

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## TITLE INFORMATION

### LIVING HAPPILY EVER AFTER

*The Reward of the Monomythic Journey*

William Oldfield

AuthorHouse (268 pp.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

Oldfield applies the classic hero's journey to struggles of modern life in this self-help book.

The author examines the stages of the "Monomythic Journey," popularized by Sarah Lawrence College literature professor and bestselling author Joseph Campbell, as an adaptive strategy for dealing with life's challenges. He specifically draws on his own revelatory experience after a failed relationship; after initially placing blame for the breakup on external forces, Oldfield says that he gained insight into his own culpability through a radical change of perception—a phenomenon he likens to accounts of mystical or religious transformation. To understand his experience, Oldfield began to study the hero's journey as encoded in mythological stories, finding in its stages of separation, challenge, and return a psychological quest to confront ingrained assumptions and cope with unfamiliar situations. Oldfield takes readers through the steps of this quest, beginning with "The Magic Door," which he defines as a mental threshold crossed through introspection and guarded by negative forces that impede adaptation: "We become puppets yanked about by the strings of the invisible myths of our mind." Oldfield argues forcefully for the necessity of this journey in today's fast-changing world, equating destructive tendencies, such as climate-change denial, with "Mythlock"—a term he coins for the impulse to ignore information that disrupts comfortable assumptions. Oldfield is particularly perceptive in his analysis of the use of scapegoats as a product of "fight-or-flight" anxiety. He's decidedly less convincing, though, when he argues that the monomyth is a panacea for all ills: "Do you realize that, if everyone were aware of this fact of perception, suicide could become a thing of the past?" Such assertions ignore external factors that no mental realignment may alleviate. His arguments are sometimes unnecessarily belabored, and extensive quotations from Campbell's work are a reminder that the benefits of the hero's journey have been elaborated before. However, Oldfield excels in relating it to struggles of modern readers and in linking contemporary events—from Donald Trump's election denial to the Iranian government's morality police—to the pitfalls of the inward quest.

An uneven, albeit occasionally revelatory, analysis of a familiar trek.