
HEROISM OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE MOVIE *PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH* (2022)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah tokoh utama dalam film Puss in Boots: The Last Wish dapat dianggap sebagai pahlawan dengan menganalisis perjalanannya menggunakan teori Hero's Journey dari Joseph Campbell. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan menganalisis monolog, dialog, dan adegan-adegan penting dalam film untuk mengidentifikasi tahapan-tahapan dalam perjalanan sang pahlawan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perkembangan karakter Puss sejalan dengan perjalanan yang ia lalui dalam cerita, di mana ia berhasil menyelesaikan 12 dari 17 tahap Hero's Journey. Tahapan ini meliputi Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, Crossing of the First Threshold, Road of Trials, Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, The Ultimate Boon, The Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, dan Freedom to Live. Meskipun tidak semua tahap terpenuhi, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perjalanan Puss tetap mengikuti struktur perjalanan pahlawan, dan perkembangan pribadinya sepanjang cerita semakin menguatkan perannya sebagai sosok heroik dalam film tersebut.

Kata kunci: *Kepahlawanan, Perjalanan Pahlawan, Perkembangan Karakter*

Abstract

This study aims to explore whether the main character in the movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* can be considered a hero by analyzing his journey through Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method, examining monologues, dialogues, and key scenes from the movie to identify the stages of the hero's journey. The findings show that Puss's character development aligns with his journey in the story, as he completes 12 out of the 17 stages of the Hero's Journey. These include Refusal of the Call, Supernatural Aid, Crossing of the First Threshold, Road of Trials, Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as Temptress, Atonement with the Father, Apotheosis, The Ultimate Boon, The Magic Flight, Rescue from Without, and Freedom to Live. Although not every stage is fulfilled, the results indicate that Puss's journey still follows the hero's journey structure, and his personal growth throughout the story reinforces his role as a heroic figure in the movie.

Keywords: Heroism, Hero's Journey, Character Development

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an imaginative art form that utilizes language in a unique and creative way (Wellek & Warren, 1963, p. 11). Over time, technological developments have also expanded the scope of literature, including visual media such as movies, also known as films. Films are now considered not only as entertainment but also as a form of narrative that is on par with literature because both present stories, characters, settings, and themes. Literature is conveyed through words, while films are conveyed through sound and images. Although different in their medium of delivery, both still aim to create an aesthetic experience for their audience (Yu, 2020, p. 1005). Because of its ability to convey moral messages and life values narratively, the film is a very effective medium for raising universal themes, one of which is the theme of heroism.

Heroism is a common theme in children's films, particularly in the adventure genre, where brave main characters undertake heroic actions that inspire young audiences. Campbell and Moyers (2011, p. 123) state that "someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself" is worthy of being called a hero, indicating that heroism occurs when someone is willing to sacrifice for a noble cause without expecting anything in return. In other words, a hero is an individual who stands out for his courage and determination in the face of great challenges. At the same time, heroism refers to the attitudes or actions that make someone worthy of being considered a hero.

Heroes often follow the pattern of the Hero's Journey, a popular framework for describing how a hero overcomes obstacles and achieves their goal. As a result, heroism and the Hero's Journey are closely connected since the Hero's Journey itself serves as a framework that maps out the hero's path through challenges and toward achievement. One of the most well-known theories that explain this pattern is the monomyth, also known as the Hero's Journey, first introduced by Joseph Campbell in 1949. In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell (2004, p. 28) describes the hero's journey as a process of personal growth, represented by three main parts in a rite of passage: separation, initiation, and return. These three parts are further broken down into 17 stages that make up the complete structure of the hero's journey. They are:

- Call to Adventure is when the hero is called to leave his old life and journey to a challenging and uncertain condition.

- Refusal of the Call is the stage where the hero refuses or hesitates to embark on the adventure offered to them. Refusal is usually caused by fear, attachment to comfort, or not being ready for the unknown.
- Supernatural Aid is when the hero receives help or assistance from a protective figure, typically an old sage or a supernatural entity. Depending on the story, the help might be through a magic sword, a talisman, or advice that enables the hero to make progress on his journey.
- The Crossing of the Threshold is the stage where the hero leaves his familiar world and crosses the threshold into an area of difficulties and dangers.
- The Belly of the Whale is the stage where the hero completely crosses the world of adventure and leaves the old life behind.
- The Road of Trials is a stage in the hero's journey where they face tests and challenges after entering an unknown world.
- The Meeting with the Goddess stage represents the hero's meeting with a figure who embodies wisdom, insight, and perfection.
- Woman as the Temptress is the stage where the hero is confronted with temptations that threaten his goal or journey.
- The Atonement with the Father occurs when the hero confronts an authority figure or father figure who holds great power and often represents the greatest challenge on their journey.
- The Apotheosis stage is where the hero experiences enlightenment or a deep understanding of the universe, self, and the meaning of life.
- The Ultimate Boon refers to the ultimate prize or most outstanding achievement the hero gains due to his journey.
- Refusal of the Return refers to the stage where the hero is reluctant or refuses to return to the ordinary world after achieving their outstanding achievement or ultimate reward.
- The Magic Flight refers to the stage where the hero experiences a tense escape or chase after stealing the ultimate prize or achieving their goal.
- Rescue from Without is a stage in the hero's journey where the hero may need help to return to his home world after a transformative adventure
- The Crossing of the Return Threshold stage of the hero's journey is when the hero must return from his adventure in the supernatural or mystical world to the ordinary world.

