

# **Heroes Who Learn to Love Their Monsters: How Fantasy Film Characters Can Inspire the Journey of Individuation for Gay and Lesbian Clients in Psychotherapy**

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## **Introduction**

In *The Lord of the Rings* film epic, the brave hobbit named Frodo Baggins, questing in partnership with his loyal companion, Samwise Gamgee, can only destroy the evil Ring if he develops empathy for the tortured and deformed creature called Gollum (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003). Meanwhile, in the original *Star Wars* trilogy, it is Luke Skywalker's reborn love for his true father underneath the black helmet that redeems Darth Vader (Lucas, 1977; Kershner, 1980; Marquand, 1983). And at the beginning of the film, *Aliens*, Lt. Ellen Ripley braces herself for an anticipated encounter with her vicious, reptilian extra-terrestrial nemesis, only to find instead a filthy, frantic, and traumatized human girl named Newt (Cameron, 1986). This evocative theme of the hero's compassion for the grotesque and wounded leading toward accomplishment of great goals closely parallels the heroic journey that ideally every client in a course of psychodynamic psychotherapy embarks on: initial frightful encounter with the material of the unconscious in "shadow" form, growing ability to understand and value the disturbing, numinous imagery of the psyche, and eventual progress toward the achievement of integrated psychological wholeness.

On the pages that follow, I would like to highlight the value of using heroic themes from fantasy and science fiction films when working in a gay-centered psychoanalytic way with adult gay and lesbian clients, whose valiant life journeys in the face of familial and societal homophobia and heterosexism deserve mirroring on the epic scale of such sagas as *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The ideas presented here are also potentially relevant, with some adjustments, for work with adults and adolescents of all different sexual orientations.

In the latter part of this essay, I will describe a course of weekly psychotherapy with a gay male client who has benefited from looking at fantasy film characters in a gay way, but first, I would like to set the stage by articulating my theoretical orientation, highlighting significant homosexual archetypes, clarifying my use of terms, and summarizing the path of development that many gay people in our culture experience from birth to adulthood. I will then describe how the heroic journeys of Ripley, Luke, and Frodo can be seen to parallel the life experiences and inner dramas of gay men and lesbians.

In a book about the use of superhero imagery and fantasy in psychotherapy, it may initially seem odd that I will be discussing such relatively "earthy" characters. Yet a consideration of the distinctive traits of these heroes and others like them, as I will describe further below, do match closely with the attributes of the typical superhero. Furthermore, I have intentionally chosen characters of nebulous overt sexuality who can reasonably be experienced as "gay" without too much "translating" by the viewer, in contrast with the many classic

superheroes such as Superman and Spider-Man who are explicitly portrayed as heterosexual, albeit often frustrated in love.

Danny Fingeroth (2005), a veteran writer and editor of superhero comic books, has identified these basic qualities of the superhero: “strength of character,” a “system of positive values,” “a determination to, no matter what, *protect* those values,” and the possession of “skills and abilities normal humans do not” (p. 17). He adds that, “one thing a superhero will usually *not* do, at least permanently, is die” (p. 18). Following this description, it can be seen that in his effort to destroy the Ring of the villain Sauron, Frodo displays all of these virtues and skills, including resilient goodness in the face of seductive evil, and the ability to become invisible when necessary. Additionally, he has an elfin cape that provides effective camouflage from enemies, a magic sword that warns of approaching trouble, and an enchanted light that shows the way in dark passages. Most importantly, Frodo’s main accomplishment is truly of superheroic stature: he saves an entire civilization from utter devastation. And at the end of his journey, he does not die, but sails off to a peaceful land of immortality. Likewise, Luke Skywalker successfully resists the temptation of great evil, while his many special abilities include razor-sharp reflexes, telekinesis, and telepathy. He also manages to save an entire galaxy from tyranny through his heroic actions. Meanwhile, Lt. Ripley valiantly battles a truly formidable alien by relying on her own immense courage, ingenuity, and stamina. It takes numerous death-defying encounters through the course of three films before she finally sacrifices her own life for the sake of humanity, only to be resurrected through cloning for yet another breathtaking adventure.

In my experience as a psychotherapist, I have found that many gay men and lesbians can recognize and find support for their own distinct life experiences in the adventures of these heroic characters and others like them. In order to provide context for how I work with these themes in the room with my clients, I will briefly describe my theoretical orientation below.

### **A Soulful, Archetypal Approach to Gay-Affirmative Psychotherapy**

My method of conducting psychotherapy with gay and lesbian clients—as well as my own personal journey as a gay man—has been most directly inspired by the gay-centered psychoanalytic theories proposed by psychologist Mitch Walker (1976, 1991, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1999). His groundbreaking work in elucidating homosexual archetypes and developing the practice of *gay-centered inner work* has sparked the creation of an integrative modality known as *contemporary Uranian psychoanalysis* that is currently in the process of refinement by a small community of psychotherapists in Los Angeles. This flexible discipline synthesizes insights from Freudian psychoanalysis, object relations, Jungian psychology, and gay-affirmative psychotherapy, among other approaches, in order to achieve the most effective and meaningful possible treatment for gay men and lesbians, with possible implications for clients of all different gender identities and sexual orientations. The term “Uranian” comes originally from “Aphrodite Urania,” the ancient Greek goddess who was described by the philosopher Plato (trans. 1994) in his *Symposium* as the champion of “celestial” same-sex love. In that same text, Plato suggested that, in contrast with heterosexual love’s biological progeny, same-sex romantic love leads to the birth of *immortal* “children,” by which he meant the creative achievements of poets, artists, and inventors (p. 53).

By asserting an essential salutary meaning and purpose for homosexual love, Plato inspired many of history’s most prominent gay visionaries, including the German lawyer and writer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (trans. 1994), who was the first modern person in Western civilization to come out publicly in 1867 and who wrote 12 unprecedented treatises on what he called “Uranian love.” Likewise, the turn-of-the-century English writer Edward Carpenter (1987) wrote of the distinctive “Uranian temperament” in asserting the validity of a homosexual

identity. Among other early proponents of same-sex romance, the American poet Walt Whitman wrote about the distinct “adhesive” love between comrades, and Harry Hay (1987), who co-founded the first gay rights organization in the United States in 1950, inspired the modern gay liberation movement by describing homosexuals as “a separate people whose time has come” (p. 279).

