

HEROISM OF DESMOND DOSS IN 'HACKSAW RIDGE': A HERO'S JOURNEY

Farennisa Audy Vandia Putri¹, Ika Oktaria Cahyaningrum²
English Literary Program, Language and Letters Faculty, Surakarta University, Jawa
Tengah, Indonesia ^{1,2}
farennisaudy21@gmail.com ¹, ikaoktaria1@gmail.com²

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Abstract

Heroism is the pinnacle of greatness in human beings, heroes demonstrate the courage to act with moral fortitude and put the needs of others before their own or above their own needs. Many films use the theme of war heroism. Hacksaw Ridge, one of the heroic films which tells the story of Desmond Doss, the heroic warrior. Desmond Doss, the main character. This research aims to analyze how the heroism represented by Desmond and the Hero's Journey experienced by the protagonist. Hero experienced by the main character. The method used in this research This research is descriptive qualitative methods, while the sampling technique used is with purposive sampling method. Data analysis uses data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification. This research was analyzed with the elements of heroism and the Hero's Journey theory. The theory in question is Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory. The data found were taken by analyzing the scenes in the film which were then validated using theoretical triangulation. The data validation is carried out using theoretical triangulation. Based on research, the author found 32 data on heroic characteristics and 17 data on the Hero's Journey. From these data, it can be concluded that Desmond can be called a hero because he has 5 elements of heroism and he has passed the Hero's Journey phase.

Keywords: *heroism, hero's journey, desmond doss, joseph campbell*

Introduction

In everyday life, people interact with a variety of literary works across different genres, such as poetry, prose, drama, novels, and film. Literature is a broad form of human expression, conveying experiences, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs through language. Sumardjo & Saini (as cited in Nurachmana et al., 2020) describe literature as a medium that captures human expression, and "shastra" from Sanskrit indicates that literary works are guidelines for understanding these expressions. While poetry and novels often require deep interpretation, film uniquely communicates its messages visually and audibly. Beyond entertainment, films carry educational and moral messages, relying on intrinsic elements such as themes, plots, and character development, as well as extrinsic

elements like societal values, to deliver their messages effectively. It can be shown in sensitivity that is in the Bible belief, there is a teaching to care for others. Desmond Doss has the sensitivity to help fellow human beings by registering himself as a paramedic in a dangerous war situation. Love: compassion for fellow human beings is a teaching of Christianity, namely in Matthew that the Lord Jesus commanded to love one another, for that Desmond Doss did not hate his colleagues who had bullied him and instead he helped save their lives when they were critical on the battlefield. Sincerity: in the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventists, there is a command from God to "serve". This is shown by Desmond Doss that he is determined to serve God to fight to save humanity on the battlefield and serve his country so that he can fight the fight with Japan. Sacrifice and Patience: in one scene, Desmond knows that God does not allow fellow human beings to kill and hurt each other. In the past, Desmond almost killed his father with a firearm because he had an argument with his mother. Then he regretted it and promised God not to hold a firearm until the war came. Unity: as a devout Christian, he believes that all humans are God's creations and must create a bond of love for each other. He proved this through good cooperation with fellow co-workers on the battlefield, no matter how conflict there was before, he had a strong determination to be able to fight together.

Characterization plays a central role in films, especially in portraying heroism, where the protagonist often embodies moral virtues like courage, patience, and sacrifice. Heroes are depicted as selfless individuals who prioritize the well-being of others. According to Kinsella et al. (2019), heroism represents the pinnacle of human greatness, where individuals act with patience and courage, often at great personal sacrifice. This research focuses on analyzing heroism in films, particularly how intrinsic elements such as characterization and plot structure contribute to the depiction of heroism in action and war-themed films. By exploring these elements, the study seeks to offer insight into how films construct heroic ideals and how these portrayals influence societal perceptions of heroism. It can be seen in courage in making decisions during the war, Desmond's very unique courage is seen when he does not carry a single weapon when fighting the Japanese army. Having a goal to motivate caring for humanity: Desmond Doss shows a very strong heroic side with a high caring nature as can be seen in the film *Black Hawk Down*. The uniqueness that war films do not always kill or hurt. Desmond shows another side of existing war film, that the most important thing is courage and self-confidence. One interesting thing is how God's magical hand works to make the impossible possible. Highlighting the importance of the role of paramedics in the world of war. Usually in war films it shows how the character fights physically, weapons, or destroys an enemy barricade. However, this film shows how the position of paramedics is very vital because without these officers, soldiers who are injured or even disabled will no longer be able to meet their families. Doss' actions in providing morphine and assistance in the form of bandages are shown repetitively so that filmgoers will be treated to the reality of how a war paramedic works on the battlefield.

