

The heroine's journey in literature

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The amazing journey—we've come a very long way from Elizabeth Bennett – 1813 to Lizbeth Salander – 2008.

Women's stories have long been stifled. Women weren't allowed to tell their own stories until recently.

- Sappho – Pope ordered her poems burned.
- George Eliot – pseudonym for Mary Ann Evans
- Currer Bell – pseudonym for Charlotte Bronte
- Virginia Woolf – refused admission to Oxbridge libraries because of her gender

Telling our stories empowers us.

- Establish our true identity
- Gain authority
- We see the truth insiders to the system (men) can't see. We have different truths.

Women refuse to be quiet

- Imprisoned by Anwar Sadat, Nawal El Saadawi sat in an Egyptian prison cell and wrote her memoirs with an eyebrow pencil borrowed from a prostitute on toilet paper.
- Taryn Davis lost her husband in Iraq and started a website/blog for war widows.
- In Mexico, despite death threats, Lydia Cacho exposed violence against women in her newspaper columns and in her book, *The Demons of Eden*.

Traditional weapons

Beauty, Lies, Helplessness, Nagging or wheedling, Being perfect housewife

Modern weapons

Intelligence and education, Meaningful work, Physical fitness, Spirituality, Computer skills, Networking, Knowing when to say yes and when to say no

The Journey Archetype

- Separation
 - Call to adventure
 - Crossing the threshold
- Transformation
 - Road of trials
 - Union of opposites
 - Face greatest fear
 - Gaining the ultimate boon
- Return
 - Retain and share what is learned
 - Master of two worlds (balance material and spiritual, inner and outer worlds)

Heroine's Quest

- An inner journey toward being fully integrated and balanced.
 - The male journey often has more “outward” components—slaying dragons, fighting drug dealers, physical battles.
 - Women's journeys more often center around self-discovery and relationship building.
- First women may embrace masculine goal: success.
 - Work helps her find identity and strength.
- Next she embraces larger quest of bringing people together rather than working only toward individual gain.
- This is the sacred marriage of masculine and feminine.
 - Serves her own needs. (masculine)
 - Serves the needs of others as well. (feminine)

Separation from the Feminine

Since the 60s, women have embraced the male route to success through work.

- Reasons girls first reject the feminine:
 - Society teaches women their bodies have to be like TV models, like Barbies, to be attractive.
 - Many cultures teach women to be ashamed of their bodies, to be afraid of them.
 - The homemaker role lacks respect, status, pay.
 - Women still earn less pay for the same work.

Reconnecting with the Feminine(or masculine)

- At some point in life, a woman desires to develop those parts of herself that went underground during her quest.
- She has been busy studying, busy serving others, busy earning an income. Maybe too busy to pay attention to:
 - Her body
 - Her emotions
 - Her spirit
 - Her creative wisdom
- Remember it's the two parts that must be joined. If she has been housewife/mother, she might need to find work to develop the masculine in herself. A person needs both to be fully realized.

Gathering allies

- The heroine finds a guide. Often an older woman offers wisdom.
- The heroine often acquires a set of close friends.
 - to share experiences
 - to sympathize
 - to give courage
 -

The Road of Trials

- The heroine crosses the threshold and goes in search of self.
- Leaves safety of parents' home.
 - Divorces husband and must support herself.
 - Takes new job, takes classes.
 - Begins a new relationship.
- Discovers her strengths and abilities.
- Uncovers and overcomes her weaknesses.
- Encounters Dragons on the Road.
 - Goes after goals.
 - Academic degrees, promotions, love, marriage, financial success, independence
 - Encounters obstacles.
 - People telling her she can't succeed, and society telling her a woman really shouldn't act that way
 - Inner doubts, indecisiveness, fear of change and the unknown
 - The myth of female dependency
 - The myth that a woman must always put others' needs first

Characters Who Add Surprise

- Fake allies can surprise the protagonist—and the reader. Add in that back-stabber!
- Fake opponents can also surprise. Someone who is suspected of opposing the protagonist turns out to be secretly cheering for her.

Iceberg Villain

- Beyond the villains/obstacles obvious in the beginning
- After defeating the obvious, a final test of strength can be defeating a villain or obstacle that has been hidden.

