

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Literature is a profound form of human expression that provides a window into the human condition, offering insights into the complexities of the world and the mind. As T.S. Eliot suggests in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), literature is not merely a reflection of personal experience but is deeply connected to the collective cultural tradition, where each new work builds upon the past. In this way, literature serves as both a mirror and a framework for understanding human society and its evolution. One of the most compelling features of literature is its ability to craft compelling narratives where readers can become deeply immersed in the lives of characters who embody struggles, triumphs, and personal transformations. These narratives often follow certain patterns, one of the most notable being the Hero’s Journey, a concept that resonates in many stories across time and cultures. As Reynolds (2023) points out, the Hero’s Journey not only provides a recognizable framework but also serves as an important catalyst for character development and transformation, ultimately shaping the way the hero evolves throughout their story. In particular, novels are a prominent medium where such narratives unfold, captivating readers with rich stories and dynamic characters.

Novels are one of the most widely recognized forms of literature, captivating readers with rich narratives and dynamic characters. As one of the oldest and most diverse genres, novels have evolved over centuries to accommodate the complexities of modern society, often becoming a vehicle for social commentary,

personal introspection, or philosophical exploration. Through characters, plots, and settings, novels provide a stage for authors to explore universal themes such as identity, morality, and the pursuit of meaning. One such theme, evident in numerous novels, is the Hero's Journey, a narrative structure that traces the protagonist's path through challenges, growth, and eventual transformation. This structure, initially outlined by Joseph Campbell in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2004), has become a template for analyzing many literary works, ranging from ancient myths to modern bestsellers.

This universal framework of the Hero's Journey is notably exemplified in modern literature, as seen in "The Poppy War" by R.F. Kuang, a gripping novel that intricately combines elements of historical fiction, fantasy, and psychological drama. The story follows Rin, a young woman from a poor family who aspires to break free from the limitations imposed on her by society and her gender. As Rin embarks on her journey, she faces numerous trials and challenges, reflecting the stages of the Hero's Journey. In this sense, the novel not only serves as an exploration of personal empowerment but also a reflection on the broader themes of war, identity, and self-discovery. By analyzing Rin's journey through the lens of Campbell's Hero's Journey, we can gain a deeper understanding of the novel's narrative structure and thematic depth.

R.F. Kuang, the author of "The Poppy War" is an emerging voice in contemporary literature whose works delve into the intersection of history, fantasy, and identity. Born in China and educated at both Georgetown University and the University of Cambridge, Kuang's diverse academic background in political

science and international relations heavily informs the political and historical depth of her writing. “The Poppy War” Kuang’s debut novel, has received widespread acclaim for its powerful portrayal of war and its impact on individuals, especially women. The novel’s success has cemented Kuang as a prominent author in speculative fiction, with subsequent works continuing to explore the themes of power, identity, and transformation. Her ability to weave complex narratives that blend historical and fantastical elements offers a fertile ground for exploring the Hero’s Journey in modern literature.

This exploration of the Hero’s Journey can be further understood through the lens of Myth Criticism, an approach that focuses on the exploration of universal themes and archetypes found across various myths and cultural stories. The use of mythological patterns in literature allows for a deeper connection between the reader and the story, as these elements transcend individual cultures and speak to shared human experiences. As Carl Jung famously theorized, archetypes are recurring symbols and motifs that appear in myths, dreams, and stories across different cultures, revealing the collective unconscious of humanity. Myth Criticism, when applied to literature, offers a framework

for understanding the deeper, often unconscious, forces that shape the characters’ actions and the overall narrative arc. Through this lens, the Hero’s Journey becomes not just a plot structure but a reflection of humanity’s shared psychological and spiritual journey. To further illuminate this, the Archetypal Approach, grounded in Jungian theory, provides a more specific framework for analyzing these universal patterns within individual narratives.

Archetypal Approach draws from the work of Carl Jung, whose theories of archetypes and the collective unconscious have profoundly influenced literary criticism. In archetypal analysis, the focus is on identifying recurring themes, characters, and patterns that represent universal human experiences. According to Roberts and Zweig (2011), an archetypal approach to literature examines the presence of universal symbols and motifs that appear across different cultures and historical periods. This method is particularly useful for analyzing works that follow the Hero's Journey, as it allows scholars to trace the protagonist's journey through a series of familiar stages and interactions with key archetypes. In this research, "The Poppy War" is analyzed using Campbell's Hero's Journey theory (2004), focusing on the three main stages (separation, initiation, and return) while applying the archetypal approach to explore how these stages manifest in Rin's narrative.

Hero's Journey as conceptualized by Joseph Campbell (2004) remains a foundational theory in the study of narrative structure. According to Campbell, the Hero's Journey consists of three broad stages: separation, initiation, and return. The separation stage involves the hero's departure from the familiar world into the unknown, often signifying a break from their old identity or life. The initiation phase is where the hero undergoes trials, receiving guidance from mentors and confronting both external and internal obstacles. Finally, the return phase marks the hero's return to the ordinary world, but now as a changed individual, often bearing wisdom or a reward. These stages are integral to the development of the hero and are central to the narrative structure of many stories, including "The Poppy War"

where Rin's journey reflects each of these stages, providing a compelling narrative of self-discovery and empowerment.

