

A Classical Hero

A Comparative Study of
Julian Assange's Autobiography and Heroic Epics



Bachelor Thesis

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Date: 25 June 2012
Course: 'Biografisch Project'

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1. Introduction

When writing autobiographies, authors present the reader with an image of their lives. These presentations are the result of the writers' interpretation of their life stories. By interpreting their lives, the authors reflect on past events and have to give a certain meaning to episodes of their lives. In other words, they reflect on their lives. Such a reflection plays an important part in our everyday life. It allows us to mirror ourselves and by measuring our own actions and lives to that of others we can determine goals and identities. We often regard important persons in our lives as examples and we strive to set similar achievements in the hope to match their status. This also shows how important status is to us. We greatly value the opinion of others about ourselves as we try to impress the people around us. This is not done by actions alone; we use opportunities to spread the word of our deeds. Stories of our holidays and achievements are a favourite topic during birthday parties and other social gatherings. Recently, with social media platforms another way to tell the world about our lives has been created. An older means of telling others about our lives are autobiographies.

These days, autobiographies belong to the most popular books. Jill Ker Conway gives us a possible reason for this in her 1998 book *When Memory Speaks, Exploring the Art of Autobiography*: 'We are still interested in the projections of gifted writers' unconscious processes, but we are unlikely to model ourselves on their fictional characters, or to surrender disbelief for long enough to be concerned whether the heroine of some popular print series is still alive and well.'¹ In other words, we need the examples that are set by the great people of past and contemporary times and autobiographies give us an insight into the way we need to live our lives in order to match the status of the writers of these texts. Of course, there are other reasons for the popularity of these books, but in the light of another quotation of Conway this is perhaps one of the most important. Conway states that 'whether we are aware of it or not, our culture gives us an inner script by which we live our lives'² and this is reflected by autobiographies, which are, or ultimately become, part of that culture.

Over the years the structures of these autobiographies have been analysed and certain patterns and origins have been discovered. In her 1984 book *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* Susanna Egan argues that autobiographies use a structure that is very similar to the heroic epics of classical times and various religious stories. This is strengthened by Conway, who claims that autobiographies are written according to 'archetypal life scripts for men and for women that

¹ J.K. Conway, *When Memory Speaks, Exploring the Art of Autobiography* (New York 1998) 12.

² *Idem*, 13.

show remarkable persistence over time³. These templates for an autobiographical life have been further developed and adapted over the years to fit the writer's intention with the portrayal of him- or herself in the text.

After so many years of development it is hard to think that we can still find the structure of a heroic epic from classical antiquity in a modern autobiography as even the use of epics themselves has changed. In ancient times stories were used to create an ideal and set an example of how each man should live his life. In these stories the life of battle was glorified or the virtues⁴ of a good king were presented in a tale.⁵ Heroes were men who dedicated their life to the honour of their people and showed their great powers and skills in warfare or in fights with monsters. During the Romantic period the epics and their meanings changed. The glorification of war and battle did not fit in and the virtues of the classical hero could hardly be regarded as Christian. As a result, the form of the heroic epic had to be altered, according to Paul Cantor in his analysis of *The Prelude* by Wordsworth and the works of Lord Byron. He also argues that the individuality of the writer emerged during this time⁶, resulting, in a way, in a more autobiographical form of the epic.

In more modern times, autobiographies were used for the creation of nationalist or ideological icons. According to Conway and Egan, these texts have similar structures as heroic epics and use metaphors that refer to those classical stories. Today, heroism and heroes still have an important function in autobiographies as Egan states in her article *Changing Faces of Heroism: Some Questions Raised by Contemporary Autobiography*.⁷ Using the autobiography of Julian Assange, *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*, as a case study I will reflect on the theories of Conway and Egan, and argue that modern autobiographies still contain the typical structures of a classical epic. By analysing Assange's autobiography and his use of this particular structure I will determine his reasons for writing this particular sort of presentation of his life story and why he has chosen to publish it at this particular time.

The publication of *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* came at a time when Julian Assange, the founder of the controversial whistle-blowers' organisation WikiLeaks, made the headlines. Assange was born on the third of July 1971 in Townsville, North Queensland,

³ Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, 14.

⁴ P.A. Cantor, 'The Politics of the Epic: Wordsworth, Byron, and the Romantic Redefinition of Heroism', *The Review of Politics* 3 (2007) 375.

⁵ T. Abusch, 'The Development and Meaning of the Epic of Gilgamesh: an Interpretive Essay', *Journal for the American Oriental Society* 4 (2001) 615-616.

⁶ Cantor, 'The Politics of the Epic', 390-394.

⁷ S. Egan, 'Changing Faces of Heroism: Some Questions Raised by Contemporary Autobiography', *Biography* 1 (1987) 20-38.

Australia⁸ and gained fame and infamy with his fight for transparency. Early 2012 he stands accused of sexual misconduct in Sweden and is fighting his extradition from Great Britain to the Scandinavian country. The fact that Assange, the person, has become synonymous with the organisation WikiLeaks, fuels the idea amongst his supporters that the charges he faces are part of his opponents' ways to stop his whistle-blowing activities. It is not surprising that, since the first publications by WikiLeaks, several books have been written about both WikiLeaks and its founder and public image. The most intriguing of them is *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*, a title that is, as Assange accurately states, 'a contradiction in terms'.⁹ It is this contradiction that sparked my interest in the book. Why was it written, why did it create such a fuss, how can an autobiography be an unauthorised publication and why was it published in 2011? Of course, we have known about WikiLeaks' situation for some time, but in the light of the personal accusations the timing of the publication was interesting to say the least. Could it be that Assange tries to present himself as a hero in order to change public opinion?