The film *Hacksaw Ridge* provides a vivid example of heroism during World War II, focusing on the life of Desmond Doss, a devout Christian who refused to bear arms but demonstrated extraordinary bravery as a medic. Directed by Mel Gibson, the film portrays Doss' journey from ridicule to admiration, as he saved 75 lives during the Battle of Okinawa without carrying a weapon. His heroism is highlighted by his sensitivity, sacrifice, and unwavering faith, which guided him through both physical and moral trials.

The study of Hacksaw Ridge seeks to deepen the understanding of heroism, offering a reflection on the traits and journey that define a hero, while contributing to the academic discussion on this important theme.

Method

The research employed a qualitative descriptive design to analyze the intrinsic elements of the film Hacksaw Ridge, focusing primarily on the characteristics of heroism and the Hero's Journey as portrayed through the main character, Desmond Doss. This approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of character traits, plot development, and the overarching themes of heroism. The design was justified by the need to interpret subjective elements such as character development and moral values, which are better suited to qualitative analysis.

Data Collection

According to (Sugiyono, 2013), data collection techniques can be done in a variety of ways such as observation, interviews, documentation, or a combination of the three methods can be used to help collect the data needed. According to Nasution in (Sugiyono, 2013) explained that observation is the cornerstone of all science. The only thing that scientists can work with is data, or facts about the real world gathered through observation. In order to clearly view both very distant (space objects) and very small (protons and electrons) things, data is often gathered with the use of extremely sophisticated instruments.

In this case, the writer collects data by observation through accessing film from the internet, then proceeds to search for conversations or the subtitle of the film conversations. The film shows the scene that runs along with the subtitle on the screen. This technique helps the writer to collect data by observing film scenes, expressions, and conversations in it by taking screenshots then analyzing the heroism characteristic and the hero's journey.

Data Analysis

All data obtained when conducting theoretical studies and searching for topics related to the research carried out certainly needs to be processed. The data obtained will be very large and varied, if this data is not processed properly, it can cause confusion, consume time, or may cause errors in research.

According to Miles and Huberman in (Hardani & Dkk, 2020), data analysis is divided into three activities that occur simultaneously: (1) data reduction; (2) data display; and (3) summary withdrawal.

1. Data Reduction

Data reduction is one way to summarize, focus, or classify data to be more detailed. At first the data can be very diverse, then this data is sorted and focused according to the research objectives.

2. Data Display

The data to be displayed is the data that will be the conclusion in the next step. In this study, the data will be displayed through dialogue and descriptions of the behavior in the main character in the film.

3. Conclusion and Verification

Determining a conclusion becomes the final part after the data has been processed and the results can answer the existing questions.

The writer watches the film and collect the data by note taking. Characteristic of hero and also the step of the heroic journey of the main character analyzed by Joseph Campbell's theory.

Validation of Data

Data that have been collected from the beginning and has been processed of course still requires a validation process to ensure the validity of the data obtained. In qualitative research researchers must obtain valid data for that in data collection the author needs to carry out data validity so that the data obtained is not invalid (defective) (Bachri, 2010).

In this study, data validation will be taken from the triangulation theory. According to (Hardani & Dkk, 2020), the triangulation data collection method combines various data sources and different data collection methods. With triangulation, researchers collect data while testing its validity. They do this by using various data collection methods and various data sources to test the validity of the data.

