



HERO'S JOURNEY IN ALEXANDRA OLIVA'S NOVEL *THE LAST ONE*

Fandi Kurniawan

English Study Program, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Andalas

fandik.student.sasingunand@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the theme of heroism in the novel *The Last One* by Alexandra Oliva. The study will focus on the main character and her journey to survival. The writer applies a qualitative research method in writing this study. In the analysis, the writer applies the Monomyth Cycle/Hero's Journey theory proposed by Joseph Campbell to analyze the story. The study determined whether the main character was considered a hero. The finding shows that the main character of *The Last One* novel went through all the stages of the hero's journey, which made her a hero character.

Keywords: *hero, Joseph Campbell, the monomyth*

INTRODUCTION

Heroism is one of the most common and oldest themes in literature. The theme appears in many mythology narratives and works of literature. From the oldest and classic works like *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, and *King Arthur*, to contemporary works like *Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Lord of The Rings*. Each writer put their idea of heroism into the story. However, there is still a similarity in how the theme is portrayed.

Experts have tried to define the concept of a hero. Philip Zimbardo (2011) explained, "key to heroism is a concern for other people in need—a concern to defend a moral cause, knowing there is a personal risk, done without expectation of reward" (para. 6). Fiske and Taylor (2008) explained there is no single defining feature of a hero, instead "the hero concept is made up of fuzzy sets of features organized around prototypical category members" (as cited in Cherry, 2020, para. 10). Similarly, Kinsella et al. define a hero by using a set of prototypical features, which are identified as "bravery, moral integrity, courageous, protecting, conviction, honest, altruistic, self-sacrificing, selfless, determined, saves, inspiring, and helpful" (2015, p. 117).

Others believe a hero can be defined using a systematic pattern in the story. In their research, Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals thought the Great Eight possessed eight traits. These traits are intelligence, strength, resilience, selflessness, caring, charisma, reliability, and inspiration (2015, para. 8).

Joseph Campbell also believed a hero could be defined using a systematic pattern. He proposed his idea of the Monomyth Cycle, or the Hero's Journey, in his book *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In his theory, he stated that a hero needs to complete some stages to be characterized as a hero. The stages he mentioned are Departure, Initiation, and Return (2004). These stages are also separated into smaller, more detailed sub-stages explaining the hero's journey.

Many researchers have applied the Hero's Journey theory in their studies of literary works. Du et al. study W.B. Yeats's Cuchulain play using the theory. They found that Cuchulain is entitled to all the qualities of a hero, and his live stage perfectly matches Campbell's heroic journey (2021, p. 186). Taheri and Jalaly (2013) also conclude the same finding in Homer's *Odyssey*. The story shows compatibility with the theory. The hero, Odysseus, completed all three stages and 12 sub-stages (p. 190). In Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*, the hero also followed Campbell's hero's journey, as proposed by Damayanti and Munjadin in their research (2020). Siddhartha's journey followed 12 stages out of the theory. Researchers also applied the theory to study other types of media. Firth (2002) analyzed the hero's journey in three 20th-century war films. The researcher concluded that the characters of those movies are "very much as Campbell described" (p. 9). Another study also revealed that the hero journey is used in video games: "The Last of Us and Beyond: Two Souls revealed that both games exemplified monomyth" (Plyler, 2014, p. 23). These findings show that Campbell's idea of a hero and his heroic journey is used across literature and narratives.

The novel *The Last One*, written by American writer Alexandra Oliva, may be one of the contemporary novels in which the main character possesses the properties of a hero. The main character, Zoo, is one of the participants in a survival game. In the story, she is portrayed as a knowledgeable and dependable woman. She dares to stand up for herself and help others on her way to survival. She joined the game to experience an adventure before committing herself to becoming a mother. She met people on her journey, faced danger, helped others, and, most importantly, completed her quest for survival. Based on those impressions, the writer assumed that Zoo might be qualified as a hero according to Campbell's theory of the Hero's Journey.

Hence, the writer would like to study the hero's journey of Zoo in Alexandra Oliva's novel *The Last One*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The author used a qualitative research method in conducting this research. Taylor et al. (2016) explained the qualitative research method as a method to "collect descriptive data, people's own words, and records of people's behavior" (p. 4). This research method is used to "understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions" (Pathak et al. 2013, para 2). The data produced by this research is delivered descriptively. As in this research, the primary source is Alexandra Oliva's novel *The Last One*, published in 2016. The writer will collect texts from the novel and analyze the collected texts using the literary theory used in this research. The writer has collected books and articles published earlier with a related topic for secondary sources. The secondary sources are used as a reference to help the writer write this research.

