Parental Absence in Modern Narratives *by*
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The protagonists of most fictional stories are characters whose origins often involve traumatic events that either lead to them wanting to do good in the world or wondering what their purpose really is. In many cases, this event is often something closely related to the central character's parents. This "parental absence" can and generally does become a defining trait of the protagonist as they progress through life and, more evidently, through the immediate narrative.

Considering the prevalence of this trope in television, film, literature, and other popular media, it is important to identify the recurring conflicts characters undergoing "parental absence" endure and whether the aforementioned mediums are conveying a meaningful message to audiences. By closely examining two films, Disney's animated feature *Hercules* (1997) and Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003), and gathering survey data from viewers, there begins to form a clear connection between parental figures on what mythologist Joseph Campbell described as "The Hero's Journey".

By pin-pointing this recurring theme across several different mediums, it becomes clear that many narratives are at least in part influenced by this concept of parental absence and that it is at the core of modern storytelling.