because people did not share the same unconscious. They were different from different groups, different families.

So what happened in the end was that a priesthood developed, probably not out of the shamans because a shaman has a personality that requires a discussion. So I don't see three or four shaman getting down and saying, let's start a priesthood and work together in a hierarchy. I don't see that. A shaman becomes a shaman by virtue of having-- I hope you all can tolerate some of these diversions because they're just too interesting. A shaman becomes a shaman by virtue of having had a traumatic experience in childhood.

AUDIENCE: I'm sorry, the word shaman describes a--

TAFT BROOME: Witch doctor.

AUDIENCE: In very early prehistoric times?

TAFT BROOME: Yes. Yes. But you can find people who do not have the function of a shaman in society today. One very good example of a person who has the same personality as a shaman is this mathematician named Ramanujan. He's an Indian.

And the story is that when he was a child, his parents would get into these violent arguments. And he would crawl under the bed with a pencil and paper and try to do math problems to keep it out of his head. What happened in the end was that he became a very great mathematician. But they call him an intuitive mathematician.

He could not prove to you any of his results. But his results worked. One of the things he did was, here's something for you to look up in the details. I'm going to recite from memory. Ramanujan found a way to discern whether a 20-digit number was a prime number or not.

And he figured it out by hand. There's a hand method where you could figure out whether it's prime or not. And somebody used that method to frustrate the US military because the military had its ICBMs, its intercontinental ballistic missiles, their orders were coded in prime numbers.

You can break the code by hand. The idea is, you could still break the code by computer. But you'd have to run a computer for a month. By that time, they would change the codes. But if you could come in there and do it by hand, you could knock it out.

The story is that they had to reconfigure the whole thing. Ramanujan was [? brilliant. ?] So we're talking about a person who really is an outsider, a person who really lives in another state of mind. I saw a program on television, a documentary, who talked about savants and other types of people that have the shamanistic personality. They all had these traumatic childhood experiences where they tried to get away from the world.

And they showed this one guy. This one I'm telling you now is good scientific stuff. We're not talking about alien visitations. This is very well-documented. These people have been studied in college lab researchers and stuff.

They had this one man who was about, when he was 50 years old, he could tell you the weather of every day of his life, well, after three or four. You say, well, what was the weather like November 6, 1942. Oh, it rained that day. And they'd go back and check. And sure enough, it was.

Now, how do you explain that? Well, it turns out, basically, he knew nothing else. But he memorized those things to keep whatever problem he had as a child out of his mind.

And so they tried to rehabilitate him. And they showed a scene where he goes to the street to cross the street. And the sign is saying go. And he gets out in the middle of the street and the sign says stop. And he stops.

I think his mother kept him close to her all his life. He just didn't know those things. The more he got into society, he got a job. He could only hold a job for something like one hour a day at first, bussing tables in a restaurant. The more he got socialized, the more he began to lose that skill.

They say that the bards back in 400 BC-- when's the world going around talking about former and all that-- they said that they could tell, they had memorized-- I read some place where these people had memorized something like a million lines of verse before. Now, a million lines of verse.

So I sat down one day and I did a calculation. I know how long the lines are, about the same length of a line in Shakespeare. So I did back of the hand kind of a calculation, 10 volumes of Shakespeare. Now, I concluded from that television program I saw, that these people probably didn't do a whole lot of anything else.

One other program that I saw was one where they were talking about these professional Scrabble players. Actually, I think they play for money. And they talked about how many words these people have memorized. And not only that, but they had a skill to take the words on their palate, I mean, the letters, and be able to turn them around in their minds to see the patterns before they put them down.

I try to do that. If it's obvious, I can do it. I can do it with three letters if there's one. But seven, it takes an effort.

These people just do it like that. [CLICKING FINGERS] And they had all of these interviews with the winners. It turns out in the end that the winners know the meanings of very few words. But they word from a nonword.

And they interviewed some of them at home. And these people had shamanic personalities. I mean, you just don't see two of them sitting down for long, organizing together. So in my mind, I don't see shaman.

Oh, I tell you where else you can find a shaman. I knew a person who was not a shaman. But she said she was taught by shaman. So she knows some of the shaman skills. Native Americans, you can still find a shaman out there.

So what happened was, going back to civilization, the priests were able to find cycles that were connected first with the moon, then with the sun, by which they were able to organize everybody to plant and to reap. And so therefore, it's very easy to understand from that who invented mathematics and astronomy, these priests, right? Now I'm getting to my point. Now I'm getting to my point.