Walker (1976) has cultivated the germinal ideas of these homosexual pioneers by embracing a Jungian understanding of the vast unconscious psyche, which has made it possible for him to clarifyingly articulate the archetypal roots of homosexual love and modern gay identity. He has elucidated the archetype of the *double*, a same-sex “twin” complex in the psyche of all people, which has the equivalent valence as the *anima* in men or the *animus* in women, and which can be seen as providing the archetypal underpinning for ego identity as well as “brotherly” and “sisterly” love. Walker (1991) further explored how libido, understood in Jungian terms as a comprehensive life force energy, can constellate in a person as a distinct pattern of *homosexual libido*. Homosexual romantic desire, and the gay identity that develops around it, can be seen to arise when a person’s double complex is charged by homosexual libido, causing it to function in the psyche as what C.G. Jung (1966) termed the *soul-figure*, the internal personification of the ideal beloved who is projected out onto another person when falling in love, and who drives the journey of individuation through the internal and external drama of romance. This process can be greatly facilitated and deepened when this double soul-figure complex is apprehended consciously in one’s own inner world. In this understanding, homosexual love has a distinctive quality of *libidinal twinship mutuality* that functions in gay romantic relationships but also inside the mind, possibly of all individuals, as supporting a conscious “romantic” relationship between the ego and the unconscious psyche, leading toward what Jung (1966) called self-realization, or the experience of psychological wholeness.

By locating the roots of same-sex romantic love and modern gay personhood in the fecund depths of the unconscious, Walker has shown the significant place that homosexual archetypes can be seen to have in the pantheon of the psyche. This depthful understanding of gay identity differs in many “soulful” ways from the so-called “postmodern” trend in gay-affirmative psychotherapy, which has been in large part inspired by the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault (1987), who argued that modern gay identity is a linguistic “construction” of “discourse” driven by insidious power dynamics throughout society whose primary effect is to control individuals and limit their idiosyncratic self-expression. In this same vein, psychoanalysts Bertram Cohler and Robert Galatzer-Levy (2000) warn that psychotherapists must be careful not to impose a “master narrative” of a favorite ideal pattern of gay identity and/or lifespan development on their clients (p. 29). This postmodern perspective is intended to be supportive of the many variations of sexuality experienced by different individuals, including the possibility of gender and/or orientation “fluidity” either in the present moment or over the course of the lifespan. However, I would argue that it’s equally important that concepts of sexual fluidity not be turned into a new kind of master narrative that gets imposed on those individuals who *do* have the felt experience of a stable, abiding sexual orientation that serves as an integral, even central, part of their personal identity. As David Nimmons (2002) points out, this highly intellectual debate is by and large ignored by the millions of gay men and lesbians who happily and consistently self-identify as gay. For these individuals, as I hope to show below, developing an understanding of their sexual identity in archetypal terms can substantively support healthy ego development and the process of self-actualization. Along these lines, my use of words such as “gay,” “lesbian,” and “homosexual” are not meant as the constricting, categorizing “labels” that many postmodernists fear (Broido, 2000; Cohler & Galatzer-Levy, 2000), but rather as highly positive, self-determining ways of communicating and celebrating the conscious

achievement of a distinct, immensely valuable kind of individuality organized psychologically around the experience of romantic same-sex desire.

In this essay, I will describe the challenges of developing a healthy gay or lesbian identity in the contemporary world by employing the overarching term “heteronormativity” to describe the pervasive “presumption and assumption that all human experience is unquestionably and automatically heterosexual” (Yep, 2000, p. 168). This oppressive attitude can be seen as deeply embedded throughout all levels of individual, familial, and societal life. I also use the similar term “heterosexism” to describe the preference for heterosexuality that is both overtly and covertly expressed by individuals and institutions at the expense of all sexual minorities. In addition, the word “homophobia” is used here to describe the feelings of revulsion, fear, hatred and/or moralistic judgement that individuals may experience in relation to gay men and/or lesbians, as well as toward homosexual sex and gay romantic love.

### **The Gay Hero’s Journey: Process of Individuation**

Jung (1956) described the hero as one “who passes from joy to sorrow, from sorrow to joy, and, like the sun, now stands high at the zenith and now is plunged into darkest night, only to rise again in new splendour” (p. 171). This is an apt description for the lifespan development of gay men and lesbians, who in countless real-world examples display great personal resilience in the face of substantial obstacles, primarily in the form of villainous familial and societal homophobia and heterosexism. Although there are notable differences of experience between lesbians and gay men—as well as between homosexual white people and homosexual people-of-color—I have tried in the following paragraphs to offer a basic-enough description that could be relevant for all.

The archetypal view of homosexuality supported in this essay suggests an inborn pattern of meaning and libidinal intentionality that influences a gay or lesbian child’s development from the beginning of life, becoming gradually more prominent during the shift from the pre-oedipal (0-4 years) to the oedipal (4-6 years) stages of development (Isay, 1989; Sadownick, 2002; Walker, 1991).

In their earliest years, gay and lesbian children are just as dependent on the crucially formative relationship with their primary caregiver, usually the mother, as are other children. The mother’s ability to provide a warm, stable, mirroring, and authentically empathetic “holding” environment is critical for basic ego development and a healthy sense of self (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Miller, 1981; Winnicott, 1971). Due to the prevalence of narcissistic wounding in so many parents in our culture resulting from their own lack of childhood mirroring, this task virtually always has complications, resulting in narcissistic injury to the child (Miller, 1981; 1990). This delicate mirroring process can be seriously complicated in the case of the gay or lesbian child by the mother’s heteronormative stance, where the heterosexuality of her child is assumed. In the very moment where she thinks she is compassionately mirroring her child’s growing sense of self, body, and future as heterosexual, she is actually imposing her emotional and cultural view onto the child’s developing homosexual subjectivity. For example, a mother might say to her infant son or daughter, “Someday, you will get married and have children just like I did.” In this way, societal heterosexism is transmitted into the homosexual child’s developing psyche from the earliest years through the mother, and eventually through similar patterns with the father.

