Myths, Maidens, and Masculinity: The Gendering of the Hero(ine) Across History

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> *"Heroes are powerful. Before you know it, the men and women in the wild-oat patch and their kids and the skills of the makers and the thoughts of the thoughtful and the songs of the singers are all part of it, have been pressed into the service in the tale of the Hero. But it isn't their story. It's his."*
>
> - Ursula K. Le Guin in "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"

Introduction

The hero is one of the most dominant figures in any culture. Beyond the reverence held for knights, humble workers, genius scholars, loyal homemakers, and sometimes even kings, lies the ever mythological hero. He is the predominant symbol of altruism, strength, and action across many cultures. He exists one degree down from the unrelatable bourgeois king of royalty, born into their power, but is also one step less removed than the enlightened prophet that descends from the heavens to bless the world. The hero may be part god, but must also be fully man, born from the same land as the people that will one day praise him. The hero is a necessary force, only conjured when the need for one arises. His origin may be filled with petty tasks and selfish ventures, but his true journey only begins when the world beckons for aid, and he stands as the single recipient worthy enough to answer in kind.

That hero is indeed a man. Despite occasional gender neutral usages of the term, the Oxford Dictionary defines the hero as, "a person, especially a man, who is admired by many people for doing something brave or good," (Oxford Learner's Dictionary N.d.). While the definition of the heroine simply replaces "man" with "a girl or woman" (a noticeable inclusion as hero does not include 'boy') the other half of the definition also posits that the hero(ine) is admired for "doing something brave or good." But the definition of a "good" deed is inconsistent, and in order to be brave, one must be free to take action. But the routines of

housebound women and homemakers, whether they are labeled heroines or otherwise, are not always considered deliberate actions. Instead, consciously or not, they are dismissed as consistent realities, as expectations. Yet these routines create the freedom for heroes to venture into the unknown. While the men hunt, to live or die, the women embark on their own non-adventures: to gather grain lest the men return empty-handed, to care for their children in their father's absence, to ready the medicines for the ones who return injured, and to prepare the meal once they do. But the narrative of the homemakers, one of endurance and fortitude, rarely qualified as "something brave or good." As Ursula K. Le Guin (1986) writes:

> It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrestled a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another…No, it does not compare, it cannot compete with how I thrust my spear deep into the titanic hairy flank while Oob, impaled on one huge sweeping tusk…and Boob was crushed to jelly when the mammoth fell on him as I shot my unnerving arrow straight through eye to brain.

Action and excitement, the realm of men and hunters, is what characterizes the most celebrated hero stories, and it is the story that makes a hero. It is what he comes to be known by. Each moment of a hero's journey exists simultaneously. In the cultural consciousness, the David that died as king of Israel is still a child, perpetually at odds with Goliath. A hero is remembered by his deeds, by his moments of braveness rather than his persistence. Heroes are captured on book covers and billboards posing in their moments of triumph. Their stories are boiled down into virtues and archetypes. That simplicity makes them easy to identify with. Perhaps it is also what led Joseph Campbell to write *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, which merges every hero's story into a seventeen-step journey.

Campbell's hero's journey is one of masculinity. It is a story of meeting the earth mother, defeating the father, and marrying the bride. He can contain these characters in such rigid confines partially because there are certain masculine attributes a character must embody in

order to be considered a hero. The structures of toxic masculinity are built into every aspect of hero culture. Every boy must find his older male mentor to pass on the traditions of the men before him. He must learn to wield his sword with strength, and then he must dominate his enemies before becoming a legend.

The heroine suffers from no such simplification. For a heroine to be reduced to a virtue would mean that she embodied something marked as heroic. Even the masculine heroine, suited in heavy armor and bravely riding toward the dragon, is a performer rather than a dismantler. A person cannot topple a system by wielding its weapons. If heroedom is a structure that informs society of what to admire, then the heroine is an intruder upon that system. In *The Heroine's Journey*, Maureen Murdock doesn't find her heroines amongst the texts of cultural legends. She finds them in the women she meets in real life, damaged in their attempts to follow the masculine path. In *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*, Maria Tatar points to the women overlooked and overshadowed. She finds their heroics in words and wit rather than strength and bravery.

Murdock, Tatar, and many more write and rewrite these heroines, illuminating their qualities as something to be admired. The heroine is varied because she must be. There is no singular archetype that rose to the top of history, because heroines have often sat at the bottom. They climb toward the peak of heroedom and take recognition where it is granted, despite the imperfections in where the spotlight places itself.

Joseph Campbell saw how the heroes of legend slotted into a neatly contained journey of self-discovery. He did not intend to write a book on masculinity, but through observation of his biases and the patterns that run through centuries of hero worship, the impacts of hegemonic masculinity on hero culture reveal itself. However, while *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* still stands as the predominant text for the hero's journey, other writers have since then explored the

heroine. Maureen Murdock, a psychotherapist, created her own structure that fit the experiences of herself or the women she worked with. On the other hand, Maria Tatar dismisses the idea of a structure all together, embracing the countless portrayals of the heroine. Analysis of these authors' writings shows how the hero's journey is used to reinforce hegemonic masculinity and how the role and definition of the heroine has evolved over time.

This essay will begin by discussing the background of Joseph Campbell and the creation of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. It will then examine how Campbell hero's journey reduces mythical women to a few mother-bride archetypes, as well as how it replicates the facets of hegemonic masculinity. The essay will then turn to Maureen Murdock's response to Campbell in *The Heroine's Journey,* discussing how the hero's journey represents masculine models of success and how they are damaging to women. Finally, it will look at Maria Tatar's take on the heroine, which reevaluates what actions and characters have been deemed heroic throughout history and challenges the concept of any one dominant hero(ine) narrative.