As autobiographies are used to reflect on the lives of their authors and our cultures shape the ways we structure our lives when we put them on paper, it is interesting to make an analysis of Assange's autobiography. In order to find out if the book can be seen as a heroic epic it is important to, first of all, determine the structure and concept of classical heroes. In his 1959 work, *Heldenlied en Heldensage*, Jan de Vries compares different epics from all over the world and reveals a recurring pattern in them. Martin Israel Kabat has used De Vries' work for his dissertation at New York University in 1979 in a more thorough analysis of the epics of Achilles, Aeneas and Odysseus. Using these analyses one can determine certain patterns in famous epics like the *Odyssey* and *Gilgamesh*. Conway and Egan see the same patterns in autobiographies and have argued that these are used by the writer to give meaning to his or her own life. In other words, the epic presentation of a life story is not only intended for the reader, but also for the writer. The use of these patterns is of psychological value to the autobiographer, as it determines their identities.¹⁰

Using this theoretical framework of classic epic structures and their application and purpose in autobiography, I will analyse the text of *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*. By looking at Assange's presentation of important events I will determine their role in his depiction of his life story. For instance, does the depiction of the confrontation between the WikiLeaks-founder and the United States' government show any similarity to the battles of

⁸ J. Assange, *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* (Edinburgh 2011) 28.

⁹ J. Assange, 'Julian Assange: Statement on the Unauthorised, Secret Publishing of the Julian Assange "autobiography" by Canongate' (version 27 September 2011), <http://www.wikileaks.org/Julian-Assange-Statement-on-the.html> (20 January 2012).

¹⁰ S. Egan, *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (North Carolina 1984) 5.

classical heroes and their opponents? And does this play a similar role in the structure of the story to that of epic heroes? By looking if the case study fits the framework I will answer what Assange's intentions with this presentation of his life are.

The titles mentioned above are, together with *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*, the core of my literature study. For the sake of a correct annotation it is important to note that I have used e-books in my research: *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* by Julian Assange, *When Memory Speaks, Exploring the Art of Autobiography* by Jill Ker Conway and *The Story of the Odyssey* by Alfred J. Church. These works have been read on a second-generation iPad, using the *iBooks* application, version 2.0.1. The annotations refer to the page numbers of the e-book; when holding the device in a vertical position with the text in the Palatino font, size five.

Upon the first readings of the book I would have to argue that there is a certain congruency between the life story of Assange and the classic picture of a hero. My hypothesis would therefore be that the book intentionally has a traditional structure of classical epics and that these similarities can be linked directly to classical epics. This could mean that Assange wrote the book with the intention of depicting himself as a hero of freedom. Unfortunately, as the subtitle suggests, a ghostwriter, Andrew O'Hagan, has written the book. There has been a conflict between the publisher, Canongate Books, and Julian Assange over the publication of the book. After reading both the statement of Assange on his website, <http://www.wikileaks.org>, and the publisher's note in the book, it can be concluded that there is a consensus on the fact that the text constitutes of a first draft of the intended book. Assange does not say that he disapproves of its contents, as he has worked together with O'Hagan on the first version. He does not state that Canongate has changed major parts, although some editing may have been done.¹¹ I will therefore regard *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* as a normal autobiography.

The goal of this thesis was to examine if the theories of, among others, Conway and Egan still hold ground. Furthermore, although it is not my intention to do this myself, I hope that my case study of this recent autobiography will shed some light on the intentions of Assange when he agreed to start writing his life story. As this publication is one of the few that come from the Australian himself and are not subject to any "strategic" editing on his part, an analysis of the autobiography can prove to be of some worth.

¹¹ J. Assange, 'Julian Assange: Statement on the Unauthorised, Secret Publishing of the Julian Assange "autobiography" by Canongate' (version 27 September 2011), <http://www.wikileaks.org/Julian-Assange-Statement-on-the.html> (20 January 2012).

2. The Recipe for a Classical Hero

Achilles, Heracles and Aeneas: just a few names that come to mind when thinking about classical heroes. Their achievements have been the subject of many a song and countless tales. They were the idols of the ancient Greeks, an inspiration to the great artists of the Renaissance and remain the calling card for Classical antiquity. But the phenomenon of the heroic epics has not been confined to the Greek peninsula. Scholars around the world have marvelled about the poems about Beowulf, Roland, El Cid, Gilgamesh and Siegfried. Some of these tales date from as early as the thirteenth century. Still, these later epics use a similar structure in the appraisal of their champions, as will be shown in this study. Therefore, in this study the term “classical heroes” refers to the poems that appeared before the Renaissance and the Romantic period in, mostly, Western Europe.

