

# Good, evil and mountains

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After the conclusion of Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, it is somewhat difficult to say which literary theory provides the most insight into the text. Initially, the novel was analyzed from potentially four different perspectives: reader response theory, archetypal theory, feminist theory, and post-colonial theory. The archetypal theory refers to universal symbols, characters, themes, or even a setting that shape the structure and function of a literary work. Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* is about what really happened on Mount Everest in the early afternoon of May 10, 1996. It is also about the dangers Krakauer and the other mountain climbers faced on their journey reaching the top of Mount Everest. Subsequently, taking the time to look back at all of the theories as a whole, it can be said that the archetypal theory provides the most insight on the text and displays many common archetypes throughout the main characters including the hero, the mentor, as well as symbols such as darkness and an oxygen tank.

Firstly, "the hero" is a common archetype in literature that is displayed in the novel. They are the "character who predominantly exhibits goodness, and struggles against evil in order to restore harmony and justice to society". Throughout the tale, Jon Krakauer performs the hero's part as he is morally good and must go on an adventure that is almost certain to end in his death. He has one ultimate goal to finish that summits Everest effectively. In the novel, Krakauer mentions "The ratio of misery to pleasure was greater by an order of magnitude than any other mountain [he'd] been on; [he] quickly came to understand that climbing Everest was primarily about enduring pain". His journey goes from innocent to experienced. Krakauer learned about the catastrophe that took place on the mountain at

the start of the novel. He has some mountain climbing experience and is more experienced than the other climbers. Jon Krakauer is very similar to Harry Potter from the “ Harry Potter” series. Both of these characters go through a great adventure in order to complete a certain objective. Harry sets off to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, learning that he must defeat the evil Voldemort who killed his parents. Just like how Harry has an objective to complete, Krakauer wants to successfully summit Everest and make it out alive.

In the second place, another common archetype that can be shown in the novel is the mentor. Using the archetypal theory, one can uncover Rob’s character as the mentor archetype.” The Mentor” refers to a wise individual who provides guidance to the main character. Usually the mentor is elderly, and this individual often has some kind of magical ability or a wider range of knowledge. Rob Hall, the head guide to the group of mountain climbers who leads them up the mountain. Hall has strong allegiance to protect his customers to the very end. In the story, “ Rob was always especially concerned about the welfare of the Sherpas who worked

for him” The reader can relate Rob Hall to Tony Stark from the Marvel Cinematic Universe as in the movie Spider-Man: Homecoming, he takes on the mantle as Peter’s mentor, giving him advice, upgrading his suit, and treats him as his own son. One would definitely want them by their side through good and tough times. Rob Hall and Tony Stark are very wise and knowledgeable about what they do. Much the same as how Tony offers

guidance to Peter, Rob Hall assists Krakauer, managing him and ensuring he is alright.

Lastly, an archetypal symbol such darkness and despair, is a perfect match to the novel, connecting the ideas of the novel to an individual's personal experience. Doom, death, and darkness are all words that represent the colour black. As the storm became worse the climbers were "[staggering] blindly around in the storm, growing ever more exhausted and hypothermic" . From an archetypal perspective, the meaning behind this quote is more understandable with others being able to make connections to the archetypal symbol. Even though many others have not actually climbed a mountain before, they have experienced the impact and emotions of what the symbol represents, making the story have a massive effect as opposed to the other three literary theories. At the same time, another symbol that one can find in the novel is the oxygen tank. The oxygen tank essentially represents assistance, providing security and additional confidence to the climbers. There are many examples of people's mental health being abolished when climbing Mount Everest. One such example is " when Yasuko tried to take her oxygen tank off so she could breathe more easily, she'd insist on putting it right back on. No amount of persuasion could convince her that she was out of oxygen, that the mask was actually suffocating her" . This shows how one cannot live long in extremely high altitudes without oxygen. Oxygen is an essential element of life that many other people can connect to as it allows us to breathe to survive. Therefore, the oxygen tank is an archetypal symbol that many others take for granted and symbolizes survival.

Overall, when reading a book, what a person takes from it is what matters most as it allows an individual to really think deeply about what is happening in the story and make connections both within the text and other texts, their experiences, and the world. The novel *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer, consists of real people, real situations, and real emotions. Therefore, a real life person would be impacted the most by the archetypal theory as many of the main characters exhibit common archetypes in literature. These symbols and characters are distinct when looking at *Into Thin Air* from an archetypal perspective in which they acquire more meaning on the reader and their personal experiences. Nonetheless, one cannot help but wonder how much it cost for this expedition and the risk of not making it back home. Despite the other three theories helps the reader gain insight on what they are reading, one can say that the archetypal theory allows one to gain the most insight on the text.