Types of Female Protagonists

1. *Damsel in distress awaiting rescue by knight*

Elizabeth Bennett: *Pride and Prejudice*, (Jane Austen)

- Acceptable goal: Good marriage
- Acceptable flaws: Pride and class prejudice, Reduced circumstances, Gossip
- Similar heroines: Snow White, Cinderella, Lady Rowena and Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*, Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*

2. *Woman Warrior*

Katniss Everdeen: *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins)

- Small town girl
- Volunteers to save her sister
- Skilled with bow and arrow
- Survives the hunger games
 - Fights bravely
 - Doesn't lose touch with feminine side
 - Tries to protect the weak and vulnerable
 - She and Peeta decide to commit double suicide rather than kill each other.
- Turns a nation of slaves into an army
- Similar heroines: Wonder Woman, Joan of Arc

3. *Women disguised as men: Disguise empowers circa 1600*

Shakespeare places women in difficult situations

- Viola banished from court
- Rosalind, a woman alone unable to reclaim her estate
- Julia, a need to travel

Lady Assano (Cat) *The Tokaido Road* (Lucia St. Clair Robson)

- Faces grave danger from her father's enemies after his death in the 1600s in Japan.
- Cat is both woman warrior and disguises herself as male
- Weapons
 - Samurai-training
 - Six-foot-long naginata (sword)
 - Quick wits
 - Disguises

4. *Rebels and Rule Breakers*

Betty Zane, *Betty Zane* (Zane Grey)

Rebels against traditional female roles

- Tears along on her pony outside the safe boundaries set by her family
- Ferocious temper when thwarted
- Pulls pranks—gives a tamed bear hard cider
- Fleet of foot, shoots a gun as well as a man
- Brave and clever
 - Believes the Indians will underestimate her as a woman
 - They mock her running to her family home—“squaw!”
 - Then returns with a tablecloth full of gun powder
 - Save Fort Henry, her friends, and family
 - Wounded
- Finds love and claims her feminine side but Zane Grey is patronizing about this, claiming she's tamed.

Janie Crawford: *Their Eyes were watching God*, (Zora Neale Hurston)

- Walks away from first husband who treats her like a work horse on their farm in the 1920s
- Second husband treats her like show pony--no pretense of grief when he dies.
- Happiness with Tea Cake, 12 years her junior. Despite poverty, pain and struggle—love and respect

Anna: *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy

- Like Janie Crawford, Anna is a beautiful woman who dares to love passionately and seeks happiness outside traditional paths
- Unlike Janie, no happiness in her struggle
- Why rebellion doesn't work for Anna
 - Anna and Vronsky don't abandon uppercrust lifestyle
 - Society judges her harshly
 - Not discreet about her affair
 - Creates gossip
 - Abandons her family
 - Society accepts her lover's indiscretion, but not her own
 - Their love affair and her life unravel

Mariam: *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Kahled Hosseini

- Afghanistan turns blind eye toward spousal abuse
- Husband beats Mariam, makes her eat rocks
- Mariam's husband takes young wife
- Attacks the younger wife, Laila
- When the husband attacks the young wife, Laila, Mariam murders him.
 - "Maybe he saw some trace of all the self-denial, all the sacrifice, all the sheer exertion it had taken her to live with him for all these years, live with his continual condescension and violence, his fault-finding and meanness."
 - "As she did, it occurred to her that this was the first time that *she* was deciding the course of her own life."
- Mariam's triumph: After she murders her husband with a shovel, Mariam is sentenced to death. (masculine side)
 - "And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last." (feminine side)

Catherine Earnshaw: *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte published as Ellis Bell

- Defies what is expected of ladies: Runs, Goes barefoot, Laughs aloud, Loves Heathcliff, a man who has no worldly goods
- Nelly begins to tame her
 - Wears shoes, develops table manners
 - Hesitates to marry Heathcliff
 - Marries the wealthy Linton instead
- Can't forget Heathcliff
- Very "unbuttoned" for the times: She dares to be passionate

Seth: *Beloved*, Toni Morrison

- Born a slave and horrible things happen to her
- Escapes to Ohio—takes control of her own destiny
- Kills her child—no bigger taboo—rather than let it be raised up as a slave
- Haunted by the child whose grave is marked by the single word, *Beloved*