In his 1979 dissertation at New York University, *The Epic Hero: Recurring Patterns and Poetic Perspectives in Epic Poetry*, Martin Israel Kabat, referring to Jan de Vries, indicates several motifs that can be seen as recurring features of a heroic epic: ‘1) the begetting of the hero, 2) the birth of the hero, 3) the youth of the hero is threatened, 4) the way the hero is brought up, 5) the hero often acquires invulnerability, 6) the fight with a dragon or another monster, 7) the hero wins a maiden, 8) the hero makes an expedition to the underworld, 9) when the hero is banished in his youth he returns later and is victorious over his enemies, 10) the death of the hero.’¹² By enduring some or all of these phases the identity of a man as a hero is formed. Kabat claims that, because of this, ‘the hero can be easily recognized, even at birth’ and is predestined to do great things. He states that the epic of Heracles embodies all ten of these motifs and can be seen as the model for later heroes.¹³ In his own work, *Heldenlied en heldensage*, published in 1963 under the title *Heroic Song and Heroic Legend*, De Vries shows that these ten motifs know certain variations. Using several examples, De Vries establishes several recurring over all patterns in classical heroes.¹⁴ According to this structure, the life of a hero can be divided in four phases: childhood, youth, maturity and old age.

The first episode of a hero’s life consists of the first four features that De Vries describes. In a classical epic, the begetting and birth of the hero is often a supernatural event. An example of this is the birth of the god Bacchus from the hip of Zeus and the birth of Athena from Zeus’ head. This extraordinary birth often signals the predestination of the child to do great things. Because they are the offspring of the immortal rulers of the universe, these children inherit the

¹² M.I. Kabat, *The Epic Hero: Recurring Patterns and Poetic Perspectives in Epic Poetry* (New York 1979) 4.

¹³ Idem, 5

¹⁴ J. De Vries, *Heldenlied en heldensage* (Utrecht 1959) 195-200.

specific features of the gods that allow them to do unbelievable things. But, although they may have incredible power or potential, childhood inevitably comes to an end and different signs precede this. In certain epics this is, as described above, depicted as the expulsion from the Garden of Eden or paradise, whereas others mark the end with the confrontation with arch nemeses. To give an example of the latter: Hera, the jealous wife of Zeus, sends a poisonous snake to kill Zeus' young bastard son, Heracles.¹⁵

This ever-looming, and therefore threatening, end of childhood sweeps away the magical foundation of their lives and children now have to explain the world on their own and give their existence meaning. 'The journey into the wilderness begins'.¹⁶ De Vries sees this as the start of puberty and the point from which the hero is expected to contribute to society.¹⁷ The hero has to establish his identity after the inevitable destruction of childhood's protection. To do so the hero has to acquire certain items, power or wisdom. This can be seen as the fifth motif described by De Vries: the acquirement of invulnerability. This specific trait is often attributed to heroes and the acquisition of heroic traits is similar to the establishment of a heroic identity.

The epic of Gilgamesh is an example of how a hero sets out to acquire wisdom. In a 2001 article, 'The Development and Meaning of the Epic of Gilgamesh: an Interpretive Essay', published in the *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Tzvi Abusch describes three different versions of the epic of Gilgamesh, the hero god-king of Mesopotamia. The poem has been translated from several tablets, but not every tablet is consistent. For instance, the eleven-tablet version was later expanded with a twelfth tablet that is not consistent with the story line of the previous tablets. Each different version puts a different emphasis on what is the most important heroic feature of Gilgamesh. For the eleven-tablet version this is, according to Abusch, wisdom and the search for wisdom.¹⁸ The hero in the epic *Gilgamesh* is not the only hero whose wisdom is praised in song and story. Odysseus was renowned for his cunning plans, like the use of the famous Trojan horse to gain access to the impenetrable city of Troy.¹⁹ Because of his intelligence the hero of the *Odyssey* gained support and favour of the goddess Athena, the Greek deity of wisdom. His cunning aids him in his travels and challenges. His encounters with the Sirens, the Cyclops and his secret return to his home on Ithaca are all displays of this outstanding heroic feature.

Not all heroes rely on their cunning or on deceit in their adventures. Strength or a magical item can also be of great value to any aspiring hero. There are several examples of adventurous, young heroes who have to acquire certain items, like Perseus and Theseus. When Perseus reaches

¹⁵L. Rawlings & H. Bowden ed., *Herakles and Hercules, Exploring A Graeco-Roman Divinity* (Wales 2005) 38.

¹⁶ Idem, 105.

¹⁷ De Vries, *Heldenlied*, 204.

¹⁸ Abusch, 'The Development and Meaning', 621.