- Master of Two Worlds describes when the hero successfully balances the world of adventure and the real world.
- The Freedom to Live stage is the final stage in the hero's journey, in which the hero gains insight into life and fully accepts reality.

This theory is not only applicable to ancient mythological stories and legends but is also widely used in modern narratives, including movies. Therefore, to understand how the concept of the Hero's Journey is applied in popular media, it is essential to examine how heroes are portrayed in movies. Indeed, heroism in movies has always been an interesting topic to discuss. Heroes in movies have long been an inspiration to many viewers, including both adults and children. They provide examples of courage and enthusiasm in fighting for what is good. Therefore, this study is interested in analyzing heroism in the children's movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*, which was released in 2022. Relevance: This movie was chosen because its theme is related to heroism, it falls under the adventure genre, and the main character is a hero.

Through this movie, the question arises whether the journey pattern of the main character, who is a cat, is similar to the pattern experienced by other heroes in stories in general. To answer this, this study employs the Hero's Journey theory, developed by Joseph Campbell, as a theoretical framework. This theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the hero's journey pattern and has been widely applied in narrative analysis. With this approach, this study aims to see whether the main character in the movie can be considered a hero based on his journey pattern.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. As defined by Taylor et al. (2015, p. 7), qualitative research methods produce descriptive data in written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. Meanwhile, according to Strauss and Corbin (2007, p. 4), qualitative research is a type of research that does not rely on mathematical calculations or statistical calculations to conclude. However, the information collected can be calculated and expressed numerically, just like a census. Creswell (2013, p. 45) mentions that this method involves collecting data through observation, interviews, and documents and analyzing the data to identify patterns, themes, and categories. This research also includes collecting data in a natural situation where participants face the issue or problem being studied. Thus, it can be concluded that qualitative research is an approach that produces

descriptive data through observation, interviews, and document analysis without relying on statistical procedures. This method allows an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study through a detailed description of the experiences and words of the people involved.

Object of the Study

This study uses the movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* as the research object or data. *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* is an American computer-animated adventure comedy movie produced by DreamWorks Animation and distributed by Universal Pictures in 2022. This movie is a sequel to the first movie, *Puss in Boots* (2011), and a *Shrek* franchise spin-off. In this second movie, Puss in Boots realizes that his love for adventure has cost him eight of his nine lives. He then embarks on an epic journey to regain them by seeking the mystical Last Wish (IMDb, n.d).

Data Collection

According to Kabir (2016, p. 202), Data collection is gathering and assessing information about the topic to be studied using structured and systematic methods. The data in this study were taken from the animated movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*. The focus of the analysis lies in identifying the stages of the Hero's Journey that the main character experiences throughout the movie. Several steps were taken to collect and select relevant data for this study. First, watch the movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* to understand the storyline and overall context. Second, re-watching the film with English subtitles while noting important scenes, monologues, and dialogues that are relevant to the stages in Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory (1949). Third, the recorded data were analyzed and selected based on the stages of the Hero's Journey theory and then used as the basis for the analysis process in the discussion section.

Data Analysis

After collecting all the necessary data, the next step is to analyze it to explore the results of this study. According to Nugrahani (2014, p. 169), data analysis is an important part of the scientific method because it helps to solve research problems. In this study, data analysis was conducted through several stages. First, the collected data is re-examined to ensure that each selected scene, monologue, and dialogue is appropriate and relevant for analysis. Next, the data is analyzed by explaining how the Hero's Journey stages are reflected in the selected scenes based on Joseph Campbell's

theory. Finally, the results of the analysis are interpreted into a conclusion that summarizes the main findings of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part describes the stages of the Hero's Journey experienced by the main character in the movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*. Based on the analysis, 12 stages were found that are reflected through monologues, dialogues, and key scenes in the film. Each stage is explained to show how the main character undergoes changes and developments throughout his journey.

1. Refusal of the Call

Datum 10



Scene at 00:16:30 (Puss run away from The Wolf)

The scene above shows how Puss tried to avoid the journey he was supposed to take. After losing the fight against The Wolf, Puss immediately ran away from the pub in a panic, even leaving his sword behind. He was terrified because, for the first time, he realized that his life was really in danger. If he forced himself to fight back, he could lose his last life. The decision to run away reflected his rejection of the call to change and face challenges. He chose to hide rather than continue his journey, which confirms that he was at the Refusal of the Call stage of his hero's journey.

2. Supernatural Aid

Datum 13

*“Robbing Big Jack Horner... Very risky. **But that wish could get me my lives back. And my life back. Goodbye, Pickles!**”*

After running away, Puss hides in a cat shelter. There, he overheard a conversation between Goldi and The Bears about a magic star that was believed to grant wishes. His monologue, *“that wish could get me my life back. And my life back,”* shows that the *Wishing Star* symbolizes the hope of regaining his eight lost lives and restoring his identity as a hero. In this case, the *Wishing Star* acts as a Supernatural Aid because its presence can

restore Puss' confidence and spirit. The aid given by this *Wishing Star* gave him a reason to get up and continue his journey again.

3. The Crossing of the First Threshold

Datum 15



Scene at 00:40:39 (Puss puts his hand into the dark barrier.)

When Puss and his friends reach the edge of the forest, they are faced with a dark barrier that separates their world from the deepest parts of the forest. Then, Puss's decision to step through this barrier, as seen in the scene above, marks The Crossing of the First Threshold stage in his journey. Because it symbolizes his departure from his comfort zone and his entry into an uncertain world, it shows his commitment to embark on his heroic journey.

4. The Road of Trials

Datum 17



Scene at 00:45:57 (Puss and Kitty trapped by giant flowers)

After deciding to enter the dark barrier, Puss and his friends begin a series of journeys filled with various challenges. One of the initial challenges in Puss's journey appears when he and his friends arrive at a flower garden. At first glance, the garden looks ordinary. However, the flowers suddenly grow into giants and begin to wrap around them, preventing them from continuing their journey. This scene reflects the stage of The Road of Trials, which is the phase where the hero begins to face various trials and obstacles that test his resolve in the journey. Like this obstacle, Puss must overcome it in order to continue his journey as a hero.

5. The Meeting with the Goddess

Datum 22

“Well, it's okay to be afraid.”

During his journey, Puss met Perrito, a little dog from the shelter who faithfully followed him. Without realizing it, Perrito's presence provides emotional support for Puss. Perrito helped him face the past and motivated him to keep going. The above statement emerges from the dialog between Puss and Perrito when Puss experiences a panic attack due to the presence of The Wolf. Puss finally reveals that he is afraid, and then Perrito responds gently, *“Well, it's okay to be afraid.”* Throughout his life, Puss has always thought of fear as something to be suppressed and hidden. However, Perrito was the first to assure him that fear was a normal response. Thus, Perrito's role in Puss's journey is undeniably that of a goddess in the hero's journey.

6. Woman as the Temptress

Datum 25



Scene at 01:12:38 (Puss sings joyfully with his past selves)

The temptation in Puss' journey occurs when he becomes trapped in his past memories in the *Cave of Lost Souls*. In this cave, Puss sees apparitions of his old life. As seen in the scene above, Puss was carried away by the nostalgic atmosphere and began to dance and sing with eight versions of his past life. In fact, he had previously intended to exit the cave and return to his friends immediately. However, this temptation made Puss complacent, and he delayed his intention until he finally lost focus on his main goal.

7. Atonement with the Father

Datum 26

“Death. And I don't mean it metaphorically or rhetorically or poetically or theoretically or in any other fancy way. I'm Death, straight up. And I've come for you, Puss in Boots.”

In the above statement, it is clear that the Wolf occupies the position of 'Father' or highest authority for Puss. Unlike other enemies, he is the only opponent that cannot be

defeated, making Puss forced to run to save his life. Puss's fear becomes even more accurate when the Wolf finally reveals his identity by saying, ***“I am Death, straight up. And I've come for you, Puss in Boots.”*** The Wolf explicitly states that he is 'Death' and shows that his authority is beyond Puss's control. Puss, who is used to facing every challenge with courage and confidence, is now faced with something he cannot defeat. No matter his power or legend, he cannot escape death. Plus, the fact that the Wolf directly states his goal to take Puss's life further deepens the fear he feels. Therefore, in this context, 'Death' can be considered as a 'Father' figure, representing the ultimate power that Puss must face or reconcile within his journey.

8. Apotheosis

Datum 31

“Come on! Pick it up. I know I can never defeat you, lobo, but I will never stop fighting for this life.”

