

## Analysis of Hero's Journey in Jack London's "The Call of The Wild"

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### ABSTRACT

*This research has the purpose to identify the stages of hero's journey in Jack London's novel entitled "The Call of the Wild", experienced by the main character as the hero. "The Call of the Wild" is a novel that has heroic aspect as the story develops. This novel talks about adventure of a dog that went from a domesticated life into a wild beast. The dog went through sequence of event which then led him to a noble ending. Hero's journey is a sequence of heroism where experience have distinct characteristic, in which Campbell (2008) mentioned that the pattern is prominent in heroic fiction referred as monomyth. This research applied the design of descriptive qualitative in order to explore detail process of the analysis. The used method to collect data is by using the method of library research by Ratna (2004), and the data analysis used the method of descriptive analysis by Ratna (2004). The result of the research has showed that Buck, the main character of the novel has gone through three stages of hero's journey with the eight steps of it, they are four steps out of five in departure stage, three steps out of six in initiation stage, and one step out of six in return stage. This leads to the conclusion of hero's journey is often following the same pattern as theorized and mentioned in the theory of Joseph Campbell.*

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### 1. Introduction

Hero is a typical theme in a literary work especially regarding the main character. Typically, in a story with the genre of adventure, the main character goes through a sequence that will then define him as a hero. This can be viewed as heroism. Heroism is a heroic act that establish an action in order to find higher purpose or achieve a noble ending. This hero act in literary works often can be analyzed with the myth approach of hero's journey. According to Lawson (2005), hero's journey is a conceptual metaphor serving the purpose of understanding and accessing individual growth.

Hero's journey was unveiled by an American professor, Joseph Campbell with his book with the title "The Hero with a Thousand Faces". His theory, which is hero's journey, typically found in literary works and mostly occupied by archetypal character which has the universal human qualities (Ascough, 2018). Hero's journey itself is a sequence of heroism where experience have distinct characteristic. Campbell (2008) mentioned that the reoccurring patterns is very much prominent in heroic fiction as he referred this as monomyth. This monomyth has structured cycle where it reoccurs in the old stories and new one.

Hero's journey can be seen in adventure literary works. In this research, the novel written by Jack London with the title "The Call of The Wild" became interest to be analyzed as it shows pattern of the hero. "The Call of the Wild" is a novel that has heroic aspect as the story develops. This novel talks about adventure of a dog that went from a domesticated life into a wild beast. The dog went through sequence of event which then led him to a noble ending. This led to the researcher interest in conducting research on hero's journey in the novel.

Published in 1903, the novel of "The Call of the Wild" is an adventure novel, and it was set in Yukon, Canada, when the demand of strong dogs for sled was high (Wikipedia, 2022). The main character is Buck, a dog who was stolen and being sold in Alaska, forced to become a sled dog. In the rough environment, Buck became wilder and more primitive, he was forced to overpower other dogs in order to survive. In the end, he relied on his experiences and primordial instinct to become the leader in the wild.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Hero's Journey

The theory focused on how a hero went through adventure from the ordinary life into a noble life. The hero came back from adventurous sequence with a power to aid his fellow man. (Campbell, 2008) divided hero's journey into three stages and seventeen steps. Hero's journey is a self-discovery while fully live the conscious life. Hero's journey is a metaphor of transformation in the deep inner journey, which in each place and time shared the path that may lead through great movements of separation, initiation, and return.