¹⁹ Gustav Schwab, *Griekse Mythen & Sagen* (Utrecht 1994) 257-258.

manhood he must retrieve the head of the Gorgon Medusa in order to protect his mother Danae. After several heroic adventures it is inevitable that he is to confront the monster and decapitate it.²⁰ But Perseus is not ready for this fight until he possesses several items that will help him to reach his goal. Armed with the sandals of Hermes, an invisibility cap and a mirror shield, Perseus is able to cut off Medusa's head. It is also important to stress that the battle with Medusa is inevitable and that Perseus cannot win this battle without these three items.²¹ Similarly, Theseus, the slayer of the Minotaur, cannot enter the labyrinth to face the monster without a ball of thread and an enchanted sword. In other words, the hero cannot reach maturity unless he is ready to face the monster. This can be seen as the transition to adolescence, as De Vries describes it, where the child has to become a part of society and has to carry the burden of responsibility.²²

The third face, maturity, is characterised by the sixth, seventh and eight motifs that De Vries describes. In the many epics, not restricted to the Greek stories alone, these adventures are numerous. Another recurring theme in these adventures is the voyage to the underworld. This particular moment in a hero's life is not just the actual entrance into the realm of the dead. Beowulf, for example, travels to the lair of the monster Grendel at the bottom of a lake. The Minotaur is slain by the hero Theseus while it is imprisoned in a labyrinth and there are several heroes who even enter a monster itself by letting it devour them.²³ Often the battle with the monster shows similarities with the entrance of the realm of the dead.²⁴ The hero emerges from this dark place or this confrontation as reborn. By overcoming these crises the hero can confirm his heroic status and eventually overcome his arch nemeses, the tenth feature according to De Vries.

Finally, the hero often looks back on his adventures by telling his stories to an audience, thus reaffirming his status and identity as a hero. For instance, in the *Odyssey* Odysseus tells about his journey at the court of King Alcinous of the Phaeacians.²⁵ With this "story within a story" the writer is able to present the three phases described above as three important moments in a hero's life. It also gives it the deeper meaning of the separation from the paradise of childhood, the initiation into society and youth and, ultimately, the establishment of the heroic status by confronting one's fears. As a result of such a narrative, the predestination of the hero is further strengthened as the goal of the story, or rather the journey, is clear from the beginning. The references make certain events inevitable. In the case of the epic of Perseus it is the final battle

²⁰ Daniel Ogden, *Perseus* (Routledge 2008) 26-27.

²¹ Ogden, *Perseus*, 43-47.

²² De Vries, *Heldenlied*, 204.

²³ Idem, 205-206.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ A.J. Church, *The Story of the Odyssey* (E-Book 2002) 68.

for which he is destined. This confrontation is inevitable and gives reason to his adventures to acquire the magical items, as without them Perseus stands no chance against the monster Medusa.

The patterns of an autobiography and epics are closely related to the development that is the subject of the text. Women can play an important role in the development of the hero. They can either be a contribution or an obstacle that has to be overcome, and as such can help to define the identity of the hero. In order to determine whether women in Assange's presentation of his life story play a similar role to the women in Greek epics, it is necessary to describe the role they play in the heroic epics. According to Mary Lefkowitz, the Greek women of the Homeric epics have little independence, as men always escort them. Yet from this position they play a very moral role, as they show the readers how to feel about a certain situation.²⁶ Another interesting notion is that though the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* would not have taken place without the presence of women, they do not play a prominent role in the text. For example, Helen who was the reason the Greeks declared war on Troy, does not appear until the third book. Despite her small role, she acts as a moral compass for the reader, reminding him or her not to anger the gods and do the right thing. Helen also shows a desire to survive, in a way representing selfishness.²⁷

According to Pierrette Daly, women in epics can also be metaphors for immobility and seduction. This is illustrated by the fact that the women that Odysseus encounters on his journey try to impede his movement. Calypso and Circe keep him imprisoned on their islands, and the sirens try to lure him towards them.²⁸ In the case of the latter, Odysseus wants to hear the sirens' calls and asks his crew to tie him to the mast of the ship. Another example is the Gorgon Medusa, who is capable of petrifying, thus immobilizing, people with her gaze.²⁹ It is important to note here that these aspects are regarded as inherent to the female nature: women cannot help the way they act. Given the fact that Assange is accused of rape in Sweden and his autobiography was published during the time of his extradition case to the Scandinavian country, it is interesting to look at the presentation of women in his life story in the analysis of *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*.

To determine whether the autobiography of Julian Assange contains similar patterns as those of classical epics, it is important to see how these patterns are present in life writing overall. To be able to make this transition from classical epics to modern autobiography, I will be

²⁶ Mary Lefkowitz, 'The Heroic Women of Greek Epic', *The American Scholar* 4 (1987) 503.

²⁷ Idem, 505.

²⁸ Pierrette Daly, *Heroic Tropes: Gender and Intertext* (Detroit 1993) 32.

²⁹ Idem, 24.

describing how these ancient patterns are used in life writing today. When that framework has been established, I will use it to determine its use in Assange's presentation of his own life.

3. Applying Heroic Patterns in Autobiography

In the introduction of *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography* (1987) Susanna Egan writes that autobiographies display a similar structure consisting of several phases or, as she describes them, narratives. She identifies four different narratives: 1) the loss of “paradise”, 2) a “journey”, 3) the “conversion” and, finally, 4) the “confession”.³⁰ These four narratives are used to describe the stages of childhood, youth, maturity and old age in the life of the autobiography’s subject.³¹ These different phases in which lives can be presented in an autobiography are similar to the episodes in a hero’s life that De Vries describes.

For instance, childhood is linked to “paradise” as it forms a period in which there often is no worry. It can almost be seen as a magical time when the child has no responsibilities. This seems to be more or less consistent with the first four of De Vries’ motifs. Egan describes this as the feeling that there is no change in the world and mythical explanations are used to create an understanding of the surrounding. This can be compared with a child believing in fairies, Santa Claus³² and perhaps even God. Slowly, but surely, every person loses this mystical vision of the world. New experiences show children that they live in an ever-changing world, which does not function upon the forces of magic and where Santa Claus is not real. Responsibility and reality hangs over us as children like the sword of Damocles.