The writer uses triangulation theory for the study, as stated by Denzin that in theoretical triangulation one applies different theories and alternative theories to the data set. Specifically, one looks at the data through a theoretical lens and through conflicting theories. Another strategic approach is to let the raw data speak to the researcher to ascertain new theories. The point, as stated by Denzin is to expand one's theoretical lens through a process that expands one's knowledge of what is known (Fusch et al., 2018) which means the writer compared the data with various theories to enhance the understand of the study.

Research Procedure

The writer sets out the steps to be carried out in the implementation of this study, the steps are as follows:

1. Finding the scenes and the subtitles along with the scene.
2. Finding expressions, movements, conversations that show heroism characteristic in the scene and analyzing them.
3. Giving explanation and conclusion which shown from the scene.
4. Coding and data design which will be shown for example:
D.1/00:01:07/SEN
 - a. D.1: Datum 1
 - b. 00:01:07: Exact minutes of the scene
 - c. Sensitive: SEN
 - d. Sincere: SIN
 - e. Love: LOV
 - f. Sacrifice and Patience: SAP
 - g. Unity: UNI
5. For analyzing the hero's journey, giving a number of the data to analyze the hero's journey with exact minutes of the scene with coding as follows:
D.1/00:01:07
 - a. D1: Datum 1

- b. 00:01:07: Exact minutes of the scene
6. Finding the hero's journey step which shown on the scene.
7. Giving an explanation and conclusion.

Result And Discussion

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that there are five key elements that define heroism, as explained by Sugiyono in (A et al., 2017). These elements represent the core characteristics of a hero and serve as a framework for understanding heroic behavior in various contexts:

Sensitivity: Sensitivity, as described by McCosker et al. (2001), refers to the ability of a person to feel deeply and be emotionally affected by situations, particularly those that are personal, stressful, or sacred. A sensitive individual is quick to recognize the needs or emotions of others and is often moved to take action. This attribute allows heroes to be attuned to the suffering around them and motivates them to respond with empathy and compassion. Sensitivity is crucial in heroic actions as it prompts a deeper emotional connection with the struggles of others.

Sincerity: Sincerity in the context of heroism is about acting with pure intentions, without expecting anything in return. It means performing good deeds or selfless actions out of genuine care or moral duty rather than for recognition or reward. According to (A et al., 2017), true sincerity arises when individuals act freely, not out of coercion or pressure, but from an inner sense of goodness. A hero's actions must stem from a place of authenticity, where their commitment to helping others is driven solely by the desire to make a positive difference.

Love: Love, as highlighted by Adihartono (2023), is central to heroic behavior. It goes beyond romantic affection and encompasses a broader sense of care, empathy, and willingness to sacrifice for others. In heroic contexts, love is expressed through acts of compassion, altruism, and a deep connection to the well-being of others. This emotional element often drives heroes to go beyond their own self-interests, showing extraordinary levels of empathy and care for the people, causes, or communities they seek to protect.

Sacrifice and Patience: Sacrifice is one of the most evident traits of heroism. It involves giving up something valuable, such as time, comfort, or even one's life, for the greater good. Washburn (2022) notes that true sacrifice does not seek reward but is offered as an act of devotion or duty. Patience, as an accompanying trait, involves maintaining composure and resilience in the face of adversity. Hani et al. (2021) point out that patience is the ability to remain unaffected by negative emotions, which is critical for heroes as they often face challenging and prolonged struggles. Together, sacrifice and patience enable heroes to endure hardship while staying focused on their noble goals.

Unity: Unity is the hero's ability to bring people together, fostering a sense of solidarity and common purpose. As (A et al., 2017) suggests, unity involves creating cohesion within a group, encouraging shared values, and working towards a common goal. Heroes often emerge as figures who can unite diverse opinions, bridge divides, and inspire collective action. This sense of unity is essential in times of conflict or crisis, where heroes rally others to work together for the common good.