The Savior, the Goddess, and the Temptress: The Role of Gender in Campbell's Hero's Journey

> *"[There] will be always the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told."*
>
> - Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D. in *Introduction to 2004 Commemorative Edition,* in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*

Joseph Campbell and The Hero With a Thousand Faces

The Hero With a Thousand Faces, originally published in 1949, is Campbell's most popular work. In it, he founds the idea of the hero's journey, a template of storytelling he claimed

every hero followed in their myths. The seventeen steps are split into three chapters, which precede: (I) Departure, containing (1) The Call to Adventure, (2) Refusal of the Call, (3) Supernatural Aid, (4) The Crossing of the First Threshold, and (5) The Belly of the Whale; (II) Initiation, containing (6) The Road of Trials, (7) The Meeting with the Goddess, (8) Woman as the Temptress, (9) Atonement with the Father, (10) Apotheosis, and (11) The Ultimate Boon; (III) Return containing (12) Refusal of the Return, (13) The Magic Flight, (14) Rescue from Without, (15) The Crossing of the Return Threshold, (16) Master of the Two Worlds, and (17) Freedom to Live. However, Campbell (1949:228) does allow some variation and interpretation of these steps, stating that "Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements…[and] others string a number of independent cycles into a single series."

Campbell never specifically names this structure "the hero's journey" (the term would be later be coined by Christopher Vogler), instead referring to it as the "adventure of the hero," and the more well-known moniker, the "monomyth." Campbell, a comparative mythologist, primarily utilizes pieces of mythology as evidence of his models universality. He writes, "It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward," (Campbell 1949:10). For Campbell, the hero's journey was not just a quest for the elixir, but also as a psycho-spiritual path to self-discovery. Many of his steps involve encountering the mother and father figure, as well as pursuing one's inner self (Campbell 1949:126, 176). He claims that, "In the office of the modern psychoanalyst, the stages of the hero-adventure come to light again in the dreams and hallucinations," (Campbell 1949:111). In the opening of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he explains the importance that the works of Freud and Jung took in his analysis (Campbell 1949:1). Throughout the book he also quotes their ideas, many of which relating to the Oedipus complex (Campbell 1949:6, 40, 102, 112, 192,

326). The hero's journey Campbell describes is not just a generalization of the steps a writer goes through when creating a hero, it is a psychoanalytic breakdown of a hero's growth and how a person could use those stories to mature themselves.

Campbell's overarching opinions in these subjects have garnered a fair amount of criticism from folklorists for his generalization and cherry picking of myth, for his misinterpretation and misunderstanding of non-western texts, and over his past racist and anti-semetic actions (Magnaro 1992; French 1998). Also of note is the general critique of Freudian theory(Crews 2017), which much of Campbell's ideas are based on (Campbell 1949:4, 6, 13).

The Hero with a Thousand Faces was not immediately popular, but in 1988 PBS produced a show with Campbell called *The Power of Myth* that would become "one of the most popular TV series in the history of public television," (Moyers 1988). For six one-hour long episodes, Campbell discussed his hero's journey and its modern applications with journalist Bill Moyers. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* grew in popularity alongside Campbell, garnering plenty of critical praise (Campbell 1949:xxi), inspiring further study of the hero's journey, and was even chosen by *Time* magazine as one of the best nonfiction books of all time (Schrobsdorff 2011). Many writers, filmmakers, and even musicians have since cited Campbell as an inspiration. Most famously, Campbell's work is cited by George Lucas as one of his largest influences in the creation of *Star Wars* (Moyers 1999).

Joseph Campbell's Approaches to Gender

At times, it is difficult to differentiate where Campbell's male gaze begins and where the original myth writers' intentions end, especially without fully viewing the texts he draws his

observations from. However, these ambiguities are quickly erased when looking at Campbell's out of book attitude towards women. When asked in an interview how society should value women, he states that they are fine as they are and that "All [women] have to do is stop looking at the boys and wondering whether they are in competition with them." (Campbell 1990:133). In another instance he talks about a student who asked him if women could become heroes and he responds that, "The woman's the mother of the hero; she's the goal of the hero's achieving; she's the protectress of the hero; she is this, she is that. What more do you want?" Such blatant sexist statements are even more impactful when considering how Campbell's writing has influenced generations of creatives.

Campbell seems to view life in the same way he views myth. He sees the roles of mothers and brides to be satisfactory because they are a necessary part in the greater hero's journey. To Campbell, life, like myth, is a closed system. He believes that everyone would be more happy if they simply played their part, somehow failing to imagine why a woman would want to play the role of a hero, or be anything else but what she was born to be. So while Campbell's observations are based in the representations of women in myth, there is a distinct masculine lens in which he views them from.

The Monowoman in The Hero with a Thousand Faces

Among the female archetypes that Campbell presents, most notable are the ones explicitly listed in the steps of the hero's journey: (7) The Meeting with the Goddess, and (8) Woman as the Temptress. "The goddess" is the cosmic bestower of aid, a helper for the hero that derives from the same universal forces that chose him as a savior. "The ultimate adventure," as Campbell describes it, is, "a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen

Goddess of the World," (Campbell 1949:100). Yet, the goddess is also the "'good' mother—young and beautiful—who was known to us...in the remotest past." (Campbell 1949:102). Campbell is, of course, relating the goddess to the parental mother. While he does state that the goddess can have aspects of the "bad mother", her ultimate form is beyond morality. The goddess is the "Universal Mother," an entity that is coveted yet unobtainable. She differs from the hero because of her cosmic origins. This distinction frames the goddess as an Other, a greater being, yet distinct from the hero as not to challenge him.