When childhood has come to its inevitable end, the hero has to regain his position in society. According to Egan, this is similar to the expulsion from paradise, which marks the start of a journey. This journey does not end with the beginning of maturity or the finding of a heroic identity. As Egan states: ‘Journey is a metaphor of duration; it does not limit its usefulness to this phase of life. It suggest, indeed, a movement that lasts until death, and the adventures that occur may occur at any age’.³³ We can therefore assume that youth is not the only journey that a person undertakes in life, but one of many. Yet, because of the nature of expulsion, this phase is best characterised by a journey or a search in order to regain what is lost or to assert a new position within society.

According to Jill Ker Conway in her 1998 work *When Memory Speaks, Exploring the Art of Autobiography*, it is this journey that can be seen as the core of Western autobiography. It is important to note here that the voyage of a classical hero is presented as an actual journey. In later autobiographies, though as early as St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, these travels manifest

³⁰ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 4-5.

³¹ *Idem*, 4.

³² *Idem*, 69.

³³ *Idem*, 106.

themselves in the ‘inner consciousness of the narrator’ of the writer.³⁴ Conway and De Vries see this transition as the rite of passage from childhood to adolescence. Egan confirms this phenomenon and gives several examples of rites of passage of ancient cultures. These often include the separation from community, similar to the drifting life of Assange. According to Egan, this manifests itself in autobiography as the start of a journey in which the hero has to acquire strength and/or knowledge before he can return as a real man and be a full-fledged part of society.³⁵ This is very similar to the De Vries’ motifs.

Egan shows how this quest for a certain quality is used in autobiographies. This search for power can be seen as ‘a trial of strength on the road to “individuation”, which is ultimate maturity’. This “trial” can be used to discover who one is and the capabilities that one has.³⁶ Conway sees a similar use in the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, when he writes about his youth and some of the acts of misconduct that he has committed. Conway sees this as a significant moment in the development of a sense of wrong and right.³⁷ Egan concludes her essay with an account of the hero’s youth and its use in autobiography by stating that this heroic journey describes the main event that eventually becomes a part of any man’s identity. This event can be seen as the establishment of ‘an identity that is of value to himself and to his society’.³⁸

As I have shown earlier, Egan states that the phase of youth can be characterised by the metaphor ‘journey’ and that this metaphor is typical of an epic structure in autobiography. Journeys have a clear starting point and a specific goal. Reaching that goal is the sole purpose of the journey and gives meaning to process of travelling. Using the narrative of a journey, when telling one’s life, a necessity for that person to live is created. When an individual narrates his own life he often connects this to a meaning that may not have been the motivation of the particular actions at that time.³⁹ The actions of a person are given meaning by connecting them to a goal. As a result this eliminates the element of surprise in the story, as the narrator often refers to the meaning of an action, achieving the goal of the journey of life. Egan uses Odysseus as an example for this phenomenon, but perhaps *The Quest for the Holy Grail* gives a better picture: according to Tzvetan Todorov, in *The Poetics of Prose*, ‘the Holy Grail is nothing but the possibility of narrative’.⁴⁰ We know that the knight Galahad will complete the search, yet the quest for the famous relic is used to give meaning to the adventures of the other knights like Gawain and Lancelot. Egan concludes that the writer of an autobiography narrates the episode of his or her

³⁴ Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, 14.

³⁵ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 105-107.

³⁶ Idem, 108.

³⁷ Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, 15.

³⁸ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 135.

³⁹ Idem, 109-110.

⁴⁰ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 110.

youth and the discovery of his or her identity in a way that puts more emphasis on meaning than action.⁴¹ This is in a way different from classical epics that use the episode of old age in the life of a hero for this purpose. The result, however, is similar. It eliminates the element of surprise and enhances the idea that the writer of the autobiography is predestined for greatness or to overcome an obstacle.

The third phase, maturity, is also present in autobiography. In *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography*, Egan describes maturity as a moment of conversion and describes it as a 'state of despair or total apathy, followed by disgust, trial, or crisis, and then by a new illumination, [...] a positive ecstasy'.⁴² It is not difficult to see the similarity between this description of Egan and a hero who is confronted with the toughest enemy of them all, death, and eventually overcoming it. In other words, in autobiography the confrontation of death has been replaced with a time of crisis. It is important to stress that this crisis, so similar to death, is inevitable in the life of the classic hero. The overcoming of this episode in life will create a new outlook on one's existence. As Egan describes it: 'Victory is not experienced as survival, but as a second birth'. The journey that started after the expulsion from the paradise of childhood has taken the hero through his youth and results in a confrontation with death. In a classical epic this is symbolised by a deadly duel with a monster or by travelling to the Underworld, the place where the dead reside.