Many gay men and lesbians in psychotherapy report that they have “always” felt different from other children of the same gender, with distinct memories of being somehow “alien” beginning as early as age 3 or 4 (Blum & Pfitzing, 1997; Derby, 1994; Isay, 1989). Of course, most people have few memories of anything earlier than this age, so that sense of difference may

in fact be experienced and/or demonstrated substantially younger. A personal example is that I have a photo of myself from age 2 “doing drag,” my small feet in my mother’s much-larger high-heels and carrying her pocketbook on my arm. This socially unacceptable “gender atypical” behavior is common for gay and lesbian children. For example, most of my gay male clients in psychotherapy have reported to me that they were more emotionally sensitive and more creative than other boys, often wishing to avoid violent contact sports, and feeling very comfortable in friendships with girls during a period (latency) when other boys were still hateful toward them. Many lesbians report being “tomboys” as children, with their own gender atypical behaviors.

These qualities of “difference,” whether subtle or overt, provoke a variety of negative responses from parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and others in the gay or lesbian child’s life (Blum & Pftzing, 1997). Whether it is covert disapproval, outright rejection, or cruel abuse, those who cannot appreciate the unique qualities of homosexual children repeatedly traumatize them. Such hatred is introjected by the child into the sense of self, usually as an aspect of the internal parental imagoes. Emotionally, this internalized homophobia, combined with pre-oedipal narcissistic wounding, is experienced as what John Bradshaw (1988) has called “toxic shame,” the kind of pervasive self-loathing that burns all the way to the core of being, an “internal bleeding” of the psyche where “the self becomes an object of its own contempt” (p. 10).

An alternative childhood pattern that some gay male clients have described to me is that they felt different than other boys *inside*, but successfully “passed” on the outside by consciously suppressing their natural emotional and creative sensitivity for fear of familial and peer disapproval. In my clinical experience, this pattern often appears to have even more severe ramifications later in life, when the constant suppression of emotion has become automatic and entrenched.

As they reach the age of 4 or 5, gay children can be seen to enter into a predominant oedipal dynamic with their parents that is the reverse of what heterosexual children experience. In this understanding, gay boys fall in love with their fathers and develop a rivalry and identification with their mothers (Isay, 1989; Sadownick, 2002; Walker, 1997a), while lesbian girls fall in love in a newly oedipal sense with their mothers, generating a rivalry and identification with their fathers. The healthy resolution of the oedipal dynamic, which leads to the solidification of ego identity, requires that, in the case of gay boys, the father *gently* frustrate his son’s desire to consummate the relationship. This is much too difficult for most fathers in our homophobic culture to successfully navigate. They most often respond to their son’s advances with withdrawal, ridicule, shaming verbal attacks, and/or physical abuse. At the same time, mothers of gay boys, who unconsciously or consciously anticipate their son’s erotic interest in them, may reject the son who affectionally turns toward the father, or, as often happens, may emotionally dominate him and become over-protective of him, especially if the father is abandoning. An analogous scenario plays out for lesbian girls, with the unique dynamic that both their pre-oedipal and oedipal cathexis is with the mother, making successful “separation and individuation,” as Mahler, Pine and Bergman (1975) call it, have its own particular complications.

As gay and lesbian children enter their school years, they must continue to negotiate overt and/or covert homophobia at home while also frequently contending with ridicule, jeers, and/or violent assaults from their peers. At this stage, the child is often consciously aware of his or her difference from other children, but does not have sufficient language, understanding, or support to be able to develop a positive identity that honors it. Instead, he or she may begin to “connect this differentness with something forbidden, terrible, unthinkable” (Blum & Pftzing, 1997, p. 421).

The process of gay identity development, where the homosexual person transforms this negative experience of differentness into a positive sense of self, has been articulated by many theorists, including Cass (1979, 1984), Plummer (1975), and Troiden (1979). Walker (1997b) summarizes the Cass model with minor variations as comprising of the following identity stages: *sensitization, confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis*. These stages suggest a challenging path that takes the homosexual person from an initial state of sexual fantasy and/or exploration, through a difficult internal conflict between internal urges and societal expectations, to a gradual acceptance of self as homosexual and the integration of sexual orientation into a healthy, mature ego identity.

Thus, a gay or lesbian person's journey from infancy to adulthood is a series of painful erasures, traumatic obstacles, challenging initiations, and, hopefully, vital steps forward toward self-regard and a meaningful life as gay. Surely, the coalescing of a stable gay or lesbian identity is a substantial, even heroic, psychological achievement. However, it can be conceived as only the midpoint in the process of individuation as articulated by Jung (1966) of becoming psychologically differentiated and self-aware (also see Edinger, 1972). In synch with this Jungian view of adult development, Walker (1991, 1997b, 1999) has articulated a further stage of gay individuation, called *coming out inside*, where the gay person develops conscious relationship with his or her unconscious psyche. The first encounter with the psyche is usually in form of the *shadow complex*, understood in this context as the most shameful, violent, and infantile parts of the self remaining from childhood trauma, which are often personified in the psyche as a monstrously enraged infant and/or devastated, shameful young child. For the gay or lesbian person, who like virtually all others in our society, has developed an "exterior" *false self* (Winnicott, 1971), these "deformed," split-off parts of the infantile self actually have a *true self* quality to them, especially in that they are more emotionally authentic than the "as-if" false self personality. Through the Jungian technique of *active imagination* (Johnson, 1985), a gay or lesbian person can develop a conscious relationship with this wounded child-self of the psyche by enacting an ongoing imaginal dialogue or conversation with him or her. Eventually, a person can learn to defend this true self figure from the internalized feeling-laden images of the negative, attacking aspects of the parents, what in Jungian terms are known as the shadow-sides of the *mother complex* and the *father complex*. This process of developing introverted self-awareness and self-advocacy is particularly important for gay men and lesbians whose subjectivity was erased in childhood, and requires a paradoxical experience where, to develop authentic self-esteem, the individual must learn to love and care for the infantile true self in all of its most grotesquely crushed and malformed aspects.

As these basic complexes from childhood and their archetypal resonances get differentiated in the mind, a gay or lesbian person can begin to develop a conscious experience of an inner lover, the double soul-figure of the unconscious most often personified as an ideal romantic figure of the same sex. Walker describes this experience for gay men as "having a special, erotic, twin 'brother' who is felt to be the 'source of inspiration'" inside the psyche (Walker, 1991, p. 62). He is "a powerful helper, full of magic to aid in an individual's struggles," and he may appear "with an aura of beauty, youth and perfection or near-perfection" (Walker, 1976, p. 168), p. 168). Alternatively, in a variation known as the *youth-adult*, the double may appear in the guise of an older same-sex figure, where the ego identity "may gain loving guidance and stimulation to self-growth" (p. 172). Conscious partnership with this soul-figure can be seen to provide a firm ground for the full actualization of a gay or lesbian person's life potential, including the achievement of loving relationships and the development of an ever-deeper connection with the archetypal psyche, which can inspire new levels of personal creativity in all its myriad forms.