The temptress plays a much less grand role. She is the inverse of the "mother-goddess," which Campbell (1949:112) regards as the "inevitable bride". The temptress is the "adultery ridden, luxurious and incorrigible mother," that the hero must overcome to "soar to the immaculate ether beyond." Campbell writes considerably less about the temptress. This is because she embodies the same beauty and features the goddess does, but instead of being praised, the temptress represents the shame of partaking in "flesh." She's the "queen of sin" and the "ancient enemy of man." Despite her title, Campbell's temptress is not cunning nor witty, depriving her of any remotely admirable qualities. Campbell does not even consider the temptress a villain of the hero (that role is reserved for the father), she is simply a reflection of his failings.

The women of the hero's journey are a non dynamic monolith, to the point that Campbell sometimes refers to them as "the woman." He describes her as, "the guide to sublime acme of sensuous adventure," (1949:106). In other chapters, the woman "represents the totality of what can be known...as [the hero] progresses...in life," and while, "she undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself," (1949:108). Campbell writes the woman

as a means to the hero's ends. She is a helper, an inspiration, or reward for the hero, but never an equal.

Campbell (1949:101) writes, "[The woman] is the paragon of all paragons of beauty, the reply to all desire, the bliss-bestowing goal of every hero's earthly and unearthly quest. She is mother, sister, mistress, bride." This quote both reiterates the idea that a woman's only value lies in her beauty and is just one instance of a concept that Campbell repeats over and over: the conflation of the bride and the mother. This incestuous paradigm echoes Freudian thought, but it also speaks to the sameness of the women in hero stories; their characters are reduced to their beauty and virtue, so much that their individuality and relations to the hero, even familial relations, become irrelevant.

Campbell's woman is not only stagnant in her personality, but also in a literal sense. He writes, "Time sealed her away, yet she is dwelling still...at the bottom of a timeless sea" (Campbell 1949:102). This trope is abundant in classical stories, such as Circe and her island in the *Odyssey*, the lady in the lake of Arthurian mythology, or Galadriel from *Lord of the Rings*. These immobile women are in direct comparison with the hero who bravely journeys into the "darkness, the unknown, and danger," (Campbell 1949:71). Frisk (2019:97) writes, "[there is] a [long] dualistic tradition of defining masculinity in contrast to the domestic sphere of allegedly inactive women." Whether they be "earth mothers" or stranded brides, the women of hero's fiction are often tied, spiritually or literally, to specific places. In ways, this trope is representative of the limited freedoms of women over time, but it also reinforces the notion that the only characters worthy to become heroes are ones who venture into the outside world. This essay will later discuss how Maureen Murdock and Maria Tatar address how this notion

contradicts with the historical control of women's bodies and how they've redefined the heroic to apply to stagnant women.

The Hero's Journey as a Method of Achieving Masculinity

In studying media representations of professional baseball player Nolan Ryan, Nick Trujillo identified five predominant facets of hegemonic masculinity. Atkinson and Calafell (2004:1) rephrased them in relation to fictional character as "(a) physical force and control, (b) occupational achievement, (c) familial patriarchy, (d) frontiersmanship, and (e) heterosexuality." Frisk (2018:97) notes a similar set of traits that heroes have traditionally possessed, "physical strength, especially in warfare…great accomplishments on the public stage…[possessing] traditionally competitiveness, power of will and risk-taking." The overlap of similar virtues highlights how the societal image of a hero is conflated with masculine values. Even aside from the more implicitly male attributes (physical strength, familial patriarchy, heterosexuality), values such as "competitiveness," "risk-taking" and "frontiersmanship" are biased towards men. The feminist sociologist, Joan Acker (1990:143) describes how certain traits are valued in the professional world, "a tough-minded approach...a capacity to set aside personal, emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment...cognitive superiority in problem solving." She describes how the pursuit of these values is favorable to men who are encouraged to assert themselves, but hostile to women who are socialized to be more passive and criticized when they are not. The same values are exemplified throughout Campbell's hero's journey and other popular representations of the hero.

Star Wars is a movie that directly follows Campbell's hero's journey and Luke Skywalker, it's protagonist, exemplifies all of Atkinson and Calafell's facets of hegemonic

masculinity: (a) Physical force, his mastering of the light saber and the force; (b) Occupational Achievement, Becoming a jedi, defeating the Empire; (c) Familial Patriarchy, the last man of his family, protecting his sister, the last surviving member of the patrilineal jedi; (d) Frontiersmanship, joining the rebellion, challenging the empire; (e) Heterosexuality, briefly falling in love with his sister.

Luke is just one example of a hero who learns to embody hegemonic masculinity during his hero's journey, but the same attributes are present all across history and popular culture, from King Arthur and Beowulf, to Aragorn and Captain America.

The saturation of hegemonically masculine heroes is important to recognize because of the dialectical relationship between heroes and cultural values. Rank (1914) states that the hero is shaped by the "collective ego," an amalgamation of the traits society deems most useful or heroic. Conversely, Holt & Thompson (2004) remark that heroes "act as semiotic raw ingredients that consumers draw upon to construct their identities." The hero is built from cultural values and people then draw on the hero for inspiration. Thus, when masculinity pervades the cultural identity of heroes, it comes to shape the values of the real world (and vice versa). That is why the same aspects of hegemonic masculinity Trujillo found in real life are present in the dominant representations of a hero.

