



UNIWERSYTET MARII CURIE-SKŁODOWSKIEJ
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**“Be Like Mike:” Constructing the Myth of
Michael Jordan in American Popular
Culture of the Late 20th Century**

„Być jak Mike”: mit Michaela Jordana w
amerykańskiej kulturze popularnej końca
dwudziestego wieku

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Dissertation abstract

Keywords: myth, monomyth, hero, American culture, popular culture, sports in culture, Michael Jordan, basketball, NBA, corporate America, the media

This thesis is devoted to the figure of Michael Jordan as a hero of a modern-day, American myth, referred in this paper as “the Jordan myth.” The aim of this study was to determine how the Jordan myth came into being; what the Jordan myth can reveal about the culture which created the myth; and whether, or to what extent, the Jordan myth represents the “monomyth” as proposed by Joseph Campbell, and how much of the “American monomyth” postulated by Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence can be found in the Jordan myth. On the one hand, Campbell’s monomyth is a more universal story of a hero’s journey to self-realization; on the other hand, the American monomyth is a unique to American culture, story of an event, in which a selfless hero protects a community from evil. The Jordan myth seems to be, either in a space between, or combining the elements of the two variations of the “monomyth.”

This dissertation is divided into five chapters preceded by Preface. Chapter I, The Myth in America, covers the overview of studies on myth, monomyth, American monomyth, and Michael Jordan himself, in a form of the literature review. In this chapter, I attempt to demonstrate why it is possible to look at Michael Jordan as a protagonist of a hero myth, and discuss the key terms and concepts, on which the study relies. I also present the aim of the study and the methodology applied in the research. Chapter II, A Path of The Warrior (1982-1991): The Jordan Myth Takes Shape, is devoted to the analysis of the narratives which constructed the Jordan myth in its first phase. It covers the development of the Jordan myth from the beginning of Jordan’s basketball career to the point of him winning his first NBA championship. The third chapter, The King’s Reign (1991-1998): The Jordan Myth Expands, covers the period of Jordan’s basketball and cultural dominance. The analysis focuses on the second phase of the development of the Jordan myth, during which the myth in question was which expanded and cemented. In Chapter IV, The Never-ending Myth, I discuss the chapter of the Jordan’s basketball biography, which is routinely omitted in the myth, and which, I claim, is an integral part of the hero’s journey. This section features two subchapters: Basketball’s “Beowulf” Puts on an Armor One Last Time (1998 – 2003), which covers Jordan’s second and final return to the NBA as an active player and a living legend; and a review of post-1998 reiterations of the never-ending myth of, as the plaque on the statue *The Spirit* would have it, “The Best There Ever Was. The Best There Ever Will Be.” In the final

Chapter, The Four Functions of the Jordan Myth, I look into the meaning(s) found in the Jordan myth according to, proposed by Campbell, four functions of myth: cosmological, sociological, metaphysical, and the pedagogical one (*The Masks of God* 609-624). This dissertation ends with Conclusions and Final Remarks, in which I summarize the findings of the study and share my reflections on the role of modern-day sports myths in contemporary culture.