This brief and schematic summary of the process of gay individuation does not describe the many idiosyncrasies of development experienced by each individual, but hopefully provides a rough roadmap for psychotherapists working with gay men and lesbians. Some of these themes will be illustrated with examples from fantasy and science fiction films below.

### **Using Fantasy Films to Amplify Homosexual Archetypes and the Journey of Individuation**

In general, Hollywood blockbuster films are not known for their positive treatment of gay and lesbian characters. Yet, with an appreciation of archetypes such as the double, along with some capacity for symbolic thinking, many films from the fantasy and science fiction genres can be fruitfully experienced in a gay way. In many cases, the archetypal resonances are stronger in these heroically epic films than in “gay genre” films that feature explicitly gay characters, where the plot and visual dynamism is almost always limited in scope. The films discussed here also seem to me to be more relevant for gay and lesbian clients in psychotherapy than more obvious “superhero” films, which are often drenched in overt heterosexual references and portray a vigorously heteronormative world. For example, *Spider-Man* opens with a voice-over narration by Peter Parker, a.k.a. Spider-Man, saying, “This story, like any other story worth telling, is all about a girl...the girl next door” (Raimi, 2002). The entire film and its sequel, *Spider-Man 2* (Raimi, 2004), are dominated by the mundane modern-day vicissitudes of heterosexual courtship. Furthermore, the plotlines of most superhero films involve the protagonist saving the “good” everyday, modern world from the “bad” villains. Their heroism is mostly limited to destroying their enemies and supporting the status quo. Although the fantasy films I will discuss also highlight the differences between good and evil, there is an attempt by heroes like Ripley, Luke, and Frodo to achieve a more nuanced integration of the “shadow,” leading toward a substantial transformation of character, and often, of the entire society portrayed.

In previous essays (Kaufman, 2002, 2003, 2006), I have offered detailed arguments for how gay archetypal themes appear to be, regardless of the filmmakers’ stated intent, an inherent symbolic aspect of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the *Star Wars* saga. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the operative question is not if a film is *inherently* gay, but if it can be *appreciated* in a way that is mirroring and meaningful for gay men and lesbians. The films discussed below are some of the most relevant examples, but there are many other movies that can be enjoyed in a similar manner.

How can therapists effectively introduce mythic themes from films into their actual work with clients? Before taking this step, I believe that the therapist should first privilege a client’s own personal imagery, especially as it comes from dreams, memories, feelings, and creative efforts such as writing and/or drawing. But often there are situations in the therapy where a particular film character or image might provide an effective way to: 1) educate the client about the process of dynamic psychotherapy and psychological growth; 2) mirror the client’s life experiences; 3) validate the client’s encounter with his or her own unconscious material; and/or 4) inspire the client in seeking his or her full potential. This process works most easily if a client has already seen the film being referenced, but alternatively, where appropriate, the therapist can invite the client to watch a particular film at home if the clinician feels such a directive will not be too burdensome for the client in a way that might disrupt the therapeutic alliance.

I would suggest that effective psychoanalytic psychotherapy is an initiatory process in its own right, requiring the client to descend into his or her own unconscious underworld of painful trauma for successful treatment. In the midst of this process, it can be useful to offer accessible stories that both mirror the descent and show the future possibility for the clouds to break and the sun to shine again. As described below, the ordeals of Ripley, Luke, and Frodo are emblematic of this hero’s journey, with specific meaningful resonances for lesbians and gay men.

*The Alien Quadrilogy: The Struggle with the Terrible Mother*

Whether they are gay, straight, or bisexual, all clients in psychoanalytic psychotherapy must come to terms with their original relationships with both parents. Since in almost all cases, the child's first relationship is with the mother, working through this primary affiliation becomes central in any long-term therapy process. Sometimes this work can appear to have a sexist quality to it, as if the mother gets solely "blamed" for all wounds of the child (Miller, 1986). Along these lines, from an adult perspective, it is easy to see how the forces of contemporary capitalistic patriarchal society oppress women, undermining their ability to authentically nurture their children while also putting them into the role of primary enforcer of dominant cultural attitudes. However, in therapeutic work, the focus must be on recovering and reconstructing the *actual emotional experience* that the client had as a *child* in relation to his or her mother (Miller, 1981, 1990). And since young children have no cognizance of larger societal forces, their only awareness is how their mother is actually treating them. Of course, even this awareness is limited at the conscious level, as large parts of the emotional experience of mother, especially in its traumatizing aspects, are too painful to bear and become split off and pushed into the unconscious. The result is that the mother complex that develops in the psyche of young children—and especially in gay and lesbian children whose heteronormative mothers have overtly or covertly erased their budding sense of homosexual self—has a particularly demonic and toxic dark side. Jung (1956) described the archetypal underpinning for this negative aspect of the mother complex as the "Terrible Mother."

The four-film *Alien* series (Scott, 1980; Cameron, 1986; Fincher, 1992; Jeunet, 1997) offers an unprecedented visceral depiction of the Terrible Mother in the form of a massively strong, viciously reptilian, extra-terrestrial fiend with huge claws, multiple piercing sets of jaws, and steel-melting molecular acid for blood. The eggs she lays spawn spider-crab-like creatures that clamp onto the face of a human host, where they insert a small fetal version of the monster through the person's mouth into his or her torso that soon after births itself by ripping through the host's chest. It is the daunting task of Lt. Ellen Ripley, a tough young woman who is second-in-command on a far-range mining spaceship, to repeatedly encounter and fight off this relentless alien species. Throughout the four films there are minor references to Ripley having intimate relationships with men, but her overall image is one of fierce independence. What could be seen as her most overtly romantic relationship occurs with another woman, a young rebel named Annalee Call, in the fourth film, *Alien Resurrection*. Ripley's self-reliance, perseverance, and tremendous empathy for the defenseless make her an excellent role model for lesbians in the process of self-discovery. And with a little gender "translating," she is also a superb hero for gay men to appreciate.