Beyond Duality: Examinations of the Feminine and Masculine in Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey*

> *The women I know and work with do not want to be there, the place that people are trying to get to…They do not want to be handmaidens of the dominant male culture…They do not want to follow the advice of fundamentalist preachers and return to the home. They need a new model that understands who and what a woman is.*
>
> - Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey*

Charting the Heroine's Path

An important distinction between *The Heroine's Journey* and *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, or even other versions of the hero(ine)'s journey, is that Maureen Murdock intended for her book to be a self-help guide for women. Campbell viewed his journey as a path to self-discovery, and while it was sometimes used as such, it was primarily a model that captured the mythological journey of a hero. Murdock wanted to create a model that represented the psychological journey of the contemporary heroine. Joseph Campbell, as a comparative mythologist, built his structure on myths and legends. Maureen Murdock still utilizes some fiction (although noticeably less) as examples, but she primarily contextualizes her journey through her experience with other women as a psychotherapist. Murdock's (2016) model describes the journey of the heroine as she separates "from feminine values, seeking recognition and success in a patriarchal culture, experiencing spiritual death, and turning inward to reclaim the power and spirit of the sacred feminine." Still, inspired by Campbell, Murdock's journey is separated into a progression of steps that describes the heroine's passage through the traditional hero's journey and the psychological aftermath of its events.

The 10 steps are: (1) Separation from the Feminine; (2) Identification with the Masculine; (3) The Road of Trials; (4) The Illusory Boon of Success; (5) Strong Women Can Say No; (6) The Initiation and Descent to the Goddess; (7) Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine; (8) Healing the Mother/Daughter Split; (9) Finding the Inner Man with Heart; and (10) Beyond Duality (Murdock 1990).

Many of these steps directly relate back to the hero's journey. "The Road of Trials" borrows its name directly from Campbell's structure, "The Initiation" is the name of one of his

chapters, “Healing the Mother/Daughter Split” is a mirroring of “Atonement with the Father,” and “The Illusory Boon of Success” is almost mocking “The Ultimate Boon” of the hero. Murdock also shares some concepts with Campbell. She is a prescriber to Jungian ideology (although there is a distinct exclusion of Freud), references similar characters like “the goddess” and “the dark feminine,” and approaches the mother/father figure as a reflection of certain aspects of the hero(ine) in the same way that Campbell does (Murdock 1990:18, 29, 35).

However, the experience of the heroine as she passes through parts of the hero’s journey differs from the hero. For example, “The Road of Trials” for heroes is about overcoming external challenges and is the time when he discovers “that there is benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage,” (Campbell 1949:89). Instead the heroine, “is alone…wandering the road of trials to discover her strengths…and overcome her weaknesses…Her task is to take the sword of *her* truth, find the sound of *her* voice, and choose the path of *her* destiny.” (Murdock 1990:50). The “dragons” she faces are voices of self doubt, incidents of workplace harassment, and the myth of dependency. Compared to the hero, who is chosen by the universe itself, Murdock’s heroine must work to make herself stand out. She is not only hampered by societal inequalities and external villains, but must also overcome the pressures of internalized misogyny and compulsive heterosexuality (Murdock 1990:51, 59).

The Heroine’s Journey accentuates the difficulties women face in pursuing masculine success. Through the women she works with, Murdock finds that attempting to follow the hero’s path is not only more challenging for a heroine, but also damaging to her psyche. As this essay will later examine, Maria Tatar (2021:24) advises against turning “hero” into a gender-neutral term. Both she and Murdock recognize that doing so would only ignore the obstacles unique to women’s journeys to heroedom. Unlike the hero, the heroine, “seldom receives validation from

the outside world," and when a heroine is validated, only her masculine accomplishments are applauded (Murdock 1990:17). Murdock's journey calls attention to how the hero's journey embodies the toxic definitions of success that women are encouraged to follow.

Embracing the Masculine

Murdock's heroine's journey begins with a separation from the feminine. This starts with a devaluation of the mother, who represents the femininity the heroine attempts to distance herself from in order to immerse herself in the masculine (Murdock 1990:26). This separation involves the rejection of a heroine's body and soul, discarding both the feminine physique and emotionality deemed incompatible with heroedom. This part of the journey refers to real world issues of internalized misogyny, and the disproportionate responsibility placed on mothers "without giving [them]...financial support, prestige, [or] acclaim," (1990:25).

This process is necessary for a heroine because the only visible paths to heroedom are contingent on masculinity. The heroine must still navigate her own way to the peak, but she must, at least partially, rely on the patriarchal systems around her. Even Campbell (1990:136) indirectly recognizes this, stating that society only recognizes three ideal identities for women: the mother/wife, the prostitute, and the "athletic warrior girl." Only the athletic warrior girl, wrapped in masculine adjectives, garners the same form of praise that heroes do.

In order to acquire these adjectives, the heroine engages with the next step, "Identification with the Male." Murdock characterizes the heroine's connection with masculinity through her connection with her father, from whom she first "learns the rules of the game," (1990:48). Just like the hero, the heroine must learn the doctrine of heroics from an older male mentor. In Murdock's book, this entails the father serving as a facsimile of the men she will meet

later in life, teaching her how to maneuver through an androcentric world. In both the hero and the heroine's journey, the mentor is an enforcer of the patriarchy. He teaches the hero(ine) the tenants of hegemonic masculinity: how to suppress one's emotions, how to wield physical strength as a tool, how to assert oneself with aggression. Even for the heroine, there is no avoiding the patrilineal structure of heroedom.

