Challenging the Monomyth: Hera's Female Hero's Journey in *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim*

Zahra Rahma Mulyanti[1], Devi Hellystia[2]

[1]zahrarahma341@gmail.com
[2]devi_hellystia@staff.gunadarma.ac.id

[1,2]Universitas Gunadarma

Abstract

Keywords:
Hero's journey, Hera, Hero, The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim

This study conducts a narrative analysis of the character Hera in *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim* through the theoretical lens of Joseph Campbell's monomyth. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the research scrutinizes key dialogues and sequences to map Hera's arc onto the hero's journey framework. The findings demonstrate that Hera's trajectory incorporates twelve of the seventeen monomyth phases, successfully fulfilling the three core stages of departure, initiation, and return. However, the analysis reveals that the narrative strategically omits certain archetypal phases, such as the refusal of the call and supernatural aid, to craft a heroism defined by agency, resilience, and strategic intellect rather than passive reluctance or external validation. This study concludes that while Hera's journey validates the structural universality of Campbell's model, it also adapts and reframes it, offering a significant contribution to the discourse on female heroism in contemporary fantasy cinema. The research underscores the monomyth's enduring utility while highlighting its evolution in modern, gender-conscious storytelling.

✉ Corresponding author:
B3 Building, Kampus Viktor, Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan Indonesia 50229 E-mail:
malikasharma2105@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The analysis of cinematic narratives through established literary theories affirms film's significant position as a legitimate object of literary study. As Klarer (2023) contends, films construct meaning through narrative structures analogous to those found in prose and drama, utilizing intrinsic elements such as plot, character, and theme to convey complex ideas and emotions (Bordwell et al., 2020). Within this context, the fantasy and adventure genres frequently deploy archetypal narrative patterns, none more influential than Joseph Campbell's (1949) monomyth, or the "hero's journey." This framework, which outlines a universal trajectory of departure, initiation, and return, has proven a durable tool for analyzing stories of transformation and quests, where a protagonist undertakes a perilous journey to achieve a vital goal (Vogler, 2020).

However, the enduring application of Campbell's model often uncritically reinforces its male-centric origins, where the archetypal hero is predominantly masculine and the journey's phases are interpreted through a gendered lens. This presents a critical gap in understanding how contemporary narratives adapt this structure for female protagonists. The recent film *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim* (2024) offers a seminal case study for this inquiry. Centering on Hera, the daughter of King Helm Hammerhand, the film presents a narrative ripe for analysis: a female character who transitions from a political pawn to a strategic leader in a brutal war, challenging the patriarchal constraints of her world.

This study employs a qualitative narrative analysis to investigate the articulation of Campbell's hero's journey in Hera's character arc. While it identifies the presence of the monomyth's core stages, this research moves beyond a descriptive cataloguing of phases. Its primary aim is to critically examine *how* Hera's journey conforms to, adapts, and, crucially, subverts the traditional monomyth. The analysis will pay particular attention to phases such as "The Call to Adventure," "Atonement with the Father," and "The Ultimate Boon" to illuminate the distinct qualities of her heroism, rooted in agency, strategic intellect, and a boon of mercy rather than conquest.

By situating Hera's journey within both Campbell's classic framework and modern discourse on female heroism, this study contributes a nuanced perspective to the fields of narrative theory and film studies. It argues that *The War of the Rohirrim* does not merely insert a female character into a male archetype but actively refashions the monomyth to accommodate a heroic identity that challenges conventional gender stereotypes. Consequently, this research demonstrates the continued relevance and necessary evolution of Campbell's theory in the analysis of gender-conscious storytelling within contemporary fantasy cinema.

METHOD

This study was conducted through a qualitative narrative analysis of the film *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim*. The central aim was to systematically examine the character arc of Hera using Joseph Campbell's monomyth as a theoretical framework. The objective was not only to identify the presence of the hero's journey stages within her narrative but also to interpret how these stages are uniquely constructed and where they potentially deviate from the traditional, archetypal model.