It is Ripley's living nightmare in the second film, *Aliens*, that most strikingly illustrates primary themes of the individuation process for gay and lesbian clients in psychotherapy. Reluctantly returning to the alien planet where she barely survived her first terrifying encounter with the gruesome beast, Ripley is exploring a deserted colony when movement is detected by her military cohorts. The tension ratchets up as they all wonder, *is this to be our first encounter with the monster?* Instead, a disheveled and crazed human girl is spotted, and Ripley takes the lead to chase her through air ducts until she finally captures the girl. Ripley holds her tightly until her hysteria subsides and she relaxes in Ripley's arms. Through fits and starts, Ripley develops a bond with the girl, made mute from trauma, and manages to get her talking again. Ripley makes a promise to the girl, whose name is Newt, that she will not abandon her and will protect her from the destructive alien who has killed the girl's family and all the other people of her terraforming colony. Ripley and Newt form a secure youth-adult twin partnership of mutual

support that endures throughout their shared journey. Unfortunately, at the climax of the film, Newt is snatched away by one of the aliens and brought to the central nest of the queen beast, where she is primed to become a host for one of the monster's many larvae. Terrified but undaunted, Ripley valiantly rescues Newt from the egg-laying behemoth, and successfully battles her ferocious nemesis until finally victorious. It would be difficult to find a more apt metaphor for the epic challenge facing the gay or lesbian client in psychotherapy who must rescue his or her own abandoned child-self in the psyche and learn to ongoingly defend the true self from the grasping, dominating, attacking aspect of the mother complex.

In the third film of the series, Ripley discovers that she has an alien fetus inside of her, and this is what compels her to sacrifice herself by falling into a pit of molten ore. But as shown in the fourth film of the series, still-surviving samples of her blood are used for a cloning technique that results in a "reborn" Ripley as well as a new alien fetus that is surgically removed and quickly grows into a full-grown extra-terrestrial. Through this process, Ripley has actually taken on some of the qualities of the fiend, which then gives birth to a new half-human/half-alien hybrid. This complex imagery suggests that even the most monstrous parts of the psyche can eventually be integrated and possibly humanized. That process is incomplete at the end of *Alien Resurrection*, since the new hybrid is still too violent to be saved, but the fourth film does provide thematic imagery that can be seen as the development of lesbian love and identity out of that struggle. Through the course of that film, Ripley begins what can easily be appreciated as a lesbian romance with Call, a young principled female rebel posing as a thieving gangster who is determined to protect Earth from the dangerous aliens. It is eventually discovered that Call is an android, considered another kind of monster, and she is subjected to intense ridicule from other crew members, reminiscent of the jeers that gay and lesbian people have often suffered. Ripley defends her by saying, "No human being is that humane," referencing Call's devotion to her cause, and their affection for each other grows. Both Ripley in her clone existence and Call in her robotic construction are struggling to become "human," a process that serves as a mutual goal in their parallel journeys. The entire four-film series culminates in the two women standing together in the picture window of a spaceship, finally arriving at Mother Earth, which appears below them perhaps as a symbol of wholeness achieved through the process of differentiating out and then beginning to re-integrate both dark and light aspects of the archetypal feminine. Call asks, "What happens now?" and Ripley says, "I don't know, I'm a stranger here myself." The full flowering of individuated lesbian twinship love is unfamiliar territory, but now, finally, entirely possible.

#### *Star Wars: Finding the True Father through Abiding Same-Sex Partnerships*

With its uniquely intense visual and aural complexity and texture, the six-film *Star Wars* saga (Kershner, 1980; Lucas, 1977, 1999, 2002, 2005; Marquand, 1983) can be appreciated in the aggregate as a symbolic evocation of the grandeur of the numinous unconscious human psyche and its epic internal dramas. Revealed through this kaleidoscopic sound and imagery is a vibrant galaxy where the primary mode of human relationship appears to be intimate, enduring same-sex partnerships, ranging from the affectionate, lifelong bond of Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi to the loyal twinship of Queen Amidala and her bodyguard, Padmé, as shown in *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace*. In a previous essay (Kaufman, 2006), I have identified 28 same-sex "twin" partnerships throughout the six *Star Wars* films, all of which provide strongly evocative examples of the double archetype. As described above, the double serves as the love-inducing, individuation-inspiring soul-figure in the psyche of gay men and lesbians, and can be seen to have similar possible benefits when cultivated in the minds of all people.

Central to the epic, as featured in *Episodes IV-VI*, is the initiatory odyssey of young Luke Skywalker, whose arduous individuation process is primarily spurred by supportive, transformative same-sex partnerships with Obi-Wan Kenobi, Han Solo, and Yoda. Luke's only minor flirtation with the opposite sex is with Princess Leia, who eventually turns out to be his twin *sister*.

The story of Luke training to become a Jedi Knight provides a meaningful analogy for the identity development process that gay men and lesbians experience. He starts out as just a kid on the farm, but then discovers through his encounter with an older man, Obi-Wan "Ben" Kenobi, that he has an inborn potential to "learn the ways of the Force," and become a Jedi knight as his "true self" identity. The trouble is, by the time Luke is born, the eons-old Jedi Order has been outlawed and has collapsed. Much of his training must come through his own trials and challenges. Likewise, gay men and lesbians respond to an inner "Force" of libidinal desire that spurs them to come out and individuate as gay despite the prohibitions of their parents and society, and they do this largely on their own, with few or no positive role models. Hopefully, a gay person will eventually meet his or her version of Obi-Wan Kenobi, in the form of a friend, teacher, or psychotherapist who can help validate and nurture the individual's budding gay identity.

Although he doesn't realize it until he's already far along in his journey, Luke has embarked on a quest to find and redeem his "true" father. This mythic storyline can be deeply evocative for gay men in particular who yearn for father-love, but have been subtly or overtly rejected by their biological fathers. A gay man who has been shamed, abandoned and/or abused by the man who raised him will constellate a hateful internal "dark father," which is echoed in the name "Darth Vader," where "Vader" is the Dutch word for "father." In the process of psychotherapy, a gay man may be able to revisit the intensely passionate feelings and hurts from his own oedipal drama in order to differentiate out this Terrible Father and gain an internal experience of a positive archetypal paternal presence that is nurturing and loving of his gay identity.