Healing the Split

Murdock believes the heroine can only come to accept her complete self once she dissolves the gender barriers within. In the middle steps of the heroine's journey, the heroine travels down the masculine path to success, finds discomfort, then slowly heals her connection with the feminine. After completing that process, the heroine unites her "ego and self" becoming the "Mistress of Both Worlds," (Murdock:141, 146). However, Murdock's completed heroine is not just a combination of masculine and feminine traits, she embodies the dissolution of the binary itself. She writes that "The masculine is an archetypal force; it is not a gender," (1990:137), further explaining how any internal split between the masculine and feminine naturally invokes a hierarchy between the two (1990:151). By the end of her journey, the heroine is a "divine androgynous being" (1990:141). However, this non-binary approach to the heroine is not consistent throughout Murdock's writing.

The androgynous heroine is rarely represented. There are many stories about heroines who overcome gender boundaries and embody masculine strengths and feminine (often in an aesthetic or sexual sense) attributes, but they fail to show the difficulties of reaching that state and maintaining it. Characters like the Bride from Kill Bill or Xena the warrior princess embody both aspects with ease, but in terms of the heroine's journey, they are only in step 4: "The

Illusory Boon of Success." During this stage, the heroine's skills and worth are still only measured "against the male standards of production," (Murdock 1990:62, 65). Their ability to express femininity is contingent on their ability to overcome men in masculine arenas, and thus do not properly represent a marriage of both.

Murdock argues that masculine heroines, like Xena, embody the 1980s superwoman myth that promised women they could "have it all." The issues with superwomen are the same issues that plague the modern idea of a "girlboss." Journalist, Abby Snyder (2021) writes, "Instead of changing the system, the girlboss just took on those traditional leadership roles and claimed the problem had been solved by the nature of her being there." This completed image of a heroine who is detached from the oppressive systems of patriarchy is a problematic fiction to popularize. The girlboss and superwoman still utilize the patriarchal systems to gain success, and although they have overcome them, the same forces of oppression actively harm the other women around them. They are working alongside structural inequalities, not fighting against them. Conversely, the masculine heroine in knight's armor does not prove that the hero's journey can be easily taken by a woman, nor does she represent a true alternate path to success. Murdock's completed heroine and journey represent the difficult steps necessary to marry the masculine and feminine.

The Capitalist Patriarchy and The Feminine Wound

The hero(ine) is an exemplary figure that embodies the values a society holds. Their journeys are supposed to represent the challenges that everyday people face and how to properly navigate them. As Murdock separates the heroine from the high-flying mythos of the hero by grounding her in stories of real life, it is important to analyze how the story of the hero(ine) can

propagate problematic narratives. Because of this, it is also important to analyze how other forces of oppression, besides the patriarchy, interact with our view of the hero(ine).

In a paper examining the "capitalist patriarchy," Zillah Eisenstein (1999:1) says that she chose the term "to emphasize the existing mutual dependence, of the capitalist class structure and male supremacy." While Murdock never explicitly mentions the term capitalism, many issues of the women she worked with are caused by the dominance of its systems. In one section, she describes that, for the heroine, "everything is geared to getting the job done; climbing the academic or corporate ladder, achieving prestige, position, and financial equity…fully supported by our materialistic society." In another, she says, "our culture supports the path of acquisition of position: more, better, faster," (Murdock 1990:19, 79). These types of work cultures originate from capitalist values that emphasize profit and production.

Murdock discusses these sentiments in relation to the feminine wound, the emotional dissatisfaction she found women experienced after having sacrificed their femininity in order to achieve professional or academic success. However, this wound does not solely derive from the loss of the feminine, but also from the disappointment of learning that possession of the boon was not fulfilling. In real life, the boon is represented by financial success or a position of power. The capitalist system promotes the idea that happiness derives from financial success and that fulfillment is gained through "meaningful" work and production (Butler 2019). As stated previously, the systems in which that work is done often favor masculine qualities (Acker 1990). In traditional hero(ine) stories, success or the boon is often characterized as the defeat of an enemy or the acquisition of a power. As the first section of this essay discussed, the archetypal hero story is buried in masculine traditions. Both forms of the boon are measured and achieved through masculine standards. They are in contrast with more feminine values, such as emotional

and spiritual wellbeing. Still, as Murdock argues, the heroine, both within and outside of the book, is forced to pursue them in order to achieve prestige in the androcentric worlds they inhabit.

Surpassing the Binary and Problems with The Heroine's Journey

The underlying point of Murdock's book seems to be that the hero(ine) structure/masculine achievement model is buried in toxic practices and patriarchal standards. This would suggest that a heroine could find emotional peace by pursuing non masculine paths, but Murdock's model states that a heroine must always pass through the stages of separating from the feminine and embracing the masculine in order to become the complete heroine. *The Heroine's Journey* is based on the lives of the women Murdock worked with, most of whom were aiming for or already achieved "The Illusory Boon of Success." Murdock wanted to chart the path of recovery after that point, but as a result *The Heroine's Journey* is not a universal story. Instead, it describes a single path for the heroine, wreathed in violence.