Joseph Campbell makes the big point that in primitive society, no, in the transition from small primitive societies to big. OK, instead of having six or seven people in a family group, now you're talking about hundreds. And they're herding these reindeer or cattle.

Here's what happens. Joseph Campbell, I think, is right about this. He does a lot of cultural anthropology. This is germane to all of this.

And I'll make all of this makes sense before the class is out. I don't ask you to trust me. But that's a promise.

Joseph Campbell says that once you have a successful society, successful in terms of holding people together and feeding everybody, you will find that your biggest problem it's not family. Biggest problem is not disease.

He says, you want to guess what he says your biggest problem is? Men with free time because you get a bad combination. The women don't have free time. They've got kids. That's 24 hours a day.

Men with free time, here's the bad combination. What they do? If they want a sheep, they just go out and get one. They got free time.

Men with free time, here's the bad combination. Free time and inclination to organize in hierarchical groups, and guess what the last piece of the puzzle is, high levels of testosterone, high levels of testosterone. That's a bad combination, free time, men, men with free time.

So what happens is that, to let out that energy, one of the things that men learned to do was to hunt other men. That is the root of the heroic story. And these ancient herding societies, anthropologists call warrior herding societies, they were warriors. Civilization was priests and farmers.

Now, here's the last piece of this puzzle. As civilization got more complicated, get more people, got bigger problems, the priest can't keep everybody together just on holidays and Sundays, if you want to put it like that. You have to have a principle of force.

So what happened was that the warrior herders, the young men, would get out and say, well, look, we've got to prove our manhood. So they'd run out to some civilization, kill someone, steal some women. Then the civilization started building walls to keep them out.

And then what happened was, the priest started hiring them as mercenaries. The priests started hiring them as, first of all, mercenaries, whenever one civilized group thought that they needed something from another civilized group. Some bugs got in and ate all of the wheat over here.

These people got wheat over there. They're not going to give you any wheat over here. So you hire some of these mercenaries to go beat up on a couple of them and bring some wheat back.

Then you have all of these problems within the culture. People are fighting. So then you hire these people, not as mercenaries, but you hire them as police. You see it? The invention of the king.

You already got the high priest. The king is really an outsider. That's what happened to the Roman Empire. The Romans came in.

They just didn't subdue everybody and beat everybody up. They just came in and became the police. They left a lot of the high priests in control.

So what I'm saying now is that the religion in warrior societies is based on kinship. And they don't believe that they lose anything by adopting your religion. You can't adopt theirs because you're not a member of the family. So warrior herding societies are not like civilized society. Civilized societies compete to the death over religion. Warrior herding societies, it doesn't matter that much to them. The pagans that we're talking about in Parzival were warrior herding Arabs. So Feirefiz really wasn't given up a whole lot to become a Christian, not a whole lot.

Even when Muhammad invented Islam, he did it as an attempt to synthesize their own religions with Christianity and Judaism and one other one, Zoroastrianism. So any person who comes in here who says that I am a Muslim will say that I have very few arguments with you about religion. You will say, I have a lot of arguments with you about religion. But they will say, I don't have a whole lot of arguments with you about religion because part of my religion is already built in Christianity.

So Feirefiz wasn't giving up a whole lot by doing it. It meant almost everything to Parzival. So I thought I'd go through that long spiel because it's built into the story here. These things are built into the story.

What had just happened was, what created the knights and what made them who they were was that there was this big void in the Western world after the Roman Empire collapsed. And any time some big power collapses, there are a whole lot of people rushing in to fill the void and get the piece of the action. Then came Islam.

That lasted for a while, went back. And now you have the Dark Ages. And then when everything comes back together, you start having the Middle Ages. And when did you start having the Middle Ages?

When Charlemagne started organizing all of these Dukes under one king. Some people would say it was Otto I who came after Charlemagne, but nevertheless. So we're talking about a time now when the West was ruled by Arabs who left.

And you got this big void. And you have a feudal system. And the knights serve a feudal lord. And there is this something about some of these knights that say, well, look, yeah, we're ravaging the land and all of that. But there's got to be principles.

And some of these knights really did bring chivalry to a high peak level. And some of them even called themselves priests like the Knights Templar. They thought of themselves as priests.

So that's where we are with all of this. And that one thing that isn't emphasized in here like it is other places, killing of the dragons, is that the purpose of mythology is to hold a society together. And one of its functions is to organize the men with the free time and say now, if you're going to kill somebody, they've got to be [INAUDIBLE].