Supported by his enduring partnerships with Obi-Wan and Yoda, but also moving beyond their training, Luke grows in his ability to sense the goodness buried deep in his imposing tyrannical adversary, Darth Vader. In the climactic moment of the entire saga, Luke valiantly tosses aside his lightsaber in a what can be seen as a homosexually creative moment of what I have termed "phallic receptivity" (Kaufman, 2006). By putting aside his aggression, and refusing to fight, Luke successfully awakens compassion in Darth Vader, who is finally revealed just before dying to be Luke's true father, Anakin Skywalker. If a gay man can in an analogous way become receptive to the archetypal imagery of his own unconscious psyche, he may discover his own true loving archetypal "father" inside. This theme is solidified at the end of the saga when Luke's soul-figures, Obi-Wan and Yoda, appear to him in their ghostly form, now joined by the ghost of his redeemed father, Anakin.

#### The Lord of the Rings: *Celebration of the Double*

Based on the original novel by J.R.R. Tolkien, Peter Jackson's popular trilogy of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King* (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003), has satisfied countless filmgoers of all genders and sexual orientations throughout the world, but it has particularly strong resonances for gay men, and with a little gender translating, can also be meaningful for lesbians. In the following section, I will describe an example of work with a client in weekly therapy that was in progress during the theatrical release of the last two of these films, but before doing that, I will introduce some of the primary homosexual archetypal themes that are so vividly portrayed in the trilogy.

*The Lord of the Rings* depicts the extended epic journey of individuation for a hobbit named Frodo. He is accompanied every step of the way by his steadfast partner, Sam. As I have described in a previous article (Kaufman, 2003), their pairing is perhaps one of the clearest examples of the double archetype to appear in modern literature and film. Although it is somewhat toned down in the film version, Sam is clearly devoted to Frodo, and repeatedly risks his life to save his comrade, even carrying him on his back for the final climactic hike up the side of Mount Doom. Furthermore, Sam and Frodo's primary pairing is evocatively echoed by myriad other same-sex partnerships. Frodo has transformative relationships with the would-be king, Aragorn, as well as the powerful wizard, Gandalf. There are also the everlasting same-sex pairs of hobbits Merry and Pippin, the dwarf Gimli and the elf Legolas, as well as, on the shadow side, Sauron and Saruman. In fact, of the nine original members of the Fellowship of the Ring, none are married or have children, and all spend their time in the close, intimate company of one another. In contrast with the countless Hollywood comedies, romantic dramas, and action pictures saturated with heterosexual imagery, it is a refreshing opportunity for gay men and lesbians to see a heroic three-film epic where virtually all of the primary relationships are abiding, intimate same-sex bonds. When approached symbolically, these relationships can help a gay person to imaginatively clarify his or her own internal same-sex soul-figure.

Frodo does not possess the musculature of a typical superhero, in fact as a hobbit he is only half the height of a grown man, but he has a superhuman ability to withstand the tempting influence of the evil Ring, and the unique insight to realize that he must befriend the grotesque creature named Gollum in order to find his way into the shadow realm of Mordor. Through breakthrough computer graphics, Gollum becomes fully alive on screen in a way that perhaps no fantasy creature ever has before. Almost 600 years old, Gollum actually appears as an overgrown, albeit emaciated, baby, virtually naked save for a tiny loincloth, full of raw, primitive emotion, simultaneously smashed and vital. This bizarre creature provides a ripe analogy for gay clients in psychotherapy who need to develop a relationship with their own devastated, inferior inner child. Just as Ripley bonds with the little girl named Newt in *Aliens*, so Frodo must make partnership with Gollum, who is an even more visceral image of the crushed infant-self in the psyche. As Gollum has spent half a millennium hiding away in a dark cave, he serves as a powerful personification of the most painful childhood feelings of hurt-rage, toxic shame, and seething envy that were split off from the conscious personality in earliest childhood and sequestered in the dark corners of the unconscious. As will be seen in the case presentation below, Gollum provides a possible starting point for inner understanding for many gay men and lesbians whose internalized homophobia and self-hatred prevents them from initially identifying with a heroic character such as Frodo. *The Lord of the Rings* offers much additional imagery for gay people, some of which will be highlighted in the following discussion.

### **Case Presentation: A Gay Man Finds Mirroring in *The Lord of the Rings***

When Derrick first came to my office in the summer of 2002, he presented as friendly, intellectually curious, and moderately depressed. A handsome, 28-year-old, gay white man who was working as a paralegal, he had moved to Los Angeles from a midwestern state about five years before. Derrick was finding it difficult to make friends, and tended to lose himself in long hours at work. He infrequently dated other men, but had not yet made a satisfying, sustainable connection with anyone. (This discussion preserves the progression of an actual course of therapy, but has been composited from several different cases in order to protect the anonymity of individual clients.)

Derrick admitted to feeling painfully empty inside, but otherwise had difficulty sensing or describing his own feelings. Instead, he would at certain moments describe feeling "shut-

down” emotionally, losing his ability to feel or think. This occurred especially when we began to talk about early childhood or when I asked him about his feelings toward me. In addition, Derrick was often nervous and fearful in a variety of different settings. Initially, he met the criteria for both Dysthymic Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. He did not meet the full criteria for a personality disorder, but he clearly had narcissistic injuries that manifested predominantly in a depressive (rather than grandiose) pattern, and there were some borderline-level traits that might be called “holes” in his ego structure.

My initial treatment plan was focused on helping Derrick stabilize and increase his basic self-esteem so that he could set healthier limits on his work patterns and develop more satisfying friendships. My primary goal was to help Derrick become more interiorly focused and develop empathy for his own emotional experience. This would be achieved by: 1) mirroring and validating Derrick’s feelings; 2) highlighting the presence, as relevant, of unconscious feelings of toxic shame, hurt-rage, fear, and grief; 3) eliciting memories of early childhood in the relationship with his parents; 4) educating him about different basic complexes in the psyche; 5) describing the effect of internalized homophobia in his psyche; 6) identifying his defense mechanisms and feelings as they appeared in the transference relationship; and 7) educating him about an archetypal way of appreciating his gay identity.