To achieve this, the research adopted a descriptive qualitative approach, chosen for its strength in exploring and interpreting the meanings embedded within a specific cultural text like a film (Creswell, 2014). The film itself served as the primary data source, treated as a coherent narrative document for analysis. The data collection process was structured and involved several key steps. First, the film underwent repeated close viewings to ensure a thorough and nuanced understanding of the plot, character development, and overall narrative sequence. Following this, a process of focused scene identification was undertaken, whereby key sequences centering on Hera's actions, critical decisions, and pivotal dialogues were isolated for in-depth scrutiny. These specifically included scenes depicting major conflict, moments of significant choice, and clear transformation. To systematize the analysis, detailed data logging was performed, recording comprehensive notes and timestamps for each relevant scene to capture the full narrative context, exact dialogue, salient visual cues, and the dynamics of character interactions.

The subsequent data analysis followed a systematic, multi-stage process guided by Campbell's (1949) framework of the hero's journey. The process began with thematic coding, where the pre-identified scenes and narrative sequences were categorized according to the predefined phases of the monomyth, such as "The Call to Adventure" or "Atonement with the Father." Following coding, each segment underwent narrative interpretation. This stage moved beyond simple classification to analyze the narrative function and significance of each scene. It involved interpreting how a specific event embodies a particular phase—for instance, examining how a challenge functions as a "trial"—and closely scrutinizing the distinctive qualities of Hera's response, such as her agency, resilience, or strategic thought.

A crucial next step was the critical examination of the coded data. Here, the analysis specifically assessed instances where Hera's journey aligned with, adapted, or subverted the traditional monomyth structure. This step was essential for addressing the core research question regarding the model's application to a female hero, ensuring the study moved past mere descriptive cataloguing toward a meaningful interpretive critique. Finally, a synthesis of all the coded and interpreted data was conducted to build a coherent argument about the nature of Hera's hero's journey. This synthesis highlighted the specific pattern of phases she undergoes and explored the thematic implications of any omissions or transformations of the classic model.

Through this rigorous, theory-driven methodology, the study was positioned to yield both robust descriptive findings and deeper interpretive insights into the construction of a contemporary female hero within a foundational narrative structure.

.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting an in-depth analysis, the data findings revealed that Hera underwent twelve out of seventeen phases of the hero's journey. the phases she surpassed included the call to adventure, the crossing of the first threshold, the belly of the whale, the road of trials, the meeting with the goddess, woman as the temptress, atonement with the father, the ultimate boon, refusal of the return, rescue from without, master of the two worlds, and freedom to live. Meanwhile, in the movie, Hera does not undergo the refusal of the call, supernatural aid, apotheosis, the magic flight, and the crossing of the return threshold phase.

Stage I: Departure

The call to adventure

Hera's journey begins with the call to adventure. The initial event or occurrence in the theory of screenwriting patterns becomes the trigger of the main character's story (Viega, 2017). Hera's initial journey is triggered by the appearance of Wulf and Freca of Dunlendings to Rohan. They came to Rohan for a *Witan*, they said, but little did the royals of Rohan know that they came to seek a marriage proposal to Hera with an excuse of strengthening Rohan. The Dunlendings are known for their greed and their bad relations with Rohan. Hence, it is strange for them to come to Rohan when they never came when *Witan* was held. Helm senses the strangeness about this; he does not welcome it and is suspicious of Freca's intentions. So, he challenged Freca to a fight as men usually do. In the fight, Freca died from a single punch from Helm. Wulf, Freca's son, does not accept the situation.

> *Wulf: You will pay for this with your life. I swear it.*
> *(00:18:08 – 00:18:31)*

Wulf's cries carry a threatening meaning, indicating a serious and vengeful threat of murder, accompanied by an assurance that Wulf will absolutely fulfil it as retribution for Rohan's treatment of him and his father. Given this, Hera cannot just remain silent if such a thing is actually going to happen. She is being triggered to start a journey to reunite the Dunlending and Rohan. This series of events foreshadows the call to adventure, whereas the hero is summoned to embark on a journey due to some unknown external change, they relocated their spiritual centre of gravity to a new territory (Campbell, 1949). Additionally, one of the features in this phase is the presence of a string of accidents. What Hera has experienced in this moment implies that she needs to undergo a journey due to the tension between Rohan and Dunlending, and due to threats from Wulf. She needs to relocate her comforts and dive into the unknown, which may have challenges.

The crossing of the first threshold

One of the phases that proves the hero is committed to the journey is the encounter with the figure of the guardian threshold (Campbell, 1949). This figure is presented in this phase. Hera has to face the Lords of Rohan and also the King to tell them what she has experienced. Before this, she was chased by a Mumakil monster, then got kidnapped by Wulf and held captive at Isengard, where then rescued by Frealaf and Olwyn. The Lords and the King serve as the guardian threshold that Hera must encounter to pass this phase.