And why have these things lasted so long? Well, what we find out is that they've lasted a long time because they become metaphors for everybody's problems, your big problems in your life. And one that I like to talk about, make mention here, let's entertain a problem.

You've just graduated. No, you haven't just graduated. You've graduated and you're working. And you have sacrificed a lot. And you've progressed in your company.

And your company is competing for a contract, let's say, with the Germans. And the company is going to make its pitch Monday morning. And you have to leave.

Sunday night, you get a call from your husband's mother in Arizona. The kids are out visiting. Your husband says, one of the kids got hit by a car.

The doctor says, we don't if the kid's going to last another two days. Now, do you go to that meeting on Monday? Or do you go to Arizona?

AUDIENCE: I'd go to Arizona.

TAFT BROOME: Well, let me tell you how this heroic story is going to help you with that decision. The heroic story says that your conscious mind does not possess all of the knowledge that your mind possessed. Your unconscious mind, and I'm not talking about memories right now. I'm talking about parts of your conscious mind that are virtually permanent.

There are truths that are hidden down in your unconscious. And if you are able to get into a mythic state of mind, then what you will be able to do is to go down in your unconscious and find out if one of those monsters down there needs to be killed. Now what kind of monster would be down there? Well, I'll tell you one kind that would be down there, your ambition because your ambition is competing with that child.

That was unfair because I made you all mothers. But suppose it was some people that are going to die if you don't go help them as opposed to going then. Then you got to face that demon down there that's your ambition. And what you have got to do is to say that I would rather be dead than to continue to live a life not being able to deal with these decisions.

I got to deal with this. Maybe my ambition is good for me. Maybe it's got to be killed. But whatever it is, I've got to face the demon. And I am ready to die because that unconscious demon is lethal in the real world.

So if you decide that on somebody else's behalf, you are willing to kill the demon and to bring the truth back to your conscious mind, that's the best way to handle the problem. Whatever decision you come up with after that is the best you can do. And the metaphor is in the heroic story.

So if you can get into the story to the point where you can get into Parzival's place and actually feel what Parzival feels, and then get into some of these other stories where they're really killing dragons, then what it does, what we know now 1,000 years later, is that if you embrace those things seriously. And if you really feel that you are Parzival in there, then the wiring in your brain will change. And your 12-year-old will start looking like a 14-year-old, not somebody who's going to be 18-year-old still looking like a 12-year-old, that your physiology, if you're young enough, will change. You will grow up.

Now, ancient people and medieval people and early modern people do all of this before the science could prove any of it. Better stated, better stated, they were willing to commit to it regardless of the consequences. So when they had their young kids coming along, particularly if they were afraid that the boys we're going to have some free time--

Oh, I mean, it's a nightmare if you got a 16-year-old on a Saturday night. I don't care how much you put into it. That can be a bad night for you.

I know, I was 16 years old once. But if you read these stories to them, and if they can embrace them, then that's a big help. It's a big help.

Some people have said that Freud, no matter what others say, that he brought the scientific method to the study of the mind. What they really say is that Freud was actually a mythologist because what he said was the best solution to your problem. Freud went one other step. This is very significant. And see if you can find it in any of these stories.

Freud said that if you are an amateur fooling around with the unconscious, you're unconscious or anybody else's, you may release the demon. But unless you make the demon morally acceptable to your conscious mind, the demon will get up there and run you to the insane asylum. And Freud talked about that in terms of the competition that boys have with the father and wanting to kill the father and take the father's place with the mother.

And Mary Shelley made a big deal out of it with *Frankenstein*. Because what did Frankenstein want to do? To kill his maker? It's wired down in the brain.

Freud said if that's the truth, then that's a hard thing to justify morally. So it's best left down there unless you can find a way to bring it up morally. So mythology is supposed to do all that.

Now, let's talk about how this thing fits into this class. If you want to solve an ethical problem and you want to solve it by using the method of virtues, but you don't want the list of virtues that Plato or any of those people have, but you want to find a character like I did with my first day on an engineering job, put that character in your place. Work the character through it. And then imitate, to some extent, that character.

The question is, what character to choose. It's not simply a matter of choosing a good person because in the end, what you want is to still have your job. You have to be prepared to lose it. But what you want in the end is to have somebody on your side.

Now the idea of the mythic story is that the mythic story provides a hero that is not only a hero to you, but is a hero to people. And why is that? Because of the long story I just gave.

