

The Hero's Journey of Sam Witwicky in Transformer Series

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ABSTRACT

The analysis is on Sam Witwicky, an ordinary man with no any special ability that becomes a hero and saves the earth in *Transformers Series*. In this thesis, I will reveal the reason of how Sam Witwicky becomes a hero. I will use the theory of the hero's journey in order to reveal the reason of Sam Witwicky's long journey in becoming a hero. In analyzing this movie, I will analyze the stages of the hero's journey that Sam undergoes in order to be a hero. These are his departure, initiation, and return. Meanwhile, in departure stage, there are four steps that Sam faces in order to find his identity. Next, in initiation stage I discover that Sam needs to gather his courage. Last, in the return stage, Sam needs to have wisdom.

Keywords: The hero's journey, Science Fiction, Hero

Science Fiction first gained popularity in the 1939 CBS's radio drama show *The War of The Worlds*. At that time some listeners misunderstood because they heard only a portion of the broadcast and thought that it was an actual happening (New York Times, n.d), this later pioneered the use of science fiction in many other works. For example, one of the phenomenal science fiction works on American TV series is *Star Trek* that was popular during 1966 to 1969 with its 76 episodes. The development of Science fiction does not only stop in TV series, but it further reached out the film industry. In 1982, *E.T* became the most famous science fiction film ever released in all history of American Sci-Fi movies as this movie was able to fascinate over billions audiences all over the world in its first week of show (IMDb, 2001). *E.T*'s popularity inspired many film producers to create movies of the same genre and soon became a favorable genre until nowadays. This genre's popularity is caused by the growing concerns in our society, its curiosity about the future, science, and also sophisticated technology. In this modern era when technology is extremely fast developed, science fiction which used to deal with advanced technology system, space travel, alien culture, a dream of other world and future seems to support human's curiosity about science and new discoveries.

Therefore, science fiction also talks about the present and past because the story of science always contains the value upholding the belief that today's people are living with some people-in-the-past's dreams. In other word, some people-in-the-past have already expected about today's condition. It may be right that people in the past had already predicted about development in many aspects. Those people who struggle for the dream to come true are people who live today. Moreover, actually it is still difficult to find a fixed definition of Sci-fi because there are many other definitions on science fiction. Science fiction is not merely about fiction, but it is a form of human mind and vision regarding our modern world. This genre explores the impact of an actual or imaginative science on society or individual (Franklin, 1995, p.21). Science fiction attempts to predict the future of the world and human beings, specifically in terms of the change of human beings' characters and behaviors. Furthermore, the genre is categorized as science fiction because it creates the image of future and the whole human beings.

There are four famous science fiction sub-genres. First is Apocalyptic genre. This genre revolves around an impending disaster set in a world or civilization after such a disaster. The time frame may be immediately after the catastrophe, focusing on psychology of survivors. The second sub-genre is dystopian. it describes the future to be a dystopia in which there will be many worse or chaotic things happened, specifically when they describe human beings not as important as before because it has been replaced by technology. Humanity inside men no longer exists because they show more individualism. They fight each other for the sake of power and they regard the weak mankind as diseases. This is then regarded as the ultimate of the future. The next famous science

fiction sub - genre is time travel. This sub-genre centers on the concept of time travel, and generally uses a theoretical invention like a time machine. The last famous genre of SF sub-genre is alien film. This sub-genre explores the existence of aliens, alien invasions, and alien abduction. From those sub-genres, alien movie is the most popular one.

On the other side, alien becomes a human curiosity, since no one has ever proved the alien's existence in this earth. On the other hand, people start to think that an alien phenomenon is perfectly rational (Stephen Hawking, 1997) and through Alien movies they can fulfill their satisfaction. The most recent Alien movie in the late 2000's is *The Transformer* series. These movies were popular during 2007 to 2011. These series were adapted from the first animated TV Series *The Transformers* in 1984 that was popular in the United States. This movie triggered a new era of alien movie because it brings the evolution for its genre

Therefore, I am interested in analysing on how Sam Witwicky, an ordinary man can become a hero and this study aims to analyze the process that Sam Witwicky has been through in order to become a hero in this *Transformer Series*.