An example from "The Poppy War" further illustrates the stages of the Hero's Journey as experienced by Rin. In the novel, Rin faces constant discrimination and mockery from her peers due to her dark skin, lack of status, and country accent. As quoted from the novel, "Rin was grateful for Kitay's loyalty, but was amazed by how cruel the other students could be. There was apparently no end of things about Rin to be mocked. It was annoying, but Rin was able to brush the taunts off—until her classmates started snickering every time she talked" (Kuang, 2018, p. 74). This moment is emblematic of the separation stage, where Rin is cast out by society and must confront the challenges of being an outsider. Later, Rin's journey continues with her encounters with mentors who recognize her potential, providing her with the validation and support she needs to grow stronger. As another quote reveals, "She found that she was fueled by praise from her masters. Praise meant that she had finally, finally received validation that she was not nothing" (Kuang, 2018, p. 109). This transformation is a pivotal part of her journey, as she begins to find her worth through the recognition of others, a key moment in her initiation phase. These examples demonstrate how the stages of Hero's Journey, separation and transformation, are clearly present in Rin's narrative.

In previous studies, similar applications of Campbell's Hero's Journey have been explored in contemporary literature. First article conducted an archetypal analysis on the hero's journey of Wade in "Ready Player One" novel (Wicaksono, 2020). The researchers tested whether Campbell's 12-heroic-stages of journey

appeared in the novel. Using qualitative design, they concluded that the novel's hero, Wade, went through completely the typical three heroic stages of the journey in order to achieve his reward dream and freedom to live, which was the last stage of his journey. Another research article also found similar narrative patterns of hero's journey in "The Nickel Boy" hero named Elwood (Hopkins, 2020). The novel's hero desired for racial equality in society, and he went through all three heroic stages of the journey in order to achieve it; departure, initiation, and return. Interestingly, the research found that the hero had achieved the equality only at the time and only at his surrounding, but not for the world. The research noticed how the hero's last stage instead hinted a new cycle of journey for other heroes he inspired. Both studies highlight the enduring relevance of Campbell's model in understanding character development and the universal themes that bind disparate literary works together.

The aim of this research is to analyze the presence of the Hero's Journey in "The Poppy War" by R.F. Kuang through the application of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey theory (2004). The analysis focuses on identifying the three main stages, separation, initiation, and return, as they unfold within the protagonist Rin's journey. The primary data source for this research is the novel "The Poppy War" which provides rich narrative material to explore these stages and their corresponding archetypes. By applying Campbell's theory, this study seeks to understand how Rin's journey reflects the universal patterns of the Hero's Journey and how it contributes to her personal growth and the broader themes of war, identity, and self-determination present in the novel. Ultimately, this research aims

to offer a deeper insight into the structure of “The Poppy War” and its alignment with the Hero’s Journey framework, as explored in the thesis titled “**Hero’s Journey In “The Poppy War” Novel by R. F. Kuang: Archetypal Approach.**”

1.2 Identification of the Problem

In general, there are five identified problems in this phenomenon. These problems are listed from general to specific.

1. The mythological creature found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
2. The woman archetype found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
3. The separation stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
4. The initiation stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
5. The return stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

From all of the problems identified previously, there are two problems that is planned to be analyzed in this research.

1. The separation stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
2. The initiation stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
3. The return stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

The research offers two formulations in order to get the right and expected answer after completing the analysis.

1. What are the stages of separation found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang?
2. What are stages of initiation in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang?
3. What are stages of return in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang?

1.5 Objective of the Research

This research has two objectives that are expected to appear after completing the research.

1. To expose the separation stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
2. To analyze the initiation stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.
3. To identify the return stages of the main character found in “The Poppy War” novel by R.F.Kuang.

1.6 Significance of the Research

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

The researcher acknowledges two theoretical significances after completing the research. The research result promises to give a better understanding and knowledge of archetypal phenomenon in literature.

1. The research gives contribution to theoretical knowledge on the usage of archetypal approach in literary analysis.

2. The research gives contribution to the in-depth information that would give a new meaning when reading “The Poppy War” novel and other similar literary works.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

The researcher acknowledges two practical significances after completing the research. The research result is promised to be applicable in a reality that demands practicality.

1. The research provides practical knowledge on the usage of archetypal approach in literary analysis.
2. The research contributes as a reference to researchers whose plan is to study hero’s journey in the novel using archetypal approach and whose plan is to study “The Poppy War” novel.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Myth Criticism : A literary theory that examines recurring mythological themes, archetypes, and symbols in literature. It is based on the idea that stories across different cultures share universal patterns that reflect the collective unconscious, as proposed by Carl Jung. This approach helps uncover deeper meanings in literature by identifying these common myths and symbols.

Archetypal Approach : Archetypal approach is a way to analyze literary works where it is found a similar or

typical patterns such as hero's journey, archetypes, images, elements, and symbols that also appears in any other literary works throughout various cultures and histories (Roberts & Zweig, 2011).

Hero's Journey : Hero's Journey comprises 3 main stages in which the hero goes through each and every struggling adventure step towards his desire or dreams (Campbell, 2004).