Finally, in autobiography the phase of old age is the period in which the autobiographical subject reminisces over his life and looks upon his heritage. Egan describes the use of this phase in several ways. First of all, she writes that the stories about Aeneas and Odysseus typically contain this particular episode. According to Egan, both heroes tell of their inner struggles and project their problematic psyches onto monsters and giants.⁴³ As described in the previous chapter, epics tend to include a narrative of confession and reminiscence, in which, according to Egan, 'the tired warrior justifies himself by a recitation of his deeds'.⁴⁴ She notes that in autobiography this self-reflection or self-justification is used in different ways. It can be used in a religious manner, where the confession is not addressed to the reader, but to God himself. This is the case with St. Augustine's work. Another, more modern and secular, way is to relieve oneself of personal guilt.⁴⁵ Later reflections tend to be more self-centred. Perhaps the first example of this is Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Confessions*. Conway describes this autobiography, first published in 1781, as 'a new model for the male life history'.⁴⁶ By writing his story, Rousseau

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Idem, 141.

⁴³ Idem, 173.

⁴⁴ Idem, 171.

⁴⁵ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 173-174.

⁴⁶ Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, 15.

creates an egocentric hero of himself as the presentation of his life completely revolves around him. This is, of course, completely different of St. Augustine's God-fearing confessions. With this, Rousseau created a hero who 'is still the agent of his own destiny, though the forces which drive the action of his life are not the classical fates but the war of the individual society'.⁴⁷ Rousseau was, in his time, the modern manifestation of heroic epics, as St. Augustine was before him. Both use the structure of a hero's journey to create their identity as, respectively, a good Christian and an individual.

Important to note here is that in more modern autobiographies, the phase of old age or "confession" is often not so clearly present. People seem to be writing their life stories at a much younger age than before. According to Egan this is a result of the modern use of heroic epics. The fact that a person finds him- or herself in a crisis is a motif for writing an autobiography. It helps them to assert a certain position that they did not have before. Egan argues that the modern hero is no longer the visible and established leader, but the anonymous rebel. Writing a life story can be used to assert an identity, make a statement or offer a certain insight in one's life and perhaps even help to alter it.⁴⁸ This also explains why these texts are sometimes written at a younger age, instead of after retirement or at the end of someone's life. Therefore, these autobiographies can be seen as a record of a process, rather than of a product.⁴⁹

It is time to return to the subject of this thesis. In *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* a chronological order is used. This is convenient for the analysis, which will follow the structure described above. I will start by looking at the childhood of Assange, followed by his youth and maturity. Finally, I will analyse his episode of old age. By following this timeline, I can apply the theoretical framework and see whether Assange uses these patterns to present his life. I will argue that this is indeed the case and that it allows him to create a specific, heroic and perhaps even innocent picture of himself.

4. Assange's Childhood

Like many other analyses, mine starts with a "birds-eye view" of *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*. The table of contents is a good place to start. A few of the chapter titles require the reading of the text they summarize, but with a little background knowledge about Assange's life

⁴⁷ Idem, 16.

⁴⁸ Egan, *Changing Faces*, 23-25.

⁴⁹ Idem, 24-26.

we can understand the book is written in chronological order. The first chapter, 'Solitary', suggests a time in prison or isolation and is an introduction to Assange's life. The fourth chapter is called 'My First Computer' and is followed by 'Cypherpunk' and 'The Mathematical Road to the Future'. These titles symbolize the period before WikiLeaks, when Assange learned more about the use of computers. A chapter called 'The Birth of WikiLeaks' logically follows them. The tenth, eleventh and fourteenth chapter titles refer to the leaks of the whistle-blower website in chronological order. This chronological sequence apparently divides Assange's life in distinctive periods that symbolize his childhood, youth and maturity. Though Assange begins his story with an account of his arrest on December 7, 2010 that acts as an invitation to the presentation of his life, I will start my analysis with the story of his childhood.

Assange presents the reader his childhood by describing the surroundings. Born in Townsville, North Queensland, Australia, he paints an idyllic picture of his birthplace:

For most people, childhood is a climate. In my case, it is perfectly hot and humid with nothing above us but blue sky. What I recall is a feeling on the skin and the cool nights of the tropical savannah. I was born in Townsville in North Queensland, Australia, where the trees and the bush crowded down to the sea and you looked over to Magnetic Island. In the summer the rains came and we were always ready for floods. It was beautiful, actually. Heat like that goes down into the bones and never leaves you.⁵⁰

Assange even describes his birthplace as a biblical Paradise a few pages later.⁵¹ The reason he calls Townsville his Eden is that the place in the seventies is a safe haven for rebels and protesters. It is in this environment that Assange sees the origin for his inquisitive nature. 'Why?' was his very first word and his inquisitive behaviour was stimulated by his parents, who were protesters by heart. Soon his mother took little Julian along to different demonstrations. His parents felt that Assange should decide for himself and presented him with the different options from which to make his own choices in life.⁵²

This description of his early childhood fits the fourth motif as described by De Vries: the way the hero is brought up. Interestingly, Assange shortly mentions his birth, which is another motif according to De Vries, though Assange's is not a supernatural birth like the birth of the god Bacchus out of Zeus' hip.⁵³ However, depicting his parents as symbols for the generation of

⁵⁰ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 26.

⁵¹ *Idem*, 29.

⁵² *Idem*, 30.

⁵³ De Vries, *Heldenlied*, 195.