In order to analyze that, I will use the concept of the hero's journey by Carl Gustav Jung's from which was re-written again by Joseph Campbell in his 1972's book *a Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This book explores about the monomyth which is several basic stages that almost every hero quest goes through. The hero's journey is divided into three main steps: Departure, Initiation, and Return. (p.8). Departure is a stage when a person struggles to find his/ her identity. There are four steps in this stage. First is the call of adventure, second is refusal the call, third is meeting the mentor, and last is crossing the first battlefield and make the final separation. The second main step is Initiation, this is a stage when a person tries to gather his courage. There are four steps in this stage. Each step will encourage the person to become a real hero. First is the road of trials, second is the temptation, third is rebirth and last is the road back. Last is Return, this is a stage when a person needs to come back to his or her society with a new wisdom. This stage is where the hero retains the wisdom gained on the quest and figures out how to share the wisdom with the rest of the world.

THE HERO'S JOURNEY OF SAM WITWICKY

Finding Identity

In order to become a hero, Sam undergoes the hero's journey and one of them is his search for identity. Sam faces four stages of departure in order to find his identity. The first stage is the call of adventure, then the refusal of the call, the third is meeting the mentor, and the last is crossing the first battlefield with the final separation.

The Call of Adventure

This is the first step of Sam Witwicky's journey in order to find his identity. In this stage Sam is informed by Optimus Prime, the leader of Autobots that he is chosen to be a hero to save the earth from Decepticons's evil invasion who wants to take control the earth and destroy the entire human race. In this stage I can see that Sam Witwicky is confused about what is going on in his life because in order to begin the adventure and save the world, he must leave his current situation to begin his adventure on a quest. I consider that is not an easy thing for Sam Witwicky since he must be called away from his ordinary life to do fantastic adventure that has never happened in his everyday life. Therefore, in this stage I can see that Sam Witwicky shows the willingness to know more about it and he notices that his life as a very ordinary boy is about to change. That means he needs to make a decision to continue at his further step. It can be seen when he tells himself at the mirror

Furthermore, I realize that the call of adventure in Sam Witwicky's journey is the most important part because at this stage Sam realizes that his life is about to change forever and he needs to decide whether he approves or denies it. In this stage Sam starts to struggle and any decision will determine how his life will be.

Refusal of the call

In this stage Sam Witwicky has to choose between to accept the quest or to deny it. Campbell indicates that sometimes the hero refuses the call to adventure. Therefore, Sam chooses to refuse the call in the first place. It is not that Sam does not want to fulfill his world-saving role, but that as a nineteen-year-old boy he only wants to have a normal life and he has several weaknesses. Moreover, I consider Sam is afraid of taking the quest because of his thought about making a life change can be so intimidating and confuse him with several kinds of reasons that hold him to stay on in his current circumstance.

The first reason that holds Sam to stay in his current circumstance is his doubt about himself. Sam is just a normal guy with no special abilities. His parents only own a small shop in side town and he always becomes the bullying object by his classmate since he is not from a rich family and has a boring life. In campus life Sam is neither a favorite nor a smart guy in his college. For all those reasons, Sam thinks that he does not deserve that huge responsible to save the world. Sam feels that his background, life and ability are not good enough to make him a hero. Therefore, it becomes the reason why he chooses to deny it.

Another reason that makes Sam Witwicky refuse the call is his sense of insecurity. Not only does he doubt his ability but also his sense of insecurity bothers his mind to turn away from the adventure. He is afraid if people cannot approve him to save the world even if he is willing to accept the quest. I can see that Sam has non-admirable qualities of being an ideal hero in society's definition. He shows deconstructions of common America's hero quality as the struggling, imperfect protagonist and is lacking with weaknesses. For examples : unattractiveness, fear, lack of courage, intelligence, power and other combination of characteristic that is different from the qualities of common heroes. That is why Sam is scared of people's judgments.

Those realities that happen in his life make Sam refuse the call because he feels scared and insecure to accept the quest since he does not fit the ideal image of a hero. He shows non admirable-displaced person in his society with no special ability. I notice that since Sam comes from Texas, America and the ideal term of a hero in his mind is the term of American hero that needs to have a super power, great intelligence, and wisdom to face and solve many obstacles (Mark, 2004).

