

The criminal hero

When fiction plays with our moral compass

Hero or villain?



Edward Snowden – CIA and NSA employee. Divulged intelligence on US government practices and exposed mass-scale international surveillance.

“From loyal NSA contractor to whistleblower, from patriot to America's most wanted” (Headline adapted from *The Guardian*, 1st February 2014)



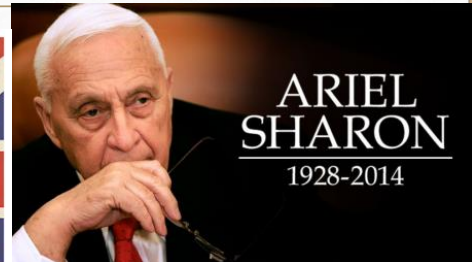
Julian Assange – Founder of WikiLeaks (2006), which published footage of US soldiers shooting dead 18 Iraqi civilians from a helicopter.

“To his supporters, Julian Assange is a valiant campaigner for truth. To his critics, he is a publicity-seeker who has endangered lives by putting a mass of sensitive information into the public domain.” (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-11047811>)

Hero or villain?



Gian Domenico Tiepolo, sec. XVIII
Cavallo di Troia viene introdotto nella città, London, National Gallery.



"'Man of peace'? Ariel Sharon was the champion of violent solutions - Sharon's legacy is the empowerment of some of the worst elements in Israel's dysfunctional politics" [Avi Shlaim, *The Guardian*, 13.1. 2014]

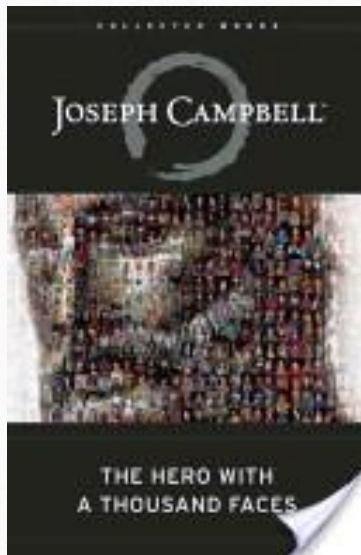
THE HERO

- Outstanding qualities
- Outstanding deeds
- Outstanding outcomes

E.g. intelligence, courage, endurance, strength

THE CRIMINAL

OUT STANDING – OUT OF THE ORDINARY
“NOT ME, OR YOU”



Identification of a paradigm “of heroic behaviour”

all forms of storytelling follow the same ancient patterns of myth

all stories are variations of the same foundational structure

“hero-myth” / “monomyth”

The Hero's Journey
Adapted from the works of Joseph Campbell

Old Road:
What was, has been, is familiar, what we know.



The Descent: Call to adventure, willingness to be trained, mentored, and to let go

The Gift:
What we learn, gain, and acquire



New Road:
Contribute the gifts and your learnings



The Road Back: Taking the road back, claiming your learning, the gift, so you can be a greater contribution



The Hero's Journey



The ordinary world:

Star Wars – Luke Skywalker - farm;
The Purloined Letter – Monsieur Dupin
-drawing room

The call to adventure

Iliad – Achilles urged to fight for
Menelaos' honour

Overcoming initial reluctance

Crossing the threshold

Overcoming difficulties in the process

Helpers and opposers

Reaching the “innermost cave”

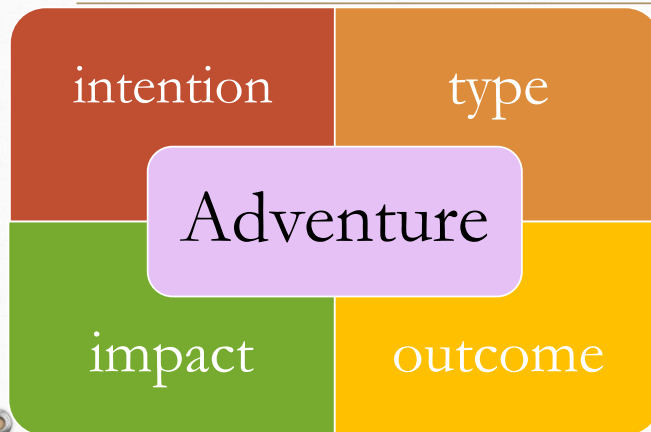
Conquering the final boon

Returning to the community (with boon)



<https://etrojanwar.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/herosjourney.jpg>

Hero vs Criminal



Interpretation of these variables:

- a. depends on a shared societal notion of JUSTICE;
- b. is “dictated” by the view taken by the LAW OF THE LAND.