To analyze the heroism aspect of the text, *The Last One* novel by Alexandra Oliva, the writer used a theory from a scholar, Joseph Campbell, called the monomyth. The monomyth, also known as a hero's journey, is a theory under the mythological approach that studies the stages a hero goes through in literature. In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), Campbell explained three major stages a hero goes through in literature: Departure, Initiation, and Return. These stages are the ever-existing pattern that the hero needs to pass.

Departure

This is the first stage of Campbell's hero's journey. In this stage, the hero goes from his ordinary world to a new world for an adventure. In the ordinary world, the hero might suffer from lacking something, or something is taken from him (Winslow, 2022, para. 1). Those might be one of many reasons the hero separated himself from the ordinary world he lived in and went on an adventure. There are five sub-stages in this departure stage. The first one is The Call to Adventure. Campbell explained this stage: "Destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (2004, p. 53). The hero will receive a call to go to an unknown world and leave his ordinary world. The call leads to the second stage, Refusal of The Call, and the hero will refuse the call for specific reasons and may think the journey will not be necessary. The next stage is Supernatural Aid. In this stage, the hero meets with a protective figure (2004, p. 63). The fourth stage is The Crossing of The First Threshold. In this stage, the hero enters the adventure. He leaves his ordinary world

and faces the unknown. The last stage of Departure is The Belly of the Whale. In this stage, the hero realizes the danger and continues his adventure.

Initiation

This stage is the central part of the hero's journey. In this stage, the hero faces tests, tasks, problems, or challenges. This part of the journey consists of six sub-stages. The first one is The Road of Trial. In this stage, the hero faces many tasks to prove himself. The next stage is The Meeting with the Goddess. The hero will meet a woman who becomes a helper in his journey. The third stage is Woman as Temptress. The hero meets a temptation, often a woman, that leads him to abandon his quest. The fourth is Atonement with the Father. The hero has to face a "father-like figure." The hero may need to defeat it to continue his journey. The next stage is apotheosis, the point of realization. The hero achieved a greater understanding and became wiser. The last stage is The Ultimate Boon. The hero achieved his goal in this stage.

Return

This is the last stage of Campbell's hero's journey. This stage consists of six sub-stages. First Refusal of the Return: in this stage, the quest is already completed, and the enemy is defeated. Still, the hero refuses to return to his ordinary world for specific reasons. The next stage is The Magic Flight. The hero will return to his everyday life, but he may face some events on his way back. The third stage is Rescue from Without. In this stage, the hero receives an unexpected assistant that helps him to return to his ordinary life. The fourth stage is The Crossing of the Return Threshold. This refers to the same threshold on his Departure. On his way back, the hero must pass the same gate he had left before. After returning, he becomes Master of the Two Worlds. He completes the journey and can return to his ordinary life. Now, he can live in both a standard and heroic world. The sixth and last stage is Freedom to Live. The hero has the right to choose what kind of life he wants to live.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The findings show that, indeed, the main character of *The Last One* is a hero character. The results came after identifying the main character's journey to the hero's journey proposed by Campbell. The main character went through all stages of Departure, Initiation, and Return and ultimately completed her quest for survival.

Departure

This is the start of the journey of a hero. The hero who lives an ordinary life will start an adventure to achieve something. Zoo, a housewife, left her everyday life for an adventure. This change indicates the start of Zoo's journey as a hero.

The Call to Adventure

In the novel, Zoo and his husband had been trying to have a baby, but it was yet to come. They would love to put more effort into it, but Zoo seems unprepared. She told her husband she wanted "one last adventure" (ch 3). A trip she desires and has to fulfill before she devotes herself to becoming a mother. Her husband gave her the call to adventure; he suggested Zoo apply to the survival game. "He was the one who found the link and suggested I apply" (ch 3). This is the Zoo's call to adventure.

Refusal of The Call

Despite having the call to adventure from her husband, Zoo still has doubts about answering the call, and the reason is because of her fear. As she explained, she feared leaving her husband because she was too dependent on her husband and thought "any concession of independence is a betrayal to her identity" (ch 3).

Supernatural Aid

The supernatural Aid in a non-fantasy is most likely to be a protective figure rather than an actual supernatural being. For Zoo, the Aid came from one of the contestants, Tracker. He protects Zoo and goes all the way to share his knowledge on survival with Zoo so she can help herself when no one is around, like how he explains that "the blood and offal might draw in predators" and "things you should know about tracking" (ch 10), he also made food for Zoo and their group. Later in her journey, Zoo calls back to what Tracker had taught her, and it did help her out of the unwanted situations.

The Crossing of The First Threshold

The first threshold for Zoo in her journey was a part of herself that was holding her from moving forward. As mentioned, she feared her incapable self; she depended on her husband. This fear may also be why she is not a mother yet; she was afraid she could not care for her kid. Early on her journey, she had made up her heart.