Meeting the Mentor

The third step for Sam Witwicky in order to find his identity is meeting his mentor. Sam finally accepts the quest after struggling in his periods of doubt and should behave like a hero by circumstances. In this stage Sam is informed about his mentor who is Optimus Prime. Prime offers himself as Sam's mentor to help and accompany him since Sam agrees to accept the quest. I can say that the biggest character development of Sam Witwicky is influenced by Optimus Prime. First of all, Sam gets his confident and faith toward other people is because of Prime always acts more like Sam's best friend. Prime always encourages him to be willing to live for a higher cause – and accept the call to act fearlessly. Second, through the words of Optimus Prime Sam learns not to be afraid of taking a chance and trying. Prime always requires Sam to gather the faith to do all the quests.

Campbell stated that “The mentor may occasionally be the hero's conscience, returning him to the right path after he strays or strengthening him when he weakens ”(Campbell, 1972, p.68). I can see that when Sam Witwicky almost gives up, Prime is always around to supports him. The third reason is that Sam's character and decision is influenced a lot by Optimus Prime because Prime cares about the sake of Sam's life. Prime always tells Sam not to become obsessed with the power but rather be the person who is willing to learn wisely.

Crossing the first battlefield and final separation

Sam finally decides to dedicate himself to save the earth. It means he has to leave his family and is ready to die in the battlefield. I can see this is as Sam Witwicky's turning point from his ordinary world into the real extraordinary world. He wholeheartedly commits not to turn back at his old life that he has left behind. And he is ready to face all the bad consequences, thus

becomes the final separation of Sam Witwicky from his old life. Sam encounters physical death because of Megatron's cannon shot and he gets injured on his arm and chest. On the other side, Optimus Prime which is Sam's mentor is also dying because of Megatron's poison. In this case Campbell stated that "[t]he hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would have appeared to have died" (Campbell, 1972, p.90). Campbell adds, "Indeed, the physical body of the hero may be actually slain.."(Campbell, 1972, p.92). I consider this as Sam's lowest point in transition. Sam does not do what he is supposed to do and his mentor is unable to solve his problem. However, Sam realizes that he has made the final separation and he has to survive no matter how hard it is. In order to do that he runs with all his last strength and then pulls the last bomb and throws it into Megatron's left arm.

Therefore, from what he acts, I realize that Sam shows that he is committed to fight and he starts to give the best for his new life, new friends, and his new vision. I can see that in this stage Sam finds his identity as he starts to realize who he is and what potentials he has as he successfully manages to arise victoriously. However, Sam's journey does not end yet. He needs to continue his journey in order to have a courage and wisdom to become a real hero

Having Courage

In order to become a hero Sam undergoes the hero's journey after finding his identity, Sam faces four stages of initiation in order to have courage. The first stage is the road of trials, second is the temptation, the third is the rebirth, and the last is the road back.

The road of trials

After accepting his departure, Sam is ready to begin this stage. According to Campbell, the road of trials on the hero's journey consists of a time in which "dragons have now to be slain and surprising barriers passed – again, again, and again. Meanwhile there will be a multitude of preliminary victories and momentary glimpses of the wonderful land" (Campbell, 1972, p.109). Therefore, trials, in this case, mean a series of tests for transformation. I find out that in the stage Sam faces two main trials that he needs to overcome one by one in order to complete his transformation, from a society loser into the person who is able to defeat the major obstacle in his quest which is to defeat Megatron and all Decepticons.

The first test is that Sam needs to overcome his fear toward Decepticons. In order to do that, Sam tries again and again even though he fails several times. It shows his effort to gather courage to overcome his fear. Second test that Sam needs to overcome is that he also needs to learn about team work since teamwork is an important essence in his battlefield. I can see that at first Sam does not care about what team work is because he does not want to share his battle with anyone else. Perhaps, Sam wants to prove himself that he can overcome his fear but at the same time, he abandons the importance of a team work. But at the end, Sam realizes that a team work is needed in his battlefield since his strength is not enough and he needs other Autobots to help him to fight against the Decepticons. Through this stage, I can see that Sam has a courage to fight without a doubt in his new life.