5. **Working Women: Modern characters, cool jobs**

- Stephanie Plum, in the Janet Evanovich mystery series (bail bondsman)
- Emily Thornhill, in Jayne Anne Phillips's historical novel *Quiet Dell* (reporter)
- Katya Hijazi, in Zoe Ferraris's Saudi mystery series (lab worker in Jeddah coroner's office)
- Katherine Johnson in *Hidden Figures* (human computer/math whiz)
- Summer Cassidy, in my Water Warriors series, including *Fraccidental Death* (hydrogeologist)

The Stone Diaries (Carol Shields)

"Before my mother became a newspaper columnist she had no sense of self-worth whatsoever. Whatsoever! Really, when you think about it, she functioned like a kind of slave in our society. She was unpaid. Undervalued. She was nobody. Now look at her. She's become" —here Alice groped for words, waving her hand toward the nodding lilacs—"she's become, you know, like a real person."

Kate Brown: *The Summer Before the Dark* (Doris Lessing)

- Interesting because she's a heroine of a different age and explores different issues
 - Empty-nester so role as mother is gone
 - Becomes well-paid translator
 - But they turn her into Mom! So she walks away from job
 - Starts affair with younger man, who gets sick
 - He turns her into Mom!
- Dyes her hair, dresses for success, so men ogle her
- Lets her roots grow gray, wears sweats, becomes invisible
- Will she explode or find peace in late middle age?

6. *Survivors*

Scarlett O'Hara: *Gone With The Wind* (Margaret Mitchell)

- Traditional Traits
 - Vain
 - Spoiled
 - Self-centered
 - A conniving flirt
- Less Traditional
 - Not beautiful (such a sin!)
 - Ruthless
 - A murderer

So why do we like Scarlett?

- Works hard in fields
 - Feminine side--nurturing
- Protects herself, family, land
 - Male side—strong
- Risks her life to care for Melanie during childbirth
- Honors her word to Ashley
- She survives! Tomorrow is another day!
- She integrates masculine & feminine

Rhee Dolly: *Winter's Bone*, 2006 (Daniel Woodrell)

- Sixteen-years old, caretaker for younger siblings
- Rhee's task: bring her father back or lose family house and land
- Opposition: drug community, whose members are hiding him or killed him
- A modern Scarlett
 - Fights for her home and land (masculine)
 - Nurtures her family (feminine)

Sarah Stevens: *The Glass Madonna*, (Donna Meredith)

- Told girls don't become glassblowers—forget her dream
- Give up basketball or lose in the game of catching boyfriends
- Turned down for reporting job because they want a man who can heave stacks of papers

Sarah's Journey

- Separation: Leaves home for college, Makes bad decisions
- Guide: Aunt Livvie shares stories of three generations of women who endured hardship
- Dragons: Abusive husband, jobs closed to women, her own lack of confidence
- Sarah survives
- Finds a way to become a glass blower
- Integrates masculine & feminine
- Like the glass she loves, she comes out of the fire transformed.

Summer Cassidy: *Fraccidental Death* (Donna Meredith)

- Leaves her home in Florida to study water quality near fracking sites in WV
- Gathers allies: computer whiz Dayita Patel, environmental activist Ty Franceschi
- Mentor Early Glover, philosophy professor who doesn't want his land fracked
- Summer survives trials
 - Personal struggles
 - Death of twin sister and fractured family
 - Considered weird at school

- Determined to conduct objective study of water quality near fracking sites
- Someone is trying to stop her—but who? And why?
- Can she remain objective and still find source of polluted well water to protect Harrison County residents?
- Betrayed by people she trusts, but refuses to give up her quest (fake allies)
 - Learns forgiveness is the path to peace
- Success will require all her unique skills and integration of masculine and feminine
 - Incredible intelligence and memory and athletic prowess
 - Compassion for those who might be harmed by polluted water

Gloria: *Gloria*, Keith Maillard

- Raised to be a debutante in 50's
 - Joins sorority, becomes prom queen, engaged to the “right” sort of man
- Dragons
 - Alcoholic country club parents who expect her to meet their social goals
 - Her “secret watcher” who knows she’s not the girl everyone wants her to be
 - Professors who don’t want girls in their graduate seminars
- Gloria’s weapons
 - Brilliant mind, creativity
 - Determination to live her own life
 - One professor who supports her goals
 - Wiggles free from the life expected of her to live her own dreams

Stieg Larssen’s Lizbeth Salander: How can you cheer for a girl so different from Elizabeth Bennett?