The journey of a hero is divided into three main stages, they are departure, initiation, and return. Each of those main stages of journey consists of the steps also. Departure is where the hero leaves his ordinary life and begin his journey willingly or unwillingly. Departure stage consists of five steps: **1) The call to Adventure:** The situation which forced the hero to start the journey. This is what makes the main character separated from the society or the lush life they have. Campbell (2008) mentioned that the adventure can start by accident or mistake; **2) The Refusal of the Call:** This stage begins when the hero feels afraid and doubtful to start the journey. This refusal also forces the hero to think and decide what is the supposed next action. The refusal of the call might appear as the hero faces many obstacles. **3) Supernatural Aid:** A stage where hero is given or met someone that could help them in the journey, aiding him to start the journey. This can also let the main character achieve his supernatural wonder. **4) The Crossing of the First Threshold:** The first step where the hero starts his journey is a phase of the crossing of the first threshold. In this phase the hero encountered possibility of changing his qualities and reaction towards the adventure. This phase will also make the hero adapts to the new place. **5) The Belly of the Whale:** This is the stage of last separation from the original world to the venture. the hero is afraid of the journey due to many challenges they will encounter.

Next stage is Initiation. This stage is where the hero will face the tribulations and trials until reaching to achieve the victory for the quest. This stage consists of six steps: **1) The Road of Trial:** In this phase the hero will go through list of tests after the separation. This list of tests will then transform the hero from ordinary being too much more noble being. Though failure is inevitable, the hero must continue with the journey. **2) Meeting with Goddess:** This is a phase where the hero encountered a helpful woman who has the same goal and mission of the hero. This can also symbolize the hero meeting love of his life. **3) Woman as Temptress:** The hero meets bad female character that ruins his mission. This is often symbolized with woman as temptress but sometimes it is not always in woman's figure. This figure can cause the hero to be unmotivated in overcoming his struggles. **4) Atonement with the father:** The hero met a good man or be wise spiritually. This father figures has the ability to provide support and strength to the hero. Often times, the father figure has power above the hero so the hero might need to overcome him in order to pass this stage. **5) Apotheosis:** Apotheosis is a stage where hero has some peace before continue further to the journey. In this phase, the hero also might get enlightenment to help his journey. **6) The Ultimate Boon:** The ultimate boon is a stage where hero has reached the end of his struggles. Following the hardship, this is the gift after much sacrifices the hero has gone through.

The last stage is return. This stage starts when the hero has passed the trials from the journey's quest and achieved the victory, which the only left is to go back home with success and gifts. There are six steps in this stage: **1) Refusal of Return:** After the fight with struggles and reaching the end of the mission, the hero sometimes refuses to go back to where he originally belongs. The hero might consider going back in the future time. When the hero does not want to return. **2) The Magic Flight:** The magic flight is a stage where the hero returns miraculously to where he started or to somewhere else. **3) Rescue from Without:** In this stage the hero got a reminder from a friend to return back to where he belongs. The hero might grow attachment to where he belongs and have not yet thought of going back. Hence why someone is reminding him to return. **4) The Crossing of the Return Threshold:** In this phase, the hero is ready to return after the struggle to go back. The journey back home might have some struggles. By the experience he has attained, the hero will utilize it to finish the mission of going back. **5) Master of the Two Worlds:** When a hero has attained his higher self, he will then be comfortable enough to live in two of the worlds –ordinary and hero world. **6) Freedom to Live:** In some cases, the hero does not have to return nor to approach another mission. The hero will attain his own freedom and choose what they want to be with the experience and abilities he obtained.

### 2.2 Previous Research

The researcher found two previous researches to be compared with current research. First, Nurdiana and Evyanto (2019) examined the stages of hero's journey in Lewis Carroll's novel with the title "Alice's Adventure in Wonderland", which is experienced by the main character, Alice. The research applied the hero's journey theorized by

Joseph Campbell, only focused on two stages, they are the stages of separation and return. The studies found out that the main character went through three steps out of five in separation stage, and one step out of six in return stage.

Next, Bahari (2020) had analyzed the contribution of archetypes and stages of hero's journey revealed by the main character Emil Sinclair in "Demian" written by Herman Hesse. In this research, the researcher used the theory by Joseph Campbell. The researcher concluded that there are five archetypes that contributed in the journey of the main character, and he had gone through three stages, consists of twelve phases of hero's journey.