Hera's words are dismissed outright by Lord Thorne, who says that those are impossible to happen. Even Frealaf's request for Rohan to call for aid is rejected for the reason he does not know the full potential of Rohan and its king. Instead, he is expelled from Rohan because Helm thinks that he did not keep guard at Hera properly. Hera's actions in sticking to her words and defending Frealaf until the very end proved her worthiness. The guardian acts to keep the unworthy from entering the new world.

The belly of the whale

This phase symbolises as the womb, where it implies the hero's transition into a sphere of rebirth or transformation (Khoury, 2006). Hera's belly of the whale has an adjustment where she experiences it before encountering the crossing of the first threshold phase. This phase

signifies that the hero cannot retreat from their journey; they must face all the challenges and obstacles that lie ahead. Their emergence from the womb symbolizes the rebirth.

Hera enters this phase when she is held captive at the tower of Isengard. The tower works as the womb. Alienation and having no control over the situation signify a space of isolation where it demands the release of ego or power in order to gain new strength and insights. Hera realises there is a bigger threat to Rohan after finding a map of Rohan's territories among the documents on Wulf's desk, which she had discovered by accident. The implications that there is going to be danger prompt Hera not to withdraw from the journey. Then she meets Wulf.

> *Wulf: First, I will kill your brothers. Then, I will kill your father. And then, I will take the throne.*
> *Hera: And be king of what? A land in ruins, its people torn apart!*
> *Wulf: You had your chance to unite Rohan. And you refused!*
> *(00:32:21 – 00:33:03)*

Wulf acts as the shadow, or darkness figure, in this phase. This figure is an opponent that Hera needs to overcome. Here, Wulf tests Hera's moral integrity. She displays her commitment, courage, and persistence despite being threatened by Wulf. She gains enlightenment from his encounter with Wulf, who threatened her, and her discovery of a conspiracy towards Rohan. Therefore, this corresponds to this phase. This series of events implies that Hera is ready to face various challenges, and go into the next stage and phases.

Stage II: Initiation

The road of trials

Once the hero pledges to the journey, they are going to undergo several challenges and obstacles in order to prove that she is capable of becoming one; to bring about their transformation to a hero. This phase will be Hera's opportunity to show her courage, wisdom, resilience, and power. In which those will be tested to prove her worthiness to become a hero, and gain deeper insight about herself. Hera faces various trials during this phase, where they challenge her mentally, emotionally, and physically.

The first challenge in her journey is to fight Lord Thorne after she has just discovered that Lord Thorne had betrayed the King. She has to use her physical fighting skills in this scene. Her emotions are also tested when she discovers that one of Rohan's long-trusted royal allies has betrayed her family. Hera managed to finish off Lord Thorne by stabbing him right in the chest with a spear. After successfully passing the first trial, other trials come, and Hera has to overcome them. Later on, Hera has to witness with her own eyes when her two brothers are being killed at the hands of the enemy, Wulf. Then her father who is depressed by the deaths of his two sons, encountered orcs and a monster, and her father who froze to death after fighting Wulf's armies alone all night long in the middle of winter. Then she has to fill the vacant throne and face distrust from the Lords, and she has to take her father's place as a leader of the army, going to the battlefield alone and challenging Wulf.

Hera went through many trials of various kinds, but she managed to overcome them all. She demonstrated her determination and persistence in overcoming them. According to Campbell (1949), while undergoing tasks in this phase, the hero enters their labyrinth of their mental. Hera also managed to navigate her mental labyrinth, with all the trials transforming her hesitance and fears into wisdom and strength.

The meeting with the goddess

During the journey, the hero might find comfort and hope from someone who embodies a goddess' ability, whose magic can aid them. At the moment, Hera lost her way. In the midst of her grief over the deaths of her father and brothers, she has to continue the war and take the commanding position, considering that she is the remaining descendant of the King. Hera was doubting her ability to lead.

> Olwyn: You ask who would come if you called for aid?
> Olwyn: Rohan would answer.
> Olwyn: People need hope, Hera. Something to believe in, no matter how out of reach it may be.
> Olwyn: So, you can wait and worry, or you can choose. You can choose how this ends.
> (01:32:53 – 01:33:15)

Olwyn comes to give comfort and reassurance. Indirectly, Olwyn gives guidance to Hera on what she could do. She helps her gain her confidence again.

Woman as the temptress

During the journey, the hero might also encounter a figure of a temptress that distracts them from their goal. During this time, for a moment, Hera is tempted by what Wulf is doing. In the midst of their fight, Wulf suddenly falls to his knees and shows a remorseful face.

> Wulf: I knew it. From the moment I first met you..,
> Wulf: I knew you would be my doom.
> (01:53:52 – 01:54:08)

Those who cannot resist the temptation would remain in the new world and might do self-annihilation or death. Hera almost falls to Wulf's action–she lowers her hand that holds her sword up. However, she regains her consciousness and guards again after Wulf suddenly attacks her again. Hera manages to parry Wulf's attack even though it is a little bit late. Therefore, Hera successfully passed this phase. She consciously demonstrates her determination.

Atonement with the father

The hero finds himself in a position of inner conflict involving a father figure, where they need to reconcile with them in order to complete their journey (Campbell, 1949). The father figure could be a symbolic figure who possesses power over the hero. In Hera's journey, Helm acts as the father here. Previously, before the war began, Helm forbade Hera from participating in the war. His reason is simply that she is the King's daughter, who would one day marry, leave Rohan, and forget the Rohirrim's culture. This indicates that Helm does not believe in Hera's potential and reinforces that he has patriarchal values, whereby women have no place in men's fields, i.e., war. Though he thinks it is to keep her safe. It is what magnifies the conflict between Hera and her father, which also connects to her inner conflict, where she thinks her father does not believe in her at all.

Then, in one scene, Hera seems to follow Helm's shadow that seems to wander in a tunnel,

but then it disappears; instead, Hera just now struggling against the Orcs and a monster. It represents Hera's descent into the symbolic abyss and the conflict of id–ego–superego. If she could resolve it well, she would be alive. Helm suddenly appeared and immediately killed the monster. However, he is actually not in his senses and does not realise that Hera is there. It is when Hera confronts him by calling him, he regains his senses and understands the situation.

> Helm: I should have listened to you. You're brave and clever, and stronger than I knew. And I was blind not to see it. I've failed you. All of you.
> Hera: No. Everything you've ever done was for Rohan. For those you love.
> (01:23:25 – 01:23:59)

Helm's statement is a tangible form of emotional reconciliation between the father and his child. This connects as a significant moment of vulnerability and acknowledgment, which not only shows a change from his previous attitude but also an emotional surrender that denotes genuine transformation. Hera's status as a hero is now validated by Helm through his apologies and recognition of her value.

The ultimate boon

Hera earns her achievement after successfully defeating Wulf. Whereas the ultimate boon is the symbol of the achievement, it means that the hero has finally received what their goal is in the new world (Campbell, 1949). She gained the ultimate boon by the death of Wulf and ended the war.

> Hera: Let them go.
> Hera: Let them return to their homes, their loved ones.
> Hera: Rohan has seen enough war. Show mercy, cousin.
> Frealaf: Then let mercy rule this day.
> (01:56:13 – 01:56:30)

During her heroic journey, she also gains the boon of compassion and love. She obtains this during her encounter with the goddess figure. Which she later proceeded to convey it during this time. Rather than being resilient by commanding to finish the remain of Wulf's armies, Hera instead shows her compassion by ordering Frealaf to let the rest of Wulf's armies to leave.

Stage III: Return

Refusal of the return

After Hera wins the war and brings Rohan to peace again, she refuses to take the throne; she instead is going to embarks on another journey. What Hera is doing corresponds to this stage, where the hero refuses to go back to their world upon finding bliss in the new world. She rejects the reintegration to her royal life, but rather chooses another adventure where no eyes from the kingdom watch her. Rohan's throne is instead given to Frealaf, who is originally her cousin. Her heroic journey has shaped a deeper meaning of life than what her ordinary world offers.

Rescue from without

During the war, Wulf had no intention to surrender at all, and Hera was on her edge. If the new world prevents the hero from returning to their world, they will need a figure to take or

help them escape the new world. Therefore, in order to bring Hera to could return to her world, the Great Eagle and Frealaf come as her rescue from without, helping Hera to defeat the enemy. Through their support, Hera manages to bounce back and gain her win in the war.

Master of the two worlds

Hera indeed surpasses character development during her journey. She learned how to make sensible decisions and to be brave in everything despite the obstacles that may come. As a result, she masters the two worlds. She can now go back and forth to her ordinary world and the adventure world without getting anxious about both realms' regulations.

> *Frealaf: But should your king ever need you...*
> *Hera: The king will always have my sword, my loyalty, and my love.*
> *(01:59:10 – 01:59:22)*

From the time's perspective, they allow the mind to know the principles under each world rather than polluting one's (Campbell, 1949). Hera's words interpret a pledge that she can manage her two worlds; she may finally make a decision without hesitation or interrupting one's once she is back to continue her future.

Freedom to live

After overcoming the obstacles and challenges in the new world, the hero has developed new insights to begin a new life. Hera's freedom to live is depicted when she is about to leave Rohan to meet a wizard who invites her. Her action supports Campbell's statement that says the hero has now known and realised the meaning of their life. Hera has become a hero not only because of her courage in facing conflict, but because she now lives life as herself, full of awareness and freedom. Hera is no longer afraid of the past nor worried about facing the future; she is now able to live fully in the present under her full will.

After going through the three stages of the journey, Hera has transformed into a royal who embodies bravery, inner courage, and wisdom. Whereas she gained them by going through with its various challenges, she is aware not to blindly trust people's actions, is willing to make sacrifices for collective benefits, takes on leadership roles, mutual support could gain strength, and is grateful to those who help her. In the end, Hera finished her journey both to bring peace and herself transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the character arc of Hera in *The Lord of the Rings: The War of the Rohirrim* significantly incorporates the structure of Joseph Campbell's monomyth. The analysis confirms that Hera's narrative aligns with the three core stages of the hero's journey—Departure, Initiation, and Return—encompassing twelve of the seventeen theorized phases. The identified phases are: the call to adventure, the crossing of the first threshold, the belly of the whale, the road of trials, the meeting with the goddess, woman as the temptress, atonement with the father, the ultimate boon, refusal of the return, rescue from without, master of the two worlds, and freedom to live. Conversely, the analysis revealed the absence of five phases: refusal of the call, supernatural aid, apotheosis, the magic flight, and the crossing of the return threshold.

The absence of these phases is not a shortcoming but a meaningful adaptation. It underscores how Hera's journey reframes the monomyth to articulate a distinctively proactive and resilient form of female heroism, characterized by immediate agency and a boon of mercy rather than conquest. Therefore, while Hera's journey validates the structural universality of Campbell's model, it also critically adapts it, proving the theory's utility while highlighting its evolution in gender-conscious storytelling.

This research affirms the hero's journey as a robust analytical framework for contemporary animated films and female-led narratives. It illustrates the enduring power of this archetypal structure while demonstrating its flexibility beyond traditional myths. For future research, it would be valuable to deepen this analysis by integrating the hero's journey with complementary theoretical lenses, such as feminist narratology or genre studies. Furthermore, employing comparative analysis across a broader corpus of films or utilizing audience reception studies could yield more comprehensive insights into the evolving representation of the hero in modern cinema.

Reference

Bordwell, D., Bordwell, T., Thompson, K., & Smith, J. (2020). *film Art: An Introduction (12th Edition).* McGraw-Hill Education.

Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Princeton University Press.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.).* SAGE Publication.

Dewi, R. F., A, D. Y., Romadhani, O., & Melisa, V. (2023). The Archetypal Symbols and The Hero's Journey of Alice in Wonderland Film. *Surakarta English and Literature Journal*, *6*(1), 79-92. doi:10.52429/selju.v6i1.112

Khoury, Y. K. (2006). "To be or not to be" in "The Belly of the Whale": a reading of Joseph Campbell's "Modern Hero" hypothesis in Hamlet on Film. *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 120-129.

Klarer, M. (2023). *An Introduction to Literary Studies.* Routledge.

Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques (2nd rev. ed.).* New Age International Publishers.

Viega, M. (2017). From Orphan to Sage: The Hero's Journey as an Assessment Tool for Hip Hop Songs Created in Music Therapy. *Journal of Genius and Eminence*, 2(2), 78-87. doi: 10.18536/jge.2017.02.2.2.08

Vogler, C. (2020). *The writer's journey: Mythic structure for writers.* Michael Wiese Productions.

Wahyuni, S., Nurhayati, A., & Atmojo, E. R. (2016). the archetypes of hero's journey in paulo coelho's the alchemist. *Jurnal Prodi Bahsa dan Sastra Inggris*, 129.