Australian protesters, Assange gives the impression that he was destined to have a strong inquisitive nature and a thirst for the truth. Predestination is another recurring pattern in traditional epics. Assange may not have a legendary wisdom or power; he does inherit curiosity and an investigative nature from his parents.

Similar to another characteristic of an epic, Assange's childhood is threatened. In his autobiography Assange talks about his first memory, which is quite a threatening one: a fire that destroys his family home. According to Assange the slow reaction of the fire brigade was a result of the hostility of the community against his bohemian family. With this incident he experienced, he says, for the first time in his life, the way authorities could use their power to strengthen their position.⁵⁴ The incident can be seen as the start of the expulsion from paradise, as part of his paradise is destroyed and the authorities are presented as his arch nemesis. By introducing the authorities in this way, Assange strengthens his predestination for fighting for individual freedom and enhances the narrative of an inevitable confrontation with his nemesis.

This idea of predestination is further enhanced by Assange's presentation of the rest of his childhood. He forms several groups of friends or 'gangs', as he calls them, and often functions as their leader. Together with his friends he sets out to explore the area around their homes, and he recalls this as memories of 'a happy childhood'.⁵⁵ Apart from this early manifestation of seemingly being a born leader, Assange also shows a habit of seeking justice or what he perceives as justice. For example, when their neighbour denies his mother the use of some tomatoes from their garden, Assange rallies his friends and thinks up an elaborate scheme to steal the fruits. Apparently his mother approves of this. On another occasion, at one of his many schools, he hits a little girl with a hammer because she refuses to share her scooter. Oddly enough, in his book Assange does not condemn these actions.⁵⁶ He does describe childhood events like these as 'ethical adventures' that shaped his character. Regarding gender, these are the only women that are mentioned throughout the presentation of the story of his childhood: his mother and the little girl that refused to share the scooter. Interestingly, Assange has the urge to protect his mother early on against injustice. This is similar to the idea that women and their honour have to be protected in epics. Examples of this are the numerous battles over women in Homer's *Iliad*. The war is fought to retrieve Helen and the Greeks are divided over the slave Briseis.⁵⁷ By naming his mother, in a way symbolising security, justice and the female need for protection, and the young girl, a symbol of selfishness, Assange presents them as an important

⁵⁴ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 32.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, 34.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, 35-38.

⁵⁷ Lefkowitz, 'The Heroic Women', 504.

part of his moral development and shows of what he approves and disapproves. The women in this part of the presentation of his life thus have a symbolic function.

Assange's time in paradise inevitably comes to an end with the divorce of his parents and, similar to the 'journey' that Egan describes as a consequence of the destruction of magical childhood, he starts drifting with his mother. Furthermore, with the later departure of his stepfather, Assange feels that he now is the protector of his family.⁵⁸ This can be seen as the transition to adolescence, as De Vries describes it, where the child has to become a part of society and has to carry the burden of responsibility.⁵⁹ Egan confirms this phenomenon and gives several examples of rites of passage of ancient cultures. These often include the separation from community, similar to the drifting life of Assange. According to Egan, this manifests itself in autobiography as the start of a journey in which the hero has to acquire strength and/or knowledge before he can return as a real man and be a full-fledged part of society.⁶⁰ In *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* the same patterns can be found as Assange's childhood ends at the time when the family is separated from society and Assange has to take on the responsibility of a grown man: the protection of his family.

To summarize Assange's description of his first years: he uses distinct words to describe his childhood. He clearly presents these years as Paradise-like: a time without sorrow and a magical world around him with an inevitable end. Even though Assange is not the offspring of a god, he does portray his mother and father as classical examples of people who fight for their freedom. Just like Heracles and other heroes he too is predestined to become an inquisitive person who can lead his people in the fight against their oppressors.

In the presentation of his childhood, Assange uses several features that, according to De Vries, are typical of a classical epic. Though Assange's conception and birth are only mentioned briefly and can hardly be considered supernatural, he clearly presents the way he was brought up and how his childhood is threatened. Following Egan and Conway's theories on the use of epics in autobiography, we see several similarities. Assange's childhood is carefree and he presents the world around him as magical and relates it to the biblical Paradise. He places the root of his inquisitive nature in this period and thereby enhances the idea that he is predestined to fight for justice and freedom. Assange tries to present his childhood to give the impression of a born hero, destined to confront the authorities and fight for individual freedom. Before he can confront his arch nemesis, Assange has to face the challenges of his youth: he has to take up the burden of responsibility.

⁵⁸ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 41.

⁵⁹ De Vries, *Heldenlied*, 204.

⁶⁰ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 105-107.

5. Assange's Youth

Following the narrative of the end of childhood, Assange's journey and youth start at the age of nine. After the divorce of his mother and stepfather, a new man, Leif Meynell, appears on the scene and 'usurps' the place of Assange's stepfather. Though the family rejects this and tries to run from Leif, he pursues the family and keeps returning into their lives.⁶¹ Interestingly, the man whom Assange sees as his 'first tail'⁶² is a member of an Australian sect called 'The Family', which was founded in the 1960's. According to the WikiLeaks founder this cult was "masonic in their way".⁶³ The first threat to his childhood and the person that caused Assange's expulsion from childhood paradise had connections with freemasons, one of the most secretive groups on the planet, and was a member of a sect, which was headed by a single woman, Anne Hamilton-Byrne, in a totalitarian way. Assange sees Leif Meynell as a symbol of secrecy and oppression and this is exactly what he set out to fight later on.