### *First Phase of Derrick’s Treatment*

In our early sessions, Derrick gave me some details about his childhood relationship with his parents. As long as he could remember, his father had been overtly shaming of any behaviors in Derrick that were not distinctly masculine. He never consciously felt close with his father, who became more and more distant as Derrick grew up. In more recent years his father had become visibly depressed and even more difficult to communicate with. Derrick did not have much trouble admitting disappointment and anger toward his father, but the situation with his mother was much more complicated. She had not been overtly derogatory toward Derrick’s gender atypical behavior, but she clearly held the heteronormative stance of her culturally conservative upbringing in the deep South. Even though Derrick had come out to both parents when he was in college, there was no longer open discussion of it when he visited them. He was able to talk with his mother about it a little, but as far as he could tell, she never discussed it with his father, suggesting that she carried substantial shame about her son’s homosexuality. He described his mother as emotionally “guarded,” even “cold” in her demeanor, but more details of their dynamic were quite mysterious, because he had difficulty remembering what it really felt like to be with her as a child. Often when I would probe his memories or feelings about her he would shut-down emotionally. My sense was that Derrick harbored substantial hurt-rage toward his mother, but became so overwhelmed with toxic shame around the taboo emotion that he had to dissociate from both feelings. I educated Derrick about the concept of toxic shame as an intense emotion that overwhelmed his ability to experience other feelings. I suggested that it had first developed in him due to a lack of basic positive mirroring by his mother, intensified by the homophobia he had internalized from both parents. These concepts resonated strongly with him, and he soon was able to name his frequent experience of this most corrosive emotion without prompting. Getting to the hurt-rage underneath was, however, still a big challenge.

Our sessions would often seem to get stuck when Derrick started to talk about his mother, and my various efforts to help him descend into deeper feelings were minimally effective. Likewise, my attempts to invite him to talk about any transference feelings in our relationship resulted in reports of feeling numb. I suggested to Derrick that this experience of emotional paralysis was probably how he responded to his mother when he was younger, but that underneath this defense was a probably very hurt little boy full of painful feelings that she could

not tolerate. Derrick appreciated the image but had difficulty achieving a felt experience of such an “inner person.”

At this point in our work, Derrick came in one late December day quite excited about a movie he had just seen, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Jackson, 2002). He was bowled over by the dynamic visual intensity of the film, and in particular was impressed by the fantastical creature named Gollum.

I suggested to Derrick that perhaps Gollum was an image of his own wounded kid-self in the psyche, and his feelings for Gollum in the film were really the beginning of empathy for that part of himself. This was initially surprising to Derrick, but it began to make more sense to him as we explored the idea. I further described to Derrick how he might find a role model in the character of Frodo, and that he might continue to develop a relationship with this part of himself just as Frodo did with Gollum. I also explained to Derrick that Frodo’s partnership with his loyal friend, Sam, could be seen as a gay romance, and that Frodo’s ability to feel compassion for Gollum was perhaps born out of the steady support and fellowship he received from Sam. Derrick told me he thought that Sam was a “hottie,” and I suggested in response that Sam might represent a kind of internal same-sex “muse” that spurred Derrick’s psychological growth.

In the sessions that followed, Derrick would often be describing his feelings or behavior in various situations, and then he would say, “That’s Gollum!” The theme of heroic Frodo feeling compassion for monstrous Gollum gave Derrick concrete imagery that he had not yet been able to access in his own unconscious. With the help of these symbolic themes, Derrick was beginning to differentiate out an authentic image of the devastated self found in the shadow-side of his psyche. It wasn’t pretty, but it had a tangible, real resonance for him. Simultaneously, he found pleasure in the idea of seeing Frodo and Sam as a couple. His understanding here was still largely extroverted, experienced consciously as a longing for an “actual Sam” in his life, but it felt like a seed had been planted, and that eventually Derrick might find his own double soul-figure inside the psyche along with the possibility of romance with another gay man.

### *Second Phase of Derrick’s Treatment*

Over the course of a year, Derrick ventured more frequently into the gay community, surprising himself by successfully developing new friendships and an active social life. On an interior level, Derrick was becoming quite sophisticated psychologically in terms of understanding early childhood dynamics, and talking with his new friends about psychological concepts, especially learning how to name and work with “toxic shame.” The direct references to Gollum, Frodo, and Sam subsided, but he did appear to have more empathy for his own internal experience. He seemed to have benefited from our work and was engaged in our sessions.

At about this time, Derrick started meeting other men for casual sex “hook-ups” through the internet. This was almost an “adolescent” time for Derrick, and perhaps in part a natural outgrowth of his feeling more accepting of his body and himself as a sexually desirable man. He consistently reported maintaining “safer sex” practices, yet these liaisons sometimes involved the use of “crystal” (methamphetamine). A pattern developed where approximately once a month, he would get together with other men for sex and “partying,” embarking on crystal binges that would last as long as three days. Afterwards, he would “crash” painfully, feeling depressed, swearing to never do it again. But a month would go by and he could not resist.

Derrick and I talked directly about the stresses that the crystal use was having on his body and mind, focusing on the highly addictive nature of the drug. There were also regular check-ins about safer sex practices. What had been subtly present all along in the transference now became obvious, where Derrick became the rebellious child and I felt forced into the position of scolding

parent. He began to oscillate between feeling angry with me and shutting down, as he had so often in the first year of our work together.

At this point, I realized that in my recent efforts to help Derrick my own anxiety had been rising during our sessions without my full awareness. Toxic shame about my abilities as a therapist had been provoked by Derrick's acting out behavior, and I could feel unresolved infantile hurt-rage bubbling underneath my anxiety. Secretly, I had an inner voice that was yelling at Derrick, "How dare you have a setback and disprove my ability as a good therapist!" As Winnicott (1947) has pointed out, the psychotherapist must be conscious of his or her "hate" for the client or else it gets acted out in the relationship. I began to appreciate that, through the phenomenon of projective identification (Klein, 1975; Cashdan, 1988), the client and I were re-enacting aspects of his original childhood dynamic with his mother. I described for Derrick how I felt this was now happening between us, acknowledging how my own anxiety and hurt-rage may have been contributing to the re-emergence of his shutting-down pattern, and even possibly his acting out around anonymous sex and crystal use. Derrick found my admission very helpful, though also scary, since it represented an increase in our intimacy and an admission of my fallibility.

By exploring our recent interactions with each other, Derrick and I were able to achieve a deeper understanding of what happened between him and his mother in his earliest years. Underneath her "guardedness," she was actually quite angry and anxious, just as I had been in our recent sessions. The client began to remember that she could actually be extremely mean sometimes, abruptly scolding him and his younger siblings. The client internalized her anxiety and hate, but had to split this off from his conscious self in order to get the indulgences of the "good mommy." Now, in adulthood, it felt as if the internal "bad mommy" had resurfaced and taken over, most directly experienced as toxic shame. He resorted to anonymous sex and crystal as a substitute for the "good mommy."