Two previous research above has the difference and similarity with current research. The difference between previous studies and current research is each of the research had different choice of data source to be analyzed, which the current research had Jack London's novel entitled "The Call of the Wild" as the data source. Meanwhile, the similarity laid on the use of the theory to be collected and analyzed data of the data source, which is using the theory by Campbell (2008) of Hero's journey that consists of three stages and seventeen stages.

### **3. Methodology**

Descriptive qualitative research is the design of this research, which focused to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or organizations assign to a human or social issue (Creswell, 2014; Rahman, 2022). The research process includes developing questions and methods, collecting data based on the participants' settings, analysing data from the themes, and providing interpretations of the data's meaning.

This research applied archetypal approach by using Campbell's (2008) theory of hero's journey that is divided into three chapters and each of its stages. The research data is collected by using the method of library research by Ratna (2004). The researcher took the novel of "The Call of The Wild" by Jack London as the primary source and the secondary data source is from articles and related literatures. The research data, the selected sentences from the novel is ticked according to the theory of hero's journey by Campbell.

The data collected is analysed by using descriptive analysis theorized by Ratna (2004), which is a method of describing the facts presented in the data source then proceeding with the analysis, finally the analysis is explained properly. In this research, there are with few steps of analysing the data. First, the researcher analysed the intrinsic elements, which consist of plot, characters, setting, theme, and point of view. To analyse the main analysis, the researcher identified and classified the selected sentences. Next, data is analysed by applying the theory by Campbell (2008) to determine the stages with its steps of hero's journey. Finally, the analysis result presented the stages of hero's journey reflected in "The Call of The Wild" novel by Jack London.

### **4. Result**

#### **4.1 Preliminary Analysis**

Preliminary analysis is an analysis regarding the elements of fictions in literary works. In this research the preliminary analysis will discuss about the elements of fiction in the novel. This includes the plot, characters, setting, theme, and point of view of the novel.

##### **a. Plot**

Plot is a sequence of events that will make up the whole story and relate to the actions. A plot typically has exposition, rising actions, climax, falling action, and denouement. Exposition is where the story starts with the introduction of characters and settings. In the story *The Call of The Wild*, the story starts with the introduction of the main character, Buck. Buck is a big dog from a St. Bernard and sheepdog crossbreed. Buck lives in California, Santa Clara Valley on Judge Miller's estate. He established a pleasant life during the time but then he was kidnapped by Judge Miller's gardener and was sold to the dog traders. Here is when the first conflict starts. Buck then became one of the sled dogs in his pack. Rising action contains conflicts that happens that lead to the climax. In *The Call of The Wild*. The plot arises when he had to battle with the alpha in the dogsled pack. After becoming the leader of the pack, Buck led the sled team to a delivery record time. Buck's pack later was sold to unexperienced team and causes them to encounter a major struggle causing many casualties. Climax is the intense events that happened in the story. In the novel *The Call of The Wild* the climax is when Buck was saved from cruelty of his new unexperienced owner by John Thornton. After he was saved, the pack that Buck previously led went down through the thin ice together with the unexperienced expedition team. Falling action is the next sequence following the climax. After Buck was saved by Thornton, he devoted himself to serve Thornton as master. Buck saved his new master, Thornton from difficulties he encountered. They both then went to venture looking for the lost mine in the deep Canadian Forest. One day, Buck found his master has died by the attack

of Indians. Buck sought revenge for it. Denouement is the end of the plot where everything comes together. After all Buck has gone through and his growing attachment to the wilderness, Buck decided to leave the civilized world and live his life in the wild as the beast he is. Making himself a legend Ghost Dog.