When he reaches the age of sixteen, Assange confronts Leif, who is stalking the family:

We'd come to the end of the road. Also, I was feeling almost a man myself and was ready to front-up to him. Masculinity and its discontents could be addressed here, but let's just say I knew I could waste him and he appeared to know it, too. He was lurking round the bound of the house and I walked over and told him to fuck off. It was the first and the last time, and something in the way I said it ensured that we would never see him again.⁶⁴

The young Assange has fulfilled his transformation from child to man and has successfully stepped up to take his father's responsibility of protecting his mother and brother. He is now allowed to return to society. This is represented by the fact that his family can once again settle in one place. They no longer need to run away from Leif Meynell. This reminds us of the initiation rites as described by De Vries and Egan, in which the hero is secluded and is confronted with a great danger before he can take his place amongst his people. This phase in a hero's life is, according to Egan, similar to customary rites of passages of the Aboriginals and the Carrier Indians of British Columbia.⁶⁵

Another distinctive feature of this return to society is the acquisition of power by the hero. Apart from perhaps a feeling of self-confidence and masculinity, Assange does not gain any

⁶¹ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 46.

⁶² *Idem*, 42.

⁶³ *Idem*, 49.

⁶⁴ *Idem*, 54.

⁶⁵ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 106.

apparent quality or power from his confrontation with Leif. But when he returns to society he does receive his first computer, a Commodore 64, and he claims that with this, his life entered a new period.⁶⁶ The new technology becomes a part of Assange's life, which, in the presentation of his life, clearly sparks a more philosophical tone and vision. As he gives himself over to the Commodore 64, Assange gains a power. The computer gives him access to a network of different workstations and Assange becomes more and more familiar with the digital language. The acquirement of this new technology gives him the opportunity to learn and discover new, digital, frontiers. It is not surprising that he describes the endeavours of his friends and himself as an act of exploring 'new terrain'.⁶⁷

There are clear similarities between the way in which Assange gains his own heroic power, wisdom, and the way in which traditional heroes acquire their powers. Furthermore, the emphasis on intelligence is quite common in heroic epics. With the acquisition of this new set of skills, Assange seems to be ready for the final encounter, but this does not mark the end of his youth. He is still in the process of forming a clear identity. The acquisition of Assange's first computer, his modem and subsequently his first encounters in the network of computers are but the first steps in his development towards maturity. The network was a global one and all the people that were involved in the personal use of this technology together could be considered as a subculture. Most of the activities of this subculture consisted, as described above, of exploring the digital limits. Because this technology was groundbreaking, the explorers tested the limits that the producers and programmers of the companies had set. Assange describes them as 'the authorities'. The constant struggle between the people that created the codes and boundaries, and the 'guys' that broke them, resulted in further development of the computer technology. But according to Assange there was no political motivation involved in this.⁶⁸

Yet, with each encounter with the digital authorities the WikiLeaks-founder's personal vision on cyberspace expanded. For him, hacking started out like 'kids breaking into quarries or abandoned buildings': 'they had to see what was in there.'⁶⁹ But only a few lines later in the text he presents a more complex view:

⁶⁶ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 55.

⁶⁷ *Idem*, 60.

⁶⁸ *Idem*, 60-62.

⁶⁹ *Idem*, 67.

*You want to get past a barrier that has been erected to keep you out. Most of them had been erected for commercial reasons, to preserve profit flow, but for us it was a battle of wits too, and in time we saw that many of those barriers were sinister. They were set up to limit people's freedom, or to control the truth, which I suppose is just another kind of profit flow.*⁷⁰

Access to governmental and corporate networks intrigues the young Assange. He feels like the hackers are able to watch over the endeavours of these mighty institutions and influence the interaction between governance and information. All the way Assange boasts about the fact that the act of hacking is an intellectual challenge that continued to form his personality. Furthermore, it proves to be the ideal preparation for confrontations with authorities. By watching governments from within their own networks the WikiLeaks-founder is able to see 'how power works and what it does to protect its own interests'.⁷¹ It is clear that Assange is still coming to terms with his vision on the use of information and developing towards maturity. He is in a process of constructing his identity and this is illustrated by the changes in his outlook on the world. Because Assange is still in this process he has not reached his full maturity yet.

Interestingly, Assange's uses the narrative of this episode in his life to defend his hacking activities. He claims to have never broken or disrupted any process of the institutions when entering their networks and keeps aloof from the label 'hacker'. Assange presents himself as a "cyberpunk". As a cyberpunk, he was part of an international political movement that uses cryptography in an attempt to create a system that 'would allow individuals, rather than corporations, to protect their privacy'.⁷² In a reaction to the emergence of hacking, governments created new laws. Assange did not accept these laws that were put into effect after the first acts of so-called cybercrime. According to Assange, these laws are merely the result of the authorities trying to protect their interest by making hacking a criminal offense. In the eyes of Assange this is just another way by which governments limit the freedom of people.⁷³

During his youth Assange makes both a physical and a mental journey. From this part of the autobiography it can be concluded that the metaphor for a journey is used throughout the book and is quite similