Heroes and Heroines: A Modern Approach to the Epic Journey

Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" has been a dominant pattern for addressing epics in terms of both plot and character for decades. Much more recently, popular fiction writer Gail Carriger published a new approach to this idea that addresses both questions of gender and identity, and the role that community plays in epic journeys. Carriger's concept of the 'hero's journey' being that of solitude and the 'heroine's' as a team effort provides some intriguing new options for looking at Greek and Roman epic as stories, and representations of heroism and gender. Applying this lens to *The Illiad* results in suggesting that Achilles follows the heroine's path as he is often in need of a companion's assistance and rarely completely by himself; most any female character, as well as Hector, follow the hero's path. Similarly in *The Aeneid*, Aeneas is frequently in company during crucial moments of his journey, meaning he follows the heroine's path; Dido on the other hand follows the journey of the hero.

Gender and gendering actions have been applied to works of Homer and Virgil often in the cultural or social senses. What Carriger's theory does is pivot the focus onto the presence of community or support within the journey. Through this lens, it is more often the female characters who are represented largely on their own, while the men have plenty of community around them. Even when a woman like Helen, Dido, Penelope, or Andromache is surrounded by people, she is often represented as very much alone to face the challenges before her. Aeneas, Achilles, and Odysseus are surrounded by their communities and largely supported by them; Hector is an interesting exception to this trend.

Abandonment, by the gods or partner, seems to be the shared feature between Hector and the epic women. While "separation" is a feature in Campbell's classic hero's journey, and most

of the central male characters do have some alone time, the emphasis on community as the determining factor presents an interesting way to address both the ancient concepts as well as our own. Carriger's distinctions between journey types are based on contemporary popular culture, which she is open about and is demonstrably the case in the majority of her analyses. Not only does the approach have some interesting applications to the original ancient epics, it also provides a way to tie them in with their contemporary versions like the films *Troy* or *O Brother Where Art Thou?*. While Brad Pitt's Achilles is solitary, this representation comes off more as a self-imposed attitude as opposed to actually being alone, and George Clooney's Ulysses Everett McGill has his two fellow convicts with him for nearly the entirety of their adventure.

Hector's similarity to Dido, Briseis, Penelope, in being surrounded by people yet being alone in their epic struggles, highlights their shared feature of abandonment by those who are supposed to protect them, be it the gods or men. This feature also comes up in several epic retellings or adaptations based on the perspective of the women, including *Circe* by Madeline Miller and *Lavinia* by Ursula K. LeGuin. With the exception of Briseis, this group also attempts to maintain some degree of power or control over their own lives, and succeed for a time. Penelope actually manages to maintain tenuous control with her deceptions of the suitors until Odysseus gets home to solve that problem permanently. Hector and Dido are abandoned by their gods, which results in their deaths.

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