Murdock's (1990:141) assertion that a person is only whole truly whole when they combine the feminine and masculine is contradictory with her image of the "divine androgenous" heroine. She writes that the masculine and feminine are not genders, but creative forces. Thus, by dissolving gendered labels and standards within oneself, a person should be able to accept and embody their true selves without regards to their born gender. Yet Murdock's model implies that a woman who does not seek to embrace the masculine cannot be considered a heroine. Men who reject their femininity can undeniably live, function, and feel content in the world. So why must women incorporate aspects of the masculine in order to be considered whole? Murdock also describes the adoption of the masculine and the separation of the feminine

as events that leave the "feminine wound," but is it not possible to reject one's born gender without violence? Murdock's model also suggests that a heroine needs to be in touch with her feminine side in order to be whole. This excludes the experiences of trans, non binary people, and masculine identifying women who may see the separation from the feminine and the embracing of the masculine as a painless or even cathartic process.

Murdock's interpretation of the heroine's journey has its limitations. Besides its assumptions about the necessity of the masculine and feminine, it neglects heroines who never reach or even aim for the boon. It forgets the heroines who don't assimilate into the masculine world and perform heroic tasks that differ from the traditional hero. While Murdock did not claim that her journey carried the same universality as Campbell's, as a feminine interpretation of the model, it lacks the same cohesiveness. However, as an attempt to offer a better portrayal of heroic women and widen the lens of Campbell's journey, it succeeds in leaps. The next section will discuss how Maria Tatar (2021:19) further progresses the heroine, exploring her "boundless possibilities [and] bravura magnitude of heroic behavior."

Words and Wit: Rediscovering the Heroines of the Past and Present in *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*

> *The faces of these women are malleable and mutable, resisting all efforts to freeze their features and to capture one representative expression. No single heroine dominates or endures. Instead heroines keep evolving, challenging authority and legitimacy, rebelling, resisting, and demanding makeovers.*
>
> - Maria Tatar, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces*

Narrative No More

Maria Tatar brings the heroine back from her journey through the androcentric corporate world, studying the thousands upon thousands of identities she's donned over history. As a

folklorist, Tatar explores a diverse variety of narratives from across the world and time that challenges, and perhaps surpasses, the scope of Campbell's examples. Instead of focusing only on the characters of legend who followed traditional quest narratives, Tatar reaches into the margins of stories. She frames the unassuming actions of non-traditional heroines like Penelope or Europa in new light, questioning past definitions of heroism.

Unlike Murdock or Campbell's books, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces* does not contain any one set journey for the heroine. By doing so, she challenges the assumption that a character must travel, discover, or defeat enemies in order to become a hero(ine). Campbell's journey traps the hero into a set destiny: he must face the father, he must venture to the inner cave, he must return with the elixir. Tatar offers no such requirements for the heroine, instead focusing on the ways the heroine has found or used her limited powers to influence the world around her.

However, Tatar's undefined and fluid definition of the heroine is her downfall. *The Heroine with 1001 Faces* offers a diverse array of perspectives to view the heroine from, but no chief argument to connect them. Tatar's assertion of the limitless heroine is only argued through a sheer volume of examples, making the book sometimes read more like a miscellaneous collection of stories rather than the sequel to The *Hero with a Thousand Faces* it claims to be.

Despite its lack of focus, *The Heroine with 1001 Faces* addresses many of the nuances and problems that Campbell and Murdock's works lack. While Tatar doesn't offer a full exploration of race, she is the only one out of the three authors to address it in any form. She also acknowledges the growing definition of gender beyond the binary, stating that "it makes it all the more important to understand the culturally scripted performances and inflexible binary codes enacted in the myths…from times past," (2021:24). Additionally, through comparisons to

present-day social justice movements and cinema, Tatar not only explores the heroine's past, but also creates a bridge to the present day.

The Fairy Tale

The quest narrative has always dominated the heroic landscape to the extent that a "hero's journey" has become synonymous with a "hero's story." As discussed previously, the concept of a journey inherently favors masculine characters who have had the societal freedom to move around. Even Campbell (2004:145) acknowledges that, "All of the great mythologies…are told from the male point of view." However, this does not mean that history is bereft of stories from a woman's point of view. Tatar (2021:26) writes, "Women have been silenced in myths told and retold by bards," but, "In fairy tales, we have not just the perspective of women but also their voices." Tatar further explains how women-led narratives and fairy tales have been regulated to children's fair and wives' tales. This highlights how the masculine lens of print and popular media further controls what stories are told. The traditional quest narrative is already wrapped up in antiquated masculine symbology, but as these stories are passed down over generations, mostly by men, they become increasingly more masculine. It was only in 2017, after over 60 English translations across several hundred years, that the famous Greek epic, *The Odyssey*, received its first female translation from Emily Wilson. In an interview, she details how certain Greek terms like "anthropos" are often translated as "man" rather than "human" or "mortal," (Giannarou:2018). Tatar (2021:54) points to similar misogynistic framing of myth, such as the removal of violent men in some Grimm's tales, or the portrayal of Europa as "exceedingly fortunate" for being raped and impregnated by Zeus. These mis-tellings are as much a result of the past patriarchal systems which produced the writing, as they are of the predominance of

masculine voices in academic spaces. The ancient Greeks may have written their gods as aggressive, lust filled beings, but it was the modern man that decided to still laud them as heroes despite it. Even in the context of the modern university, Zeus is described more often as a playboy or cheater than the rape hungry predator he is. The male perspective of these myths is filtered and reinforced time and time again through the male gaze as they are translated and rewritten.