"Kids. It's time for kids. Everyone I know with kids says it's never the same, that it changes your life, that you lose all your me time. I'm prepared for that; I'm okay with ceding some of my individuality and, yeah, my sanity. But before that happens, before I exchange my name for the title of Mom, I want one last adventure. That's why I'm

here, and that's why I'm not going to quit, no matter what." (ch 2) "The important feature is the contrast between the familiar world of light and the dark, unknown world of adventure" (ORIAS, para 6). Overcoming her fear and stepping out of her ordinary world, she crossed her first threshold.

The Belly of the Whale

In this stage, Zoo started to face some challenges. The game's first challenge, where she is challenged to find a package hidden by the crew (4), is the Belly of the Whale, the first out of many tests to the hero. She found it; she will move to the next test in her journey, and she made up her mind; she will not quit.

Initiation

Initiation is where most of the trials and tests happen. It is to determine whether a character is worthy and capable of being a hero, and Zoo successfully finished her test and progressed through her journey as a hero.

The Road of Trial

It is the start of the journey; the hero is facing the unknown world and has to complete many tasks, or, as the name suggests, trials, in this stage. The early trial for Zoo was to complete other challenges and prove herself capable. These challenges include collecting food, climbing, racing, and bear-tracking. Zoo completed these trials. Zoo proved capable in these trials and might complete her quest for survival.

The Meeting with the Goddess

Zoo's meeting with Brennan, a young boy, is The Meeting of the Goddess in the novel. It is different from the typical meeting, which is portrayed by a woman or a supernatural and higher being like a goddess. It may be due to the hero being a woman. In this stage, Campbell stated there would be a "mythical marriage" (Campbell, 2004, p 100) as their meeting will change the hero and also become "the final test of the talent of the hero" (Campbell, 2004, p 109). To perform the "mythical marriage," the "Goddess" has to be of the opposite sex, male, and as a test, because Zoo and her husband long for a child, the "Goddess" is in the form of a kid, a young boy named Brennan. This character will also help and guide Zoo to achieve her quest to survive.

Woman as Temptress

The temptation to stray from the quest comes from a woman because, as Campbell stated, "the woman is life" (Campbell, 2004, p 111). The same applies to *The Last One* novel, yet the subject changed similarly to meeting with the Goddess. The temptation for Zoo was a boy.

Zoo mentioned wanting to have a kid throughout the story. "Odd how my dreams are always about a baby boy," "dream my own dreams. I'm holding our blue-eyed baby", and "A baby. Our baby. A little boy with light blue eyes" (ch 11, 21). Brennan is the temptation to Zoo, who always wanted a kid. Brennan is the temptation and, as mentioned before, the final test of the hero's talent.

Atonement with the Father

Zoo facing the brothers is the implementation of this sub-stage. The brothers reflect Zoo's desire for a kid/family. She had to fight and defeat them, a family she always yearns for. It was the test: Will she be able to kill a family, something that she loved and always wanted? She proved capable of doing so; her will to achieve her quest was more significant than the test she faced. Zoo won the final battle against the antagonist.

Apotheosis

Zoo defeats the antagonists; it makes her realize that her world is different than it used to be. She finally got the grasp that everything she went through was real. However, despite her shock, she received a better understanding of the world. She may become wiser and better with the experience she collected on her journey.

Ultimate Boon

In this stage, the hero finishes the quest and may receive the prize for completing her journey. The thing she achieved after finishing her quest was the experience and a friend, Brennan. This may be her ultimate boon, which can save her if she decides to go on another journey.

Return

The final stage of the hero's journey is when Zoo has finished and is left with a choice for her future. With this stage, Zoo has become a hero character in the story.

Refusal of the Return

Zoo refused to return to her ordinary life because there was no place to return. She did not know whether her husband was alive or not, and the world was already in ruins, "I watch Brennan closely and try to identify birdcalls as we walk; anything not to think of my husband, because every time I do I think I might collapse" (ch 21).

The Magic Flight

"He's not there. There is no banner. It's just me here in this empty, gently cluttered room." (ch 21) Zoo tried to return to her ordinary life, to her home. However, her husband was not there; she could not return to ordinary life.

Rescue from Without

Feeling down after knowing her husband was not there, the hero, Zoo, needs help. As Campbell (2004) stated, "The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without." (192) Unexpected assistant will come and help the hero. In Zoo's case, three strangers, "An old black man with bright white hair, a youngish white woman, and another man, also youngish" (ch 25), came to help her and Brennan. They give Zoo and Brennan a place to live, "a barn that's been converted to a dorm and houses two dozen people." (ch 26)

The Crossing of the Return Threshold

Zoo needed to overcome the same threshold she had when she first departed. She feared being separated from her husband, yet now he is gone. He is nowhere to be found; she is alone now, just like she left for the game. However, now she realized that there should not be any fear within her. Only after her journey did she realize it.