## b. Characters

Character is a person, animal, or any animate things that is introduced to make up the story. Often times the character can be divided into two categories, major and minor character. This is based on their involvements in the story. **1) Buck:** a crossbred dog from St. Bernard and sheepdog. He was once a tame dog which then evolves into a wild beast. Although Buck is now a wild animal, he still has his own principle and wise. Buck is attracted to the wilderness as his wild instinct calls for it. **2) John Thornton:** an experienced gold hunter of Klondike. Thornton is wise and developed good connection with Buck after he saved Buck from a cruel master. **3) Spitz:** a former pack leader before Buck defeats him. He is evil and like to pick fights. Spitz often fight to win by any all means. He became rival after Buck shows a leader potential in the pack. **4) Francois:** a French-Canadian mail man who bought Buck for his sled pack. Francois has had experience in the North and thought Buck is a good dog for the job. **5) Perrault:** Francois partner. He is wise and treat dogs with respect. They are both skilled sleds men. **6) Hal:** An American gold seeker. Hal came in search for adventure and wealth. As inexperienced he is, he bought buck and his team. His inexperience causes many losses. **7) Mercedes:** Hal's sister and wife of Charles. She is spoiled and very much unreasonable. Though she is with the inexperienced team, she shows sympathy to the already tired sled team. **8) Charles:** Mercedes' husband. He is foolish and not suitable for the wilderness he is going through with his unprepared team. **9) Dave:** a dog in the sled team. Dave possesses much determination that he died stubbornly pulling the sled. **10) Sol-leks:** an experienced dog in the sled team. Sol-leks is older than Buck. **11) Curly:** first friend that Buck has met during the journey to the north. Curly died as she tried to meddle with the wild nature of dogs.

## c. Setting

Setting is element of fiction that refers to the where and when of an event. The novel set in the late of 1890's, during the gold rush of Klondike. The story took place from Buck's home in California, to the northern Alaska, and to the wilderness of Canada's forest.

## d. Theme

Theme is an important element of fictions that refers to the major concept that a writer explores in a book. The novel "The Call of The Wild" has the theme of perseverance, knowledge and wisdom. Perseverance theme is reflected by the determination of the characters in living the harsh and wild nature. The determination shows not only on the survival but also in asserting dominance. Knowledge and wisdom also became a theme in this novel. The protagonist of the novel "The Call of The Wild", Buck, when through series of event when he learnt to adapts to his new alien surrounding. This adaptation is crucial for his survival. He learned how to survives in many conditions. The wisdom he obtained has sculpted him to a better and stronger character.

## e. Point of View

It is an element of fictions that refers to how the story is narrated or told. The novel "The Call of The Wild" utilizes third person limited omniscient where the narrator has the ability to asses character's thought and feelings. This POV however is limited due to the omniscient view is only represented by the main character, Buck.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Departure

#### a. The Call to Adventure

The call to adventure is where the hero first started the adventure in the foreign world. In "The Call of The Wild", this stage first experienced by the main character –Buck— when he was kidnapped from his luxurious domesticated life. Buck is forced to start the adventure.

"And this was the manner of dog Buck was in the fall of 1897, when the Klondike strike dragged men from all the world into the frozen North. But Buck did not read the newspapers, and he did not know that Manuel, one of the gardener's helpers, was an undesirable acquaintance... but to his surprise the rope tightened around his neck, shutting off his breath." (London, 1903, p. 14)

Buck was kidnapped by his master's servant and then sold to a man who wore a red sweater.

**b. Refusal of the Call**

The stage where the hero is against the journey and afraid of the call of adventure.

“Straight at the man he launched his one hundred and forty pounds of fury.” (London, 1903, p. 9)

Buck decided to attack the buyer in order to seek escape and lash out his anger as he is furious.

**c. Crossing of the First Threshold**

This step is where the hero accepted his fate and allow himself to adapt to a new world.

“He speedily learned that Perrault and François were fair men, calm and impartial in administering justice, and too wise in the way of dogs to be fooled by dogs.” (London, 1903, p. 12)

After the beatings by the man in the red sweater, Buck surrender to his fate that he could not defeat the man. Buck then later was bought by Perrault and Francois as a sled dog. This phase made Buck believes he has to adapt to a new life and go on with the adventure.