In summary, these five elements sensitivity, sincerity, love, sacrifice and patience, and unity form the foundation of heroic character. Each element contributes to a hero's

capacity to act selflessly, face adversity, and inspire others, ultimately defining the essence of heroism across various narratives and cultural contexts. In addition to the five key elements of heroism sensitivity, sincerity, love, sacrifice and patience, and unity there is also the concept of the hero's journey, a narrative structure introduced by Joseph Campbell (1968). The hero's journey describes the transformative process a hero undergoes as they venture into an unknown and often supernatural realm, face significant challenges, and return with newfound wisdom or gifts to share with humanity. According to Campbell (2004), this journey is divided into three major stages and a total of seventeen steps.

(Campbell, 2004) divided the hero's journey into three big stages and seventeen steps:

1. Departure

Departure is a call for someone who has moved his heart to move away from ordinary life and begin to explore his destiny as a hero. Departure stage divided into 5 steps:

- a. The call to Adventure: the mythological journey of the first stage, which we call the "call for adventure", suggests that destiny has called the hero and shifted its spiritual center from a grey society to an unknown place.
- b. The Refusal of The Call: the refusal of the call turns an adventure into something negative. Walls in boredom, hard work, or "culture", the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved (Campbell, 2004). In this case, the hero experiences fear or doubt in continuing his heroic journey.
- c. Supernatural Aid: for those who have not yet rejected the call, the first meeting of the heroic journey is the encounter with the protective figure (often a little old or old) who often helps in the adventure
- d. The Crossing of the First Threshold: according to (Campbell, 2004), the first step in which the hero begins his journey is the phase of crossing the first threshold. At this stage, the hero encounters the possibility to change the quality and reaction to adventure. This phase will also make the hero adapt to a new place.
- e. The Belly of the Whale: images of heroes crossing the magic threshold are inspired by images as the belly of the whale. Heroes like being immersed in something unknown and feeling dead.

2. Initiation

The next stage of the journey is initiation. Initiation lead after crossing the threshold, the hero enters curiously fluid, ambiguous dream world where he must overcome a series of obstacles. There are six steps following this stage

- a. The Road of Trials: a guidance, amulets, and covert operatives of the supernatural assistant he encountered prior to entering this area provide the hero with covert assistance. Alternatively, it could be that he learns here, for the first time, that a benevolent force is assisting him on his extraordinary journey everywhere.
- b. The Meeting with the Goddess: One typical representation of the ultimate journey, once all obstacles and ogres have been conquered, is a mystical marriage. Woman is the guide to the sublime acme of sensuous adventure. This states that hero found a woman who has a same mission for heroism.
- c. Woman as the Temptress: The hero's trials, which served as a warm-up for his final experience and action, were symbolic of the epiphanies that enabled his consciousness to expand and become strong enough to withstand the full control of the mother-destroyer, his unavoidable bride.

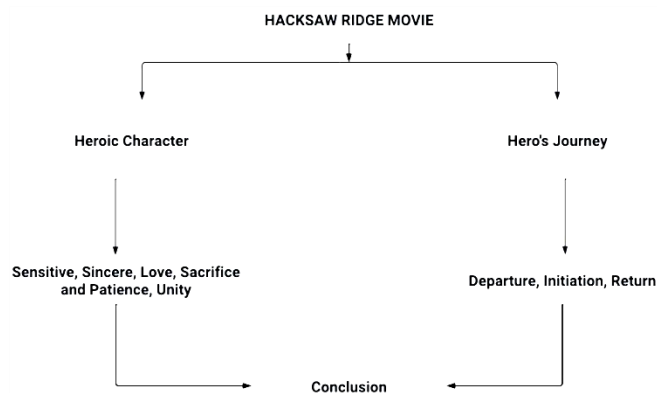
- d. Atonement with the father: At this stage, the hero meets with good or wise spiritual stages. The blessings from The God gives the hero powers, so the hero may have to defeat him to pass this stage.
- e. Apotheosis: with the multitude of prayer extended to the God, the hero breaks the threshold that now opens emptiness and limitation into an enlightenment journey.
- f. The Ultimate Boon: the ultimate boon point in the story where the hero has overcome all obstacles. After passed so many doubts, afraid, and challenges hero find the glory after his sacrifice.