As Derrick's insight around his childhood experiences grew, and as my ability to maintain awareness of my own feelings during the sessions increased, our rapport became newly secure, and his ability to stay engaged in the sessions improved.

### *Third Phase of Derrick's Treatment*

Derrick's crystal use decreased but did not stop altogether. At this point, with my countertransference more "partnered" and Derrick's self-awareness growing, we were able together to explore more deeply the allure of the recreational sex and drug use. It wasn't only about a repetition compulsion seeking the soothing of the "good mommy," though that was a crucial aspect of it. There was also something deeply masculine about Derrick's sexual experiences, and he began to describe for me his phallic enthrallment with other gay men and the beauty of the male body.

Derrick and I began to discuss different ways that he could more healthfully celebrate his gay sexuality. I educated him more directly at this point about an archetypal, symbolic way of appreciating this burgeoning force within him. Together we were searching for satisfying images that would be substantial enough to encapsulate Derrick's rising homosexual desire.

This exploration led to new conversations about themes we had discussed previously in *The Lord of the Rings*. Together, we revisited Frodo's heroic quest as it had been portrayed since our earlier conversations in the third installment of the *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy, *The Return of the King* (Jackson, 2003). We discussed Frodo's journey as a metaphor for Derrick's initiation into his full adult gay identity, intensified in recent years through the process of his work in psychotherapy. By tracking Frodo's continued descent into the shadow realm of Mordor and related aspects of the epic, Derrick found more meaningful parallels with his own life story.

For example, the giant spider called Shelob that pierces Frodo and paralyzes him was an ideal metaphor for how Derrick's mother would "pierce" Derrick with her anger and render him numb. Similarly, Derrick could see in the despairing character of Denethor, steward of Gondor, a powerful metaphor for his relationship with his own deeply hopeless father. In a state of utter despair, Denethor attempts to die by throwing himself and his son, Faramir, on a burning pyre. In a similar way, Derrick felt his father's depression as drawing him into a deathly fire. The image further echoed how Derrick felt that he was being burned alive by his father's homophobia.

Derrick found the most positive and satisfying mirroring around his homosexual libido in the culminating scenes of the film trilogy. While massive battles are fought with stirring dynamism, Frodo's ardent partner, Sam, carries him up into the very core of the shadow-realm, the grand inner chamber of red-hot erupting Mt. Doom. Through a difficult struggle between Frodo, Sam, and Gollum, the evil Ring is finally destroyed. At this moment, the skyscraping tower of the villain Sauron shatters like glass, and the militant hordes suddenly disperse as the earth itself opens up and the massive Black Gate of Mordor collapses into the chasm. Now Mt. Doom with great orgasmic explosiveness releases the full force of its massive primordial molten rock into the air. Utterly surrounded by rivers of lava, Frodo and Sam ponder their ultimate death, only to be swooped up and saved by giant eagles under the command of the white wizard Gandalf in what can be appreciated as a potent reference to Zeus' homosexual abduction of Ganymede. Now the clouds really do lift and the sun shines again, in this instance on the coronation of Aragorn as the rightful beneficent King. As a huge crowd on top of the seven-tiered round white city of Minas Tirith celebrate his ascension, Aragorn strides over to greet the four heroic hobbits, Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin. When they begin to bow down to him, he says emphatically, "My friends, you bow to no one," then he himself and everyone in the great throng bow down to the stouthearted nature of these four loyal comrades, a pair of two steadfast twinship pairs, the archetype of the double displayed doubly and celebrated in a heroic way perhaps never before seen on film. In these final moments of the epic, countless visual, musical, and thematic elements evoking homosexual twinship and the bursting energy of masculine phallic libido combine together in an inspiring, inspiriting, intoxicating climax.

Through this vibrant imagery, Derrick had found a memorable symbolic experience that deeply mirrored his love for other men and gave him a soul-level jolt of imaginative pleasure. I encouraged him to explore these same themes of libidinal twinship mutuality and homosexual eros in other films, focusing him on the visual imagination of the *Star Wars* saga, the *Alien* films, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (Spielberg, 1982), *The Dark Crystal* (Henson & Oz, 1982), and *The NeverEnding Story* (Peterson, 1984), among others.

As this essay is being written, Derrick has not used crystal in several months, and is feeling more stable than ever before. He is enjoying more intimate friendships, and is learning healthier ways to self-soothe and nurture himself. Furthermore, Derrick has a deeper experience of his own identity as homosexual. He has developed an interest in understanding the living psyche, especially as he is able to experience it through imaginative films and the heroic characters he identifies with in the process of viewing them. In this sense, he has taken on the role of Frodo in his own epic journey of gay individuation, his identity and sense of gay soul substantively strengthened. Derrick's struggle to develop an authentic and secure sense of self is by no means finished, as his wrestling with toxic shame has not ended and he still finds it difficult to fully express the depth of his own feelings. But overall, his satisfaction in life has grown substantially.

### **Conclusion: The Heroic Potential of Gay and Lesbian Clients**

In this essay, I have offered a description of the treacherous path that each gay or lesbian person must negotiate in a heteronormative world in order to honor the call of his or her homosexual libido and come out as gay despite the disapproval of parents, peers, and the larger society. From a broad evolutionary perspective, this honorable development of authentic gay personhood, even with the unavoidably deep scars from childhood trauma, is a huge historic achievement, comparable in its own way to the grandly heroic deeds of fantasy film characters like Lt. Ellen Ripley, Luke Skywalker, and Frodo Baggins. Psychotherapists who practice in a gay-affirmative way are uniquely positioned to support and nurture this accomplishment in their gay and lesbian clients by offering them honest mirroring at the most gruesome, terrifying depths of the unconscious as well as at the most satisfyingly meaningful heights of erotically alive, dynamically individuated self-acceptance and self-awareness.

For those who resonate with the themes, it is possible to integrate heroic film imagery into a course of psychoanalytically oriented gay-affirmative psychotherapy while also staying focused on the primary work of uncovering, validating, and working through the client's early childhood trauma. Eventually, many gay and lesbian clients can learn to take a heroic stance in their own mind to cultivate their individual subjectivity, and to neutralize the messages of hate and shame internalized from family, culture, religion, and government. Through these vitalizing practices, gay men and lesbians can model an urgently needed kind of internally centered, autonomously creative individuality that can be potentially inspiring for all people.

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