Because she survives!

- Abusive stepfather
- Being tortured
- Disabilities that make her misunderstood
- Foster care guardianship

Because she is

- On the right side of good vs. evil
- Coping with the world the way she finds it
- Intelligent and resourceful

Unable to claim the feminine side because of her disability

Lady Ragnell: Knights of the Round Table

King Arthur challenged by a fearsome knight who will spare his life if King can answer a question: “What is it that women most desire, above all else?”

Sir Gawain sets out to save his King and goes to Lady Ragnell.

She wants to control her own inheritance when her father dies, so her brother turns her into a hag.

- She knows the answer, but will only tell if Sir Gawain will marry her
- Arthur’s life spared and Gawain must marry her
 - Kisses her and she turns into a beautiful woman
- She offers him a choice: She will remain ugly by day, beautiful at night or the reverse
- He gives the one right answer!
 - Answer: the right to exercise her own free will

Elizabeth Bennett to Lizbeth Salander

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From long dresses to jeans—we can wear what we want. • We’re allowed to be imperfect. • We’re allowed to grow older. • We can work outside the home in a wide array of jobs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can marry—or not. • Our dowry doesn’t determine our worth. • We can choose and shape our own destinies. |
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RECAP: Steps in the heroine's journey

- Separation from feminine.
- Gathering allies.
- Road of trials.
- The illusory boon of success.
- Awakening to feeling of spiritual emptiness.
- Descent to the goddess.
- Yearning to reconnect to the feminine.
- Integration of masculine and feminine.

Plot points like a clock: The Three acts of a novel

Act one.

- Establish the character's real life, but it can't be conflict-free. You have a main character and she has a problem.
- At 2:00 something happens: call to action.
- Think of all the reasons she can't do it. This exposes the weakness in your character.
- 3:00 is a major plot point. Enter the mentor and this person kicks the main character in the butt, so she accepts the call to action.
- This is one-sixth of the novel.

Act Two

- This section is two-thirds of the novel.
- The middle sags if there isn't enough conflict.
- The protagonist must face encounters, tests, problems.
- She meets allies and villains.
- Her weaknesses are exposed.
- At 6 p.m. she must face her greatest fear. She has to decide who she is going to be.
- At 7 or 8:00 she finds the tools to solve her problems. Love interest should be consummated here. Also reprise the plot. Where have we been and why are we where we are now?

Act Three

- Between 8-9:00 a major plot point should occur. A final test.
- Both internal and external conflicts need to be strong here.
- At 10:00 whatever the whole plot has been moving toward takes place. It should require all the heroine's allies and weapons.
- She usually succeeds.
- From 11-12:00 is the resolution. She goes home and ends at the beginning, though not necessarily literally. She is changed.

Questions for Writers

- Do your plot points occur at appropriate times (approximately)?
- Do you need to increase conflict and tension in the middle so it doesn't drag?
- Did you use a fake ally or opponent or "iceberg" villain to create surprise?
- Did you alternate action with reaction scenes? The reaction gives time to emphasize the internal journey as well as plan the heroine's next step.
- Has your heroine married the masculine and feminine aspects of her personality?

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- Robertson, Jamie Cox. *An Uncommon Heroine*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2010.
- Truby, John. *The Anatomy of a Story: 22 Steps to Becoming a Master Storyteller*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.
- Detailed journey at www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/smc/journey

Planning a Heroine's Journey

1. Choose a female character you have already created or name a new one. State her main goal or desire.
2. Name your heroine's greatest strength and greatest weakness.
3. Write down the names of an ally and fake ally. How will one help her reach her goal and the other try to thwart her?
 4. State how your character will reclaim the missing aspect of her character, either the male (strong, aggressive) or female (nurturing, creative) aspects.