The criminological take on crime

CRIME (lat. Crimen): “an intentional act in violation of the criminal law, committed without defence or excuse, and penalised by the State” ((Tappan, Paul. 1947. 'Who is the criminal?', *American Sociological Review*, 12: 96-112, p 100).

- John Hagan – crime is a continuous variable and a subcategory of all harmful acts [1985. *Modern criminology : crime, criminal behavior, and its control* (McGraw-Hill: New York)].
- The perception of an act as “criminal” depends on three units of measure:
 - SOCIETAL ATTITUDES - The consensus amongst the population about what is a right act and what is a wrong act;
 - THE VIEW OF THE LAW - The degree of severity with which the law punishes any given act;
 - THE OVERALL PERSPECTIVE- The evaluation of the level of harm caused by the act (this is a combination of societal view and State response).

Mala per se and mala prohibita

Crimes which are culture and time bound (*mala prohibita*)



Attempting to commit suicide was a crime in English Law until 1961

Crimes which are considered inherently and universally bad

- Assault
- Theft
- Murder

The loveable rogues

- Robin Hood (English Folklore) - Anglo-saxon freedom fighter who combats against the Norman usurpers. "Steals from the rich to give to the poor"
- Arsène Lupin (Maurice Leblanc, 1905) - "the gentleman thief"
- Diabolik (Angela & Luciana Giussani, 1962-on)

Laura Grimaldi (1923-2012)

Series editor - Giallo Mondadori, Segretissimo and Urania

Translator - Rex Stout, Scott Turow, Jerome Charyn and Raymond Chandler

Publisher - Interno Giallo

Novelist:

- *Il sospetto*, Milano, A. Mondadori, 1989
- *La colpa*, Milano, Leonardo, 1990 (poi Milano, Mondadori, 2010)
- *Il cappio al collo*, Torino-Milano, Edizioni Sonda, 1991
- *Monsieur Bovary*, Milano, Leonardo, 1991
- *La paura*, Milano, A. Mondadori, 1993
- *Perfide storie di famiglia*, Milano, Marco Tropea Editore, 1996
- *Profumo di casa*, Milano, Pratiche Editrice, 1997
- *Faccia un bel respiro*, Milano, Mondadori, 2012

Il sospetto (1989)

- Background: *il mostro di Firenze* (1968-1985)

- A mystery that captivated the entire Italian society
- Grimaldi was involved in the investigations as a journalist and a police consultant
 - Helped construct a psychological profile of the killer (I. Bossi Fedrigotti, “Il mostro vive dalla mamma”, Laura Grimaldi spiega l’identikit dell’omicida di Firenze’, *Corriere della Sera*, 3 July 1988.)

Michele Giuttari, *Il mostro* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2006) and *Compagni di Sangue* (with Carlo Lucarelli, Milan: BUR Rizzoli, 1999).

Carlo Lucarelli *Nuovi misteri d'Italia. I casi di Blu Notte* (“I mostri di Firenze”). Turin: Einaudi, 2004

Nino Filastò, *Storia delle merende infami*, (Florence: Maschietto Editore, 2005).

What suspicion?

- The protagonist, Matilde Monterispoli, suspects her son Enea of being the “mostro di Firenze”
- A recurrent *topos* in literature and myth, forecasting disasters:
 - Gaea and Tartarus generating Typhon;
 - Pasiphae and the bull breeding the Minotaur.
- “myth” of the Italian mother and her relationship with the male child.