"I was wrong. Wrong to leave, wrong to fear, wrong to lie, wrong to think that you couldn't make even raising a child possible. I'm sorry, I was wrong, I will forever be wrong—but I came back.

It can mean nothing now, but I did.

I came back." (ch 21)

She overcomes those fears again and comes back. The world has changed, but she is back to her own life.

Master of the Two Worlds

She now accepted her new world, and her ordinary life changed. It is not the world she knew, but this is the reality. She also changed after her journey. She is not like her past self, who fears many things. "A different world, a different life, a different me." (ch 26) She has accepted the change and is ready to start her life.

Freedom to Live

At the end of the story, Zoo is allowed to live her life how she wants to. She had gone through many things and finally achieved freedom. One thing on Zoo's mind now is Brennan; she wants to ensure her friend is safe and sound. "Because his future is more important than my past," she said (ch 26).

CONCLUSION

Alexandra Oliva's *The Last One* is a survival novel with a heroism theme. Oliva's heroism lies in Zoo's character; she has the courage, helps others, and finishes her quest for survival. She also overcomes her fear of being a maternal figure by protecting Brennan until the end of the story. The trait may not be seen on the surface, but on a closer look, the writer found a heroic aspect of the novel hidden under the structure of the narrative.

The main character, Zoo, went through all three stages of the hero's journey proposed by Joseph Campbell, along with all the sub-stages. The stages are Departure: (1) The Call to Adventure, (2) Refusal of The Call, (3) Supernatural Aid, (4) The Crossing of The First Threshold, (5) The Belly of the Whale; Initiation: (1) The Road of Trial, (2) The Meeting with the Goddess, (3) Woman as Temptress, (4) Atonement with the Father, (5) Apotheosis (6) The Ultimate Boon; and the last stage Return: (1) Refusal of the Return, (2) The Magic Flight, (3) Rescue from Without, (4) The Crossing of the Return Threshold, (5) Master of the Two Worlds, (6) Freedom to Live. Through this finding, the writer confirms the compatibility of Oliva's *The Last One* and Campbell's hero's journey.

REFERENCES

- Allison, S.T., Goethals, G.R. (2015 October, 15). *Our Definition of "Hero"*. Heroes: What They Do & Why We Need Them. [https://blog.richmond.edu/heroes/2015/10/15/our-definition-of- "hero"/](https://blog.richmond.edu/heroes/2015/10/15/our-definition-of-)
- Campbell, J. (2004). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces Commemorative Edition*. Princeton University Press.
- Cherry, Kendra. (2020, May 14). *The Psychology of Heroism*. Very well mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-psychology-of-heroism-2795905#citation-10>
- Damayanti, A., Munjid, A. (2020). The Significance of the Hero's Journey in Siddhartha's Character Development as Seen in Herman Hesse's Siddhartha. *Lexicon*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.22146/lexicon.v7i2.66573>
- Du, L., Xiao, Y., & Kang, S. (2021). The Heroic Journey in Yeats's Cuchulain Plays. *International Journal of Advanced Culture Technology*, 9(3), 181-187. <https://doi.org/10.17703/IJACT.2021.9.3.181>
- Frith, L. A. (2002). Defining American Heroes: Analyzing the Metamorphosis of the War Hero in Twentieth Century War Films Using Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey." *ERIC*. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED468663>
- Kinsella E.L., Ritchie T.D., & Igou E.R. (2015). Zeroing in on heroes: A prototype analysis of hero features. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(1), 114-127. <https://doi:10.1037/a0038463>
- Oliva, A. (2016). *The Last One*. Ballantine Books.

- ORIAS. *Monomyth: Hero's Journey Project*. Berkeley ORIAS.
<https://orias.berkeley.edu/resources-teachers/monomyth-heros-journey-project>
- Pathak, V., Jena, B., Kalra, S. (2013). Qualitative Research. *Perspective in Clinical Research*, 4(2). 192. DOI: 10.4103/2229-3485.115389
- Plyler, J. (2014). Video Games and the Hero's Journey. *The University of Central California*. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from
https://cah.ucf.edu/writingrhetoric/wpcontent/uploads/sites/27/2019/10/Stylus_5_1_Plyler.pdf
- Taheri, M., Jalaly, R. (2013). The Archetype of The Hero's Journey in Odyssey. *The International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 4(2), 181-190.
- Taylor, S.J., Bogdan, R., DeVault, M.L. (2016). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource 4th Edition*. Wiley.
- Winslow, K. (2022, August 23). *The Monomyth (The Hero's Journey): The Hero's Journey*. Grand Valley State University University Libraries.
<https://libguides.gvsu.edu/c.php?g=948085&p=6857311>
- Zimbardo, P. (2011, January 18). *What Makes a Hero?* Greater Good Magazine.
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_makes_a_hero