Puss' statement above reflects the Apotheosis stage of the Hero's Journey, where he achieves enlightenment by understanding that death is not something to be defeated but rather a natural part of life that must be accepted. As he says to The Wolf, ***“I know I'll never beat you, lobo, but I'll never stop fighting for this life.”*** Puss, who has reached this stage, is no longer fighting to prove himself as an immortal being because he realizes that he is not a perfect hero. However, this time, he is not fighting to avoid death but to live the life he has truly. This transformation is proof that Puss has experienced character development in his journey as a hero, where he changed from someone who was afraid of losing his life to someone who appreciates life wholeheartedly.

9. The Ultimate Boon

Datum 33



Scene at 01:27:10 (Puss breathes a sigh of relief as the Wolf stops chasing him)

The scene above shows Puss sighing in relief after the Wolf acknowledged his changes and decided to stop chasing him. This scene marks the achievement of The Ultimate Boon

stage. This moment symbolizes Puss's highest achievement, which is freedom from the threat of death that persists to haunt him throughout his journey. The Wolf, previously a symbol of Puss's fear, finally accepts reality and chooses to leave. The Ultimate Boon that Puss achieved was not a physical gift but the inner peace he had been searching for all this time. Therefore, although not material, this moment is an important achievement in his heroic journey and represents The Ultimate Boon stage.

10. The Magic Flight

Datum 34



Scene at 01:28:27 (Giant Jack Horner tries to grab the map from Puss and Kitty)

In the scene above, Puss experiences The Magic Flight stage of the Hero's Journey. After defeating the highest authority, Puss faces a new threat from Jack, who turns into a giant. In this situation, Puss must face this new challenge and use all the skills and help he has acquired during the adventure to overcome the threat and escape safely with his friends. The scene at this stage highlights the challenging dramatic escape, where the heroes must protect their prize from a powerful enemy, while also showing the transformation of Puss, who must now face the threat with the wisdom and courage he has gained during the journey.

11. Rescue from Without

Datum 36



Scene at 01:29:45 (Puss, Kitty, and Goldi prepare to pull the map, splitting it into three pieces)

The scene above shows the moment Puss, assisted by his friends, manages to defeat Jack by tearing the map into three pieces. This scene highlights the essence of the Rescue from Without stage, where the heroes receive assistance from outside to continue and

complete their journey successfully. The help from Perrito, Kitty, and Goldi shows the importance of cooperation, sacrifice, and support from friends and former enemies in overcoming obstacles. This emphasizes that outside help, even from unexpected sources, is crucial to the hero's success in his adventure.

12. Freedom To Live

Datum 38

“Off to find new adventures and to see some old friends”

Datum 38 appears in the final scene when Puss, Kitty, and Perrito board the ship and set sail, which represents the Freedom to Live stage of Puss' hero's journey. In this scene, Puss has achieved emotional freedom. He is no longer haunted by the fears or inner conflicts that once overshadowed him. As Puss answers Perrito above, *“to find new adventures and meet some old friends.”* This shows that Puss is now living without fear and is ready to face the future with renewed vigor. By reaching this stage, it indicates that Puss is no longer isolated or self-centered but has found meaning in relationships and cooperation with others. This freedom allows him to enjoy life to the fullest, exploring the world with his friends without worry, making him a symbol of the 'Freedom to Live' stage.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study aims to identify the Hero's Journey pattern experienced by the main character in the movie *Puss in Boots: The Last Wish*. The results of the analysis show that the main character successfully goes through 12 of the 17 stages in the hero's journey structure developed by Joseph Campbell. The twelve stages are spread across three main parts of the Hero's Journey, namely departure, initiation, and return. Initially, Puss acts bravely without considering the consequences and ignoring his fears and vulnerabilities. Throughout his journey, he learns to accept these fears as part of life. He realizes that being a hero involves more than just glory. It requires responsibility, friendship, and an understanding of one's limitations. Ultimately, Puss accepts death as a natural part of life and learns to appreciate every moment of his last life. This shows that Puss meets the criteria of a hero because his journey reflects important stages in the hero's journey while also displaying a dimension of heroism accompanied by character development throughout the process.

Suggestion

This study found that the movie's main character did not go through all stages of the hero's journey. This shows that not all works of fiction follow this pattern completely. Therefore, this study suggests that further studies consider analyzing characters from other works such as novels, television series, or serial comics, which provide a more extended narrative space and allow for deeper exploration of the stages of the hero's journey. In addition, researchers who still want to study this movie should use a different hero's journey theory approach. Since this theory has several versions and approaches, using other theories can open up new perspectives, produce more diverse analyses, and reveal narrative aspects that may not have been seen in this study. Finally, this study is hoped to be useful for readers in understanding the theme of heroism in the story and can be a reference for those interested in studying heroism in movie analysis.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nariah is an English Literature student at Universitas Bangka Belitung. She was born in Bangka Tengah on August 28, 2001. Her friends usually call her Nana. She loves to read, especially fiction books, and also enjoys watching films of the same genre. She often talks about her favorite stories on social media.

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