The protagonists

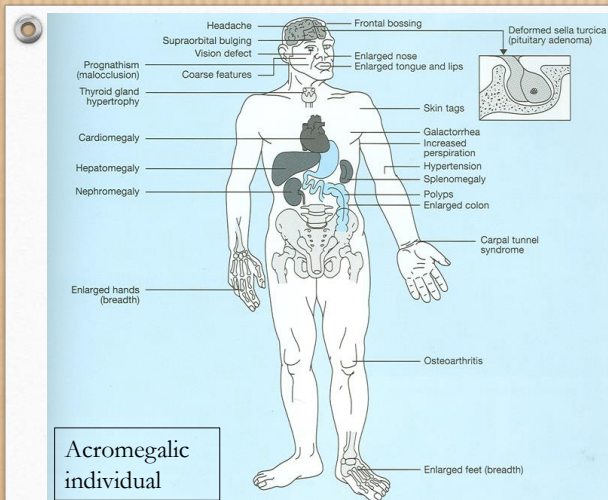
Matilde Monterispoli

- “Taciturna e ombrosa” (p.5)
- “ancora una bella donna, alta e diritta, dallo sguardo placido, i capelli appena spruzzati di bianco accuratamente acconciati in piccole onde che si arricciavano sulla nuca” (pp 24-25).

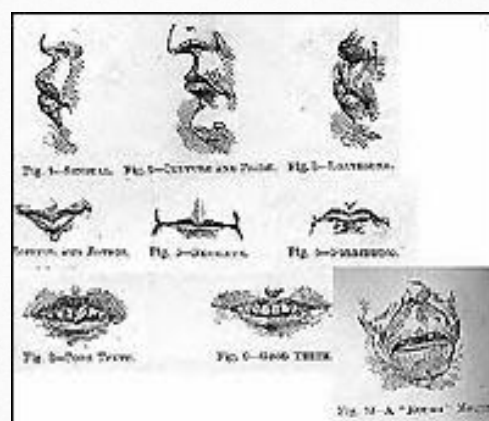
- Enea Monterispoli “aveva sofferto da ragazzo di una forma [...] di ipogonadismo, complicata da una tendenza all’acromegalia, aveva il corpo sviluppato con accentuata disarmonia. Era alto quasi un metro e novanta, aveva braccia così lunghe che quando le teneva abbandonate gli arrivavano di poco sopra le ginocchia, e il suo mento rotondo pareva sostenere a fatica le mascelle e la bocca. [...] (p25)

Mother and son

- “Enea aveva quarantotto anni compiuti, diciassette meno della madre, e capitava sempre più spesso che qualcuno lo scambiasse per il marito di Matilde, la quale non l'avrebbe confessato, ma mai avrebbe voluto un marito come suo figlio.” (p25)
- “Matilde si sente ferita, quasi insultata, dalla diversità fisica di Enea: si aspettava un figlio attraente, brillante professionista, padre di un paio di marmocchi. Così le era stato insegnato che dovessero essere i figli e così si era convinta che le sarebbero arrivati” (Laura Grimaldi, in private conversation, 8.7.2003)
- Mother and son become semi-recluse at her behest— limiting social interactions to the bare minimum.



Cesare Lombroso's (1835-1909) description of atavism: receding hairline, forehead wrinkles, bumpy face, broad noses, fleshy lips, sloping shoulders, long arms and pointy fingers. Lombroso associated these stigmata with primitive man.



Facial characteristics described by Lombroso, some of which may indicate criminality. From: *New Physiognomy or Signs of Character* (1871)

The reader's response(s) to this instance of *malum per se*

- Empathy
 - Matilde's action is inspired by social responsibility;
 - Nobility of intention and extent of positive impact.
- Relief
 - A solution to the mystery of the Mostro, albeit only in a fictional space.
- Shock
 - Hubristic act that bypasses the institutional structures – two wrongs do not make one right.

The text does not
provide a definite
steer

But the author
does

Intentio auctoris

Murder not inspired by

- a desire to “protect society” from a dangerous criminal;
- Enea from the might of the law,

BUT by the mother's desire to eliminate the evidence of her own faulty genes

(Grimaldi's own interpretation in “Hitchcock mi insegnò a conquistare il lettore sussurrando”, interview with Anita Lorian Ronchi, *Il Giornale di Brescia*, 14/04/2002, p36).

Crime and the female offender

Do authors punish female characters who offend more harshly?

(Vincenzo Ruggiero, 2003. *Crime in literature : sociology of deviance and fiction* (Verso: London), p 96.)

- Matilde Monterispoli is not punished by the law, but her narrative journey is one of decline:
 - Presented initially as a hero (ἥρως "warrior", literally "protector" or "defender")
 - Ends the narrative as a tragically lonely criminal.
- Her author settles the score later, in a metanarrative space (an interview in a newspaper).