Tatar views fairy tales as a form of storytelling that somewhat escaped the male trappings of translation. Instead of being passed on in books, they were passed between women during sewing circles, in front of the hearth, in the kitchen, or to children during bedtime. These stories contained valuable life lessons, and "old wives' wisdom." Men like Campbell, who looked down on fairy tales as lesser forms of fiction, ensured that they stayed separate from the "printed eloquence of educated men," (Tatar 2021:96). But this also meant that fairy tales preserved the women's voices who told them. It was in these fairytales that so many heroines lived. Untouched by the male definitions of "heroic," fairy tale heroines were wise and clever women who wielded words and stories to change the world around them (Tatar 2021:26, 85).

The fairy tale represents the aspects of the heroine Tatar tries to capture, not only the stories of heroines who prove their worth in masculine arenas, but the ones who exhibit heroic behaviors in feminine ways. Her heroine's journey is not one of saving the world, but it is also not one that fails to interact with it. Tatar's analysis focuses not only on the fiction of the heroine, but also on the intentions of the writers who created them. She views how the heroine's actions serve as acts of resistance against the conditions surrounding her. The fairy tale does exactly this, not only because of its preservation of a female voice, but also because it challenges the assumption that the heroine's journey is a new development. She points back to these tales, and

later to the women of male dominated stories, to show that models of heroic women have always existed, but been overlooked by the predominantly male cultural memory.

The Heroine Rediscovered

Campbell infamously told Murdock during an interview that, "Women don't need to make the journey. In the whole mythological tradition, the woman is there. All she has to do is realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to," (Murdock 2016) Murdock (1990:17) refutes this in *The Heroine's Journey*, stating that "Women do have a quest at this time…It is the quest to fully embrace the feminine nature…to heal the deep wound." Tatar further challenges Murdock's structure, proposing that the heroine does not always need a quest, nor a wound to heal. Even for heroines like Penelope of *The Odyssey*, who receive little actual character from their writers, Tatar (2021:40) explains how her complexities are revealed through re-imaginings of the myth. Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad* does exactly this. As does Madeline Miller's *Circe* and Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of Medusa," (Tatar 2021:10).

These retellings of heroines are, of course, partially an imposition of the writer's experiences and perspectives, but they are also demonstrations of compassion. These works identify the long ignored patterns of misogyny within mythology that still echo true today. By focusing on the women so close to the characters deemed traditional heroes, these retellings challenge the reader to reassess their view of the Jason's as well as Penelope's. Tatar's inclusion of these undeveloped female characters shows that she believes actions aren't the only thing that makes a heroine admirable. She finds bravery in endurance and perseverance as well. Unlike Murdock's journey, this definition of the heroine includes women who didn't succeed in the

masculine world, or weren't injured on entry. It also includes the heroines who never had the opportunity or desire to leave feminine spheres.

Curiosity and Bravery

Curiosity became the strength of women who were physically limited by their surroundings. Tatar (2021: 123-128) states that while "we live in a culture that claims to value curiosity," the term used to carry a negative connotation. Curiosity was something to avoid. It was the "quintessential failing" of the biblical Eve, represented an unsavory sexual curiosity, and it encouraged women to step into subject matters or fields they were not suited for. Tatar further points to other heroines like Pandora and Bluebeard's wife that were punished because of their curiosity.

Yet heroines held onto their curiosity throughout time, eventually becoming a strength rather than a failing. The female thirst for knowledge that Tatar describes originates from a history of gendered educational and occupational barriers. In a culture that sought to control women's bodies, curiosity represented the freedom of the female mind to wander wherever it pleased. As history progressed and the domain of women moved beyond the home, so did the heroines. Tatar finds the same curiosity of Pandora or Eve in Carrie from *Sex and the City* or Nancy Drew.

There is a difference between the curiosity of the heroine and the bravery of the hero. Both drive the hero(ine) to venture into the world, but Tatar (2021:142) connects curiosity with care and concern. The heroine pursues the unknown out of fascination and with compassion for what she will encounter. The hero ventures on a journey as a challenge. He requires bravery

because he sees the outside world as dangerous and something to be conquered. This compassion for their surroundings is one of the few unifying factors across all of Tatar's heroines.

New S(words)

One of the biggest assumptions that Tatar challenges is the myth that the heroine does not seek to better or affect the world around her like the questing hero does. It is actions of "conflict and conquest" that come to define a hero's impact. He seeks to save the kingdom, but also expects to ascend to the throne afterwards (Tatar 2021:34). The heroine's goal might not be as lofty, but her reduced scope of impact is more due to social realities than lack of ambition. Tatar shows that no matter the circumstances, heroines try to change the world around them to the extent of their freedom to do so. Very often, this means using words and wit rather than strength or weapons.

Care and curiosity are what drives Tatar's heroines to pursue justice despite the risks. Tatar (2021:41) explains how the term "Social Justice Warrior" was first used as an insult for those who defended the harassed women during the Gamergate controversy in 2014. This was a modern, real life example of two trends Tatar found in heroines: women's use of words to defend themselves, and an attempt by men to silence them in response. Tatar finds a care for social justice in a variety of heroines. She finds it in the detective, who wields her unassuming femininity to gather information and spreads it anonymously to avoid discrimination. She finds the thirst for justice in the silenced voices of abused heroines, like Philomela, likening them to the survivors who spoke out during the #MeToo movement. Even in heroines characterized by masculine strengths like Wonder Woman and Lisbeth Salander, Tatar chooses to focus on the ways they've aided other women or their surrounding communities (2021:87, 157, 170, 180).