It's another thing that's wired into the brain. After a while, people began to see from these stories that there's something of me in these heroes. Why isn't that?

All right, this is this word, gestalt. And let's take the Necker cube again. What your brain actually sees is a three-dimensional figure. What's up there is 12 lines on a flat board.

When you are sitting around with your family, is there one person that gets up to represent your family. Is there such a thing as an MIT person? Can you go to the airport and, say there are 400 students out here. But that one is probably from MIT.

Can you do that? Probably. Doesn't matter if you're right or wrong. The point is that you've got a picture in your mind.

Did I ever tell you a story about the old blues at Yale? Yeah, I was chair of the Faculty Senate. We had just gotten a constitution approved where we could get faculty members on the board of trustees. The question was, what kind of faculty member do we want?

You get somebody that's quote unquote "too scholarly," the board won't understand them. You get somebody who's too businesslike, and he won't reflect the rest, or she won't reflect the rest of us. So what do you do? How do you deal with that problem?

There was one faculty member there who got his law degree from Yale. And he said, look, why don't you call up to the President's Office and ask for the person who staffs the trustees. And when you get the person on the phone, ask them what an old blue is.

I said, what's an old blue? He said, you ask this person. I said OK.

So I called up there. They gave me the staff person for the trustee board. And I said, what's an old blue? And she said, an old blue is a member of the faculty who looks like Yale.

I understood that. I mean, it was abstract. Yeah, OK. And we concluded in the end, they said, they come into board meetings. The board, by some Yale tradition, is able to pick out who the old blues are.

And the board brings them into the board meeting. And here's what really happens according to that conversation, that 95% of the time, the board is talking about what Yale lives for. But when they want to make a decision where they can gain a lot, maybe they want to know what Yale is willing to die for.

Then they turn to the old blue. Should we take this take on this project? Should we have a course in here on Islam? Should we have Jerry Falwell on the faculty?

They look to the old blues. And the answer is not right or wrong. The answer's is this here, if we do this, will we have Yale at the end?

Well, that's a gestalt of Yale. And this tradition I'm talking about is Yale's mythology. Mythology will give you these old blues for a culture. And if an old blue is representative of the whole, then the old blue has a part of each of us in him or her.

And once she has done whatever she has done, no matter how bad it is, we all have a tendency to say, well, maybe she needs to be punished. But let's not be too harsh. I mean, I might have done that. Or we are decent people here. But this is the best it gets with our family.

So if you pull out a cultural hero and imitate a cultural hero, my argument has been, and I'm not alone in this, that whatever you do in the end, and no matter whether they want to punish you for it, there will be a tendency for them to side with or to forgive you or to see the point of what you did or something.

AUDIENCE: Did I hear you using the words cultural heroes?

TAFT BROOME: Yes.

AUDIENCE: And it's hard for me to see knights-- our theory of knights as cultural heroes.

TAFT BROOME: Yes.

AUDIENCE: So I'm trying really hard to think metaphorically and to see Parzival or characters like him as heroes that could help make decisions. But it's really tough because all of the activities that these knights engage in are not relevant. So now you're using cultural hero.

And I wonder if that's different. Like, a cultural hero to me would be someone who has faced decisions that we can relate to or has lived in the time that we relate to or has distractions that we also have to deal with. So someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Ghandi or John Kennedy or whoever, why wouldn't those types of people be perhaps more helpful than dead heroes from the past.

TAFT BROOME: OK, first of all, you hit a very, very, very important nerve. And that is that there's some generational differences. And so the question is, why is it that Parzival meant so much to me? I was not in his generation.

And the key word in the end is metaphor. Now, listen to me carefully because I want to choose my words properly here because if I mess up, I could really throw everybody off. When I had to make that decision on my first day as an engineer, I didn't see any difference between Parzival and my uncle Roy.

Campbell says that the hero's journey has this path. We just went through it. First of all, you hear a call. That's really your unconscious trying to say, look, you better get down here.

You hear a call. You don't really want to do it because somehow you know that this thing can be lethal. But somebody else makes the case that if you don't go, somebody else is going to suffer. So you got to go.

So the first thing is to hear the call. The second thing is the separation. You have got to go away from the comfort zone and into the unknown and the fabulous.

That's very important, fabulous, fabulous, Not fabulous in terms of peacock feathers, fabulous in terms of fable, that there are things that you are going to encounter that are not of this conscious Earth. They are the demons in your unconscious. You've got to slay a dragon because that's a real thing in your unconscious.