**d. The Belly of the Whale**

It is the step where hero is introduced to new challenges and worried about his future endeavors.

“Buck’s feet sank into a white mushy something very like mud... Buck’s first day on the Dyea beach was like a nightmare. Every hour was filled with shock and surprise.” (London, 1903, pp. 13-14)

Buck has boarded the ship and he encountered first alien thing to him. Next, he arrived at Dyea beach where everything frightens him. In this transition, Buck experienced new challenges regarding how wild the surroundings are.

**5.2 Initiation**

**a. The Road of Trials**

The road of trials is the list of tests that the hero experienced following the separation from his original world. In the novel, Buck has gone through many tests and adapted himself to the surroundings. Buck first was introduced to the sled team by Francois and Perrault in which he then able to follow up easily.

“François fastened upon him an arrangement of straps and buckles.... Buck learned easily, and under the combined tuition of his two mates and François made remarkable progress.” (London, 1903, p. 15)

Buck then has to overcome the living condition where he has to rest for the night. He was able to overcome this by observing and learning quickly how the other dogs do

“Another lesson. So that was the way they did it, eh? Buck confidently selected a spot, and with much fuss and waste effort proceeded to dig a hole for himself. In a trice the heat from his body filled the confined space and he was asleep.” (London, 1903, p.18)

Buck also challenged himself in search for seeking dominance in order to end the cruelty done by his former pack leader, Spitz. They fought and Buck won the fight.

“But Buck possessed a quality that made for greatness—imagination. He fought by instinct, but he could fight by head as well... Buck stood and looked on, the successful champion, the dominant primordial beast who had made his kill and found it good.” (London, 1903, pp. 37-38)

All of the trials made the hero into a better self and able to adapt with the foreign surroundings.

**b. Atonement with The Father**

Atonement with the father is where the hero encountered a figure that could guide him like a father and provides support and strength. In “The Call of the Wild”, the main character was saved by an old man named John Thornton. He saved Buck from the inexperienced team and treated Buck with care.

“John Thornton stood over Buck, struggling to control himself, too convulsed with rage to speak. “If you strike that dog again, I’ll kill you,” he at last managed to say in a choking voice...As Buck watched them, Thornton knelt beside him and with rough, kindly hands searched for broken bones.” (London, 1903, p. 62)

### c. The Ultimate Boon

The ultimate boon is a phase when a hero has achieved his goal or attained a wisdom after his long venture. After all of what Buck went through, loved by his new master Thornton, he has to accept the fate of his master's death. Buck has entirely mended his life with the wilderness. He has a dispute with the Yeehats Indian who killed Thornton and he is known as the legend Ghost Dog.

"They are afraid of this Ghost Dog, for it has cunning greater than they, stealing from their camps in fierce winters, robbing their traps, slaying their dogs, and defying their bravest hunters." (London, 1903, p. 93)

### 5.3 Return

#### Freedom to Live

In the last stage of hero's journey, a hero can decide for himself to stay where he is now or return to his origin. Freedom to live is a phase where the hero chooses what they want to be using the experience they have acquired.

"Then an old wolf, gaunt and battle-scarred, came forward. Buck writhed his lips into the preliminary of a snarl, but sniffed noses with him, ... And Buck ran with them, side by side with the wild brother, yelping as he ran." (London, 1903, p.93)

In the novel, the hero, Buck, lost his master and now roams free on his own will. He decided to go with a wild wolf pack and became one of the members.

### 6. Conclusion

The conclusion of the research analysis and findings in the "The Call of the Wild" novel is the main character has gone through three stages of hero's journey with the eight steps of it, they are four steps out of five in departure stage, three steps out of six in initiation stage, and one step out of six in return stage. This leads to the conclusion of in literary work the hero's journey is often following the same pattern mentioned by Joseph Campbell. Therefore, the hero's journey is prominently present in Jack London's novel with the title "The Call of the Wild".

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