Unlike Murdock, who viewed the heroine's journey as an internal process, Tatar highlights how heroines influence the world around them, even given their limited powers. Murdock's heroines are coming to terms with their femininity, but Tatar finds her heroines ready to wield them to their advantage. This perspective of the heroine paints them as more active participants in their lives, rather than characters only capable of internally grappling with their surrounding circumstances. Even in stories where a heroine's voice, her most powerful weapon, is taken from her, like Arachne's, Tatar (2021:83) finds resistance in the silent act of weaving. Like curiosity, Tatar calls attention to aspects of mythical heroines that have been looked down upon and shows how those have grown into the strengths and personalities of modern heroines.

1001 Stories Untold and Unnoticed

In her video "The Forgotten Legacy of Brittany Murphy," youtuber *Yhara zayd* discusses the phenomena of female movie stars, who primarily played traditionally feminine roles, never receiving praise for the quality of their acting. She points out how so many of these celebrities die or pass into obscurity without ever "receiving their flowers." Through the *Heroine with 1001 Faces*, Maria Tatar is trying to ensure that the heroines of past and present have an opportunity to receive their flowers. She knows how important hero(ine)s are to culture, and how reevaluating the values of heroines can greatly affect how people view those values in real life.

Tatar chooses not to use archetypes or titles like "the goddess" or "dark feminine," instead delving into the specifics of each heroine she examines because she is fighting the historical trend of reducing female characters down to stereotypes. This is not to say that Tatar's heroine is a superfluous being that has no discreet identity. She characterizes the heroine as a responder to her surrounding circumstances, rather than by their internal discoveries, like

Campbell or Murdock. She refuses to set one standard journey or action for the heroine because she recognizes the heroine is often limited by the social boundaries set around her (2021:11). While parts of the book can be unfocused, this approach to the heroine is more universal than Campbell's hero's journey, even if through an ambiguity of message. *The Heroine with 1001 Faces* is a celebration of the heroines across myth, literature, and film. It's not a journey, structure, or framework for what type of heroine's people should be writing. Instead, Tatar shows a multitude of admirable heroines that already exist in the world, encouraging readers to look for more where they don't expect them.

Conclusion

As Maria Tatar explains, "Hero cults [first] emerged in ancient Greece to commemorate those who had died in battle…rituals honoring heroes offered a reassuring form of simple and direct piety uncomplicated by the full details of historical lives," (2021:36). Defined by battle and born in death, it is no surprise that the hero has maintained the same masculine virtues he originated from. Just as it is no surprise that Joseph Campbell, a man who faithfully believes that myth holds all the keys to the inner psyche (Campbell 1990:85), would prescribe to the archaic views of women present in those same myths.

Despite Campbell's sexism (perhaps partially because of it), *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* has become the predominant text on the hero's journey, shaping countless pieces of media since its release. Both Maureen Murdock and Maria Tatar's books are direct responses to Campbell's popularity. While *The Heroine's Journey* fails to capture all the nuances and representations of the heroine, Murdock addresses the deep flaws in the path the hero's journey promotes. She traces its steps into the real world and explains how its toxic expectations can

leave women disconnected from feminine values. Tatar widens the view of the heroine, redefining what actions and characters are deemed heroic. She expands beyond the notion of universal structure, showing that a character does not need to partake on a journey to qualify as a heroine.

Despite their differing approaches, all three writers exemplify how important a role gender plays in the creation and understanding of hero(ine)s. The hero(ine) has always served as a vehicle for reinforcing the values of the writer. Perhaps, then, it is best to do away with any conception of any single monolithic journey for heroes or heroines. No matter what story is being told, the presence of one absolute narrative creates a hierarchy between what aspects it deems important and what aspects it does not. Murdock recalls what she heard from a Nigerian writer, "Single stories…create stereotypes, 'and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete,'" (2021:206). While it is easy to draw parallels in the closed vacuous space of myth, absolutes extracted from that space are bound to miss the important nuance of real life.

Of course, the journeys of heroines and heroes have been explored by many other writers as well. Christopher Vogler attempted to modernize Campbell's journey to better suit writers. Victoria Lynn Schmidt did the same for both the feminine and masculine journey, and Valerie Frankel argues how many heroines from across fiction can fit into Campbell's journey with just a few changes. This is in addition to the plethora of papers and essays examining hero culture, criticizing the flaws of Campbell's journey, analyzing the evolution of the heroine across history, and much more.

As society works to ungender dated social structures, hero culture is an important area to consider. While the process is incomplete, there has been a lot of progress in creating better and

more diverse female heroines, but there is still little being done to disrupt the hegemonically masculine landscape of heroes that exists today. There is a lot of room for gentle heroes that embody compassion, but men must become more active in creating and promoting heroes that possess those traits. Aside from more diverse male and female hero(ine)s, there is also the need for more nonbinary and androgynous ones. While many default to the masculine "hero," there is not even a true gender-neutral term to describe a hero(ine). In addition to gender boundaries, there is also a need for hero(ine)s who properly convey the experiences of different races, cultures, social classes, psychological states, and more. This is not to say the purpose of every new hero(ine) story should be to capture the experience of a marginalized group, but perhaps it is time to do away with the journey of the hero with a thousand faces. There are a limitless amount of stories to be told, and it is a waste to keep telling the same ones over and over again.

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