And then when you slayed the dragon, you have to bring back something, like the truth. That's the Holy Grail. You've got to bring the Grail back. And what do you do with the Grail when you get back? You share it with everybody.

OK, so that's the pattern of the hero's journey. Look at Roy. Why was Roy a hero?

Well, when they got back home, they found out that all the parents were dead, then they heard a call to do something for the children. But it wasn't staying there working. So they had to go out.

When they got down to Oberlin, that was just like being in a dream world for them. I've heard them talk about it. And when they got their degrees, what did they do with the degree?

They didn't go out and get a big job. They brought the degree back home to help the others get out. That was their Holy Grail. It's the same thing.

So what you've got to do is to look around you and find somebody you know. You don't have to know them personally. But find somebody you know who has had that same experience.

They don't have to be perfect people. But if they have had that experience, and they are heroes in the sense that they are-- The beautiful thing about these things is, they don't hide, as we just discussed, the negative sides of these people's characters.

I mean, when you find out what is relevant in them that's heroic, put them in one of those situations. Do your best or do what you think is right in terms of how much you can follow them. Then once you have done it, everybody else, even if it's only on an unconscious level, we'll see some sense in it and have some compassion for you, why you did it. And we'll be inclined to say, well, that's as good as it gets with us.

And you'll be the kind that, if they sent to prison, you get your old job back when you get out. You see what I'm saying? You'll be like John Brown at rugby. Was it rugby?

John Brown's School Days, was that rugby? I'm talking about this story about this American that goes to one of the British schools. And he does something very heroic. But he gets sent down for it, gets kicked out of school for it.

It's Oxford. It's John Brown at Oxford is the name of it. Well, anyway, what happens is he gets sent down for it. But when he's in the carriage leaving Oxford, on the way to the port where he gets the boat home, all of the Oxford students are out there cheering him on.

That's the kind of hero I'm talking about. If you've got to go, they still will treat you like a hero or think of what you did was as good as it gets. All right, so my point is that we can bring virtue ethics back. But mythology is the way to go.

And if you do mythology right, and this is another one of the things that Joseph Campbell takes credit for. As a matter of fact, this is really the source of his fame, that what he found out was that if you look at mythologies of all cultures, you'll find a whole lot of things in common. And the hero's journey is one of them. And there are different kinds of hero's journeys and all of that.

Your challenge then is to find somebody that you, like I said, that you know. You don't have to know them personally. They don't even have to be alive.

You can read them out of books, and say, I know that person and say that, uh huh, that person fits the pattern. And if I really get in some trouble and do what I think that person will do, it may not be the right thing. But somehow or another, I will still fit in the culture when it's done. It will be probably the best you can do.

And the only reason I was hoping that this would be a bigger class, the only reason, is that I was hoping that we'd have a whole lot of people in here saying, well, you know, where I'm from, we got another story. And the hero didn't go out and kill a dragon. The hero went out and killed something else, might be just as bad.

I've heard some stories from South Americans where the person goes out and kills something in the forest. Well, even anthropologists who study Oedipus say that he did not kill, it was a Sphinx that he killed, a lion with a person's head that was terrorizing the populace. They did find something. And I don't know how they did it, but they found something.

They said around that place at around that time there was a pestilence, a disease. And somehow or another, this man came in from outside and walked among the people and helped cure them. Well, how does it work 12 generations later when it gets down in the unconscious into a story. You kill dragons.

So now, what I want you to do since you all got all of this free time is to take this last paper that I've given you back and resubmit it. But you can change it if you want to. These were good papers.

But what I want you to do is take the character that you analyzed, and substitute Parzival in there. And if that doesn't work, then substitute some kind of hero in there and see what that person would have done in that situation. And what would have been the consequences to that person after?

AUDIENCE: So we can do a different hero, well, any heroic figure?

TAFT BROOME: What I would like for you to do is to try Parzival first. If it does not work for you, then choose another one. But justify why that person is a mythic hero, a mythic hero of some sort or another. Like my Uncle Roy and those, they followed the pattern.

The heard the call. They went out for a higher cause. They had this fabulous experience. They killed the dragon. They brought the Grail home and shared it with everybody.

There's a pattern. If that doesn't work, then pick another case, the A7D or some other case that you've already studied. I don't want to, as we all know, none of these methods will work every time for everybody. But so but I'd like for you to try Parzival on Chernobyl.