The Temptations

Temptations are a part of an essential character's development of Sam Witwicky. Temptations serve as monitors, reminding of our weakness, develop the patience and courage. Therefore, without temptations Sam could never develop the courage that hero should have and it is only by meeting temptation, wrestling with it and overcoming it. There are three main temptations in Sam's journey in order to become a hero. The first temptation is Sam needs to control his emotion. According to Campbell, emotion is the feeling of supreme. It is an attitude of thinking ourselves superior to others. It obstructs the open mind as it gives lot of importance to self while rejecting other personalities and point of views.(Campbell, 225).

Second temptation is money and Sam can prove that he is a loyal man as he does not want to disappoint Autobots for making him their ally just based on money. Campbell states that "Money and power are the biggest temptress for the future hero" (Campbell, 1972, p.215). Sam proves that he can kill that temptation and he has courage to reject betrayal. Last, Sam Witwicky should choose either commit with his new life or choose to live as a normal person with his

girlfriend. But, he manages to prove that he has the ability to refuse the temptation even though woman as a temptress is the biggest temptation in heroic journey in order to reach his or her goal. After all, since Sam passes this stage successfully and has the courage to refuse any temptation, indicating that he is ready for a further journey.

Rebirth

Rebirth does not literally mean dying to arise. Rebirth in this stage means the center point of Sam Witwicky's journey when he experiences mentally death. Therefore, the Center point means the center of Sam's transformation to be a new person. Therefore, the rebirth of Sam's journey happens when Sam sees Optimus Prime dying. The death of Optimus Prime gives a big psychological impact to Sam Witwicky. The death of Optimus Prime results in Sam's regret and it becomes Sam's biggest life crisis. Sam faces the greatest fear since his mentor Optimus Prime dies and leaves him alone. There is no one who can help Sam finish his quest since "a mentor, is the center of hero's consciousness" (Campbell, 1972, p.134)

Therefore, Sam realizes that he is more than what he thought and he has courage to defeat his major obstacle with his own power. Campbell states that "through experiencing "death" hero can be "reborn" experiencing even greater powers to see the journey to the end" (Campbell, 1972, p.231). Thus, Sam experiences rebirth at this stage as he experiences the psychological death because of Optimus Prime. Otherwise, that event triggers Sam's new courage to fight for other person and also makes Sam stop relying everything on everyone else.

The Road Back

Sam faces the road-back before he moves further to another stage of his hero's journey. The road back here means the final test that Sam needs to overcome before he returns back to the society. Campbell states that "a hero has another challenge to complete" (Campbell, 1972, p.311). In this case Sam needs to pass one more test to have courage to tell the truth. Therefore, Sam is struggling to tell the truth since the people around him think that he is the only who saves the world. He was previously known as a loser and no one sees him as a special person before. In this case, Sam is put to the test whether he can briefly tell the truth that he is not alone in defeating Megatron. Therefore, at the end Sam tells the truth and he admits that he is nothing without Prime. People suddenly become silence and they feel regretful because at first they do not believe in Prime. Furthermore, Sam passes this stage and he gets a new courage to tell the truth in front of many people and they do appreciate his courage.

Having Wisdom

To be a hero Sam undergoes the hero's journeys and one of them is for having wisdom. Sam faces return in order to complete his hero's journey. This is the last stage for Sam to determine his hero's life.

Return

Sam Witwicky defeats his major obstacles and becomes a hero. Sam has to go back to the ordinary world with a new understanding to share for other people. Campbell states "in his return a hero should gains more wisdom" (Campbell,2004). Therefore, Sam gains more wisdom and he starts to share his stories of transformation to many people around him. Sam delivers many wise words and he always says not to afraid of choosing and changing. Therefore, Sam always encourages people around him. It is different from the life of Sam Witwicky in the past. Last, The story of Sam Witwicky releases the new hope in his society. He effectively changes his society perfective with his wisdom and to people around him. Campbell indicates that acts are "the fundamental human experience" (p.240). As Sam continues to develop personally, he embraces the qualities that make him both a great hero and an honorable human being. Overall, Sam completes all his hero's journey after he passes this return stage and he successfully becomes a real hero.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing this Transformer Series, I conclude that a hero is made not born and to be a hero is an option. A hero can come from any background as long as that person has love, hope and effort to change. Therefore, in order to be a hero, a person should undergo the hero's journey because each stage of it develops his or her to be a real hero. It can be seen from the life of Sam Witwicky in this series. He was an ordinary man with no special ability but after he has been through a series of hero's journey, he manages to transform himself to be a hero.

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