3. Return

The last stages of the hero's journey is return. According to (Campbell, 2004), return means the hero has passed the trials from the journey's quest and achieved the victory, which the only left is to go back home with success and gifts (Satria, 2022). There are six steps of return

- a. Refusal of the Return: When the heroes have finished their journey, they need time to begin a life of freedom, but there's a refusal.
- b. The Magic Flight: If the hero in his victory, then asked to return to the world with miraculously.
- c. Rescue from Without: stated by Campbell that the hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by assistance from without.
- d. The Crossing of the Return Threshold: the hero adventures out of the land and finish his journey.
- e. Master of the Two Worlds: a hero will be at ease enough to exist in both the ordinary and hero worlds once he has realized his greater self.
- f. Freedom to Live: The battlefield is a symbol of life, where each creature lives on the other's death. The awareness of the inevitable guilt in life can be so painful that in some cases a hero can refuse to continue that journey. The hero can choose to get their freedom.

By sorting the dialogue and scenes in the film. Then, the writer analyzes the character of heroism through Sensitive, Sincere, Love, Sacrifice and Patience, and Unity. Furthermore, the writer identifies the step of the main character experienced his heroic journey by Joseph Campbell theory. In the end, the writer will make conclusions from the data that has been obtained.



Picture 1. Research Map

From the data analysis technique carried out on the film Hacksaw Ridge, the writer found 32 data of heroism characteristic and 17 data of Hero's Journey were found. The total data obtained is 49 data which presented in the following in table

Tabel 1. Research Finding

Data	Element of Heroism					Hero's Journey		
	SEN	SIN	LOV	SAP	UNI	Departure	Initiation	Return
00:07:07/SEN	V							
00:08:50/SEN&LO V	V		v					
00:09:42/LOV			v					
00:09:59/SEN & SAP	V			v				
00:10:48/SEN	V					V		
00:20:07						V		
00:23:09						V		
00:26:01/SEN	V							
00:28:18						V		
00:37:43						V		
00:40:01/SIN		V						
00:44:17/SIN & SAP		V		v			v	
00:52:52							v	
58:45							v	
01:00:13/LOV & SAP			v	v				
01:07:18/UNI					v			
01:13:36							v	
01.13.53/SAP				v				
01.16.49/LOV & UNI			v		v			
01:24:20							v	
01:27:10/SIN & LOV		V	v					
01.31.38							v	
01:36:00/LOV & SAP			v	v				
01:38:44/LOV			v					
01:40:07/SAP & UNI				v	v			
01:42:06/SAP & UNI				v	v		v	
01:48:23							v	
01:51:46/SIN & SAP		V		v				
01:56:56/SAP & UNI				v	v			
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Data	Element of Heroism					Hero's Journey			
	SEN	SIN	LOV	SAP	UNI	Departure	Initiation	Return	
01:58:18 /LOV & UNI			v		v				
01:58:56								v	
02:02:30								v	
02:05:45								v	
02:07:01								v	
Amount of the Data	5	4	8	9	6	5	8	4	
Element of Heroism found in the film								32	
Hero's Journey data found in the film								17	

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, Desmond Doss, the main character in *Hacksaw Ridge*, can be regarded as a hero due to his embodiment of key heroic traits such as sensitivity, sincerity, love, sacrifice, patience, and unity, which guided his actions in saving lives during World War II. Doss' journey aligns with Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, which consists of the three major stages—Departure, Initiation, and Return. Although Doss did not experience all 17 steps of the Hero's Journey, he successfully passed through the essential stages, demonstrating the typical heroic transformation. His sensitivity is evident in his quick response to help others, his sincerity and love are reflected in his forgiving nature, and his sacrifice and patience are displayed in his perseverance under harsh conditions. Furthermore, his unity with fellow soldiers contributed to their victory. Overall, Doss' journey and character fulfill both the personal and universal aspects of heroism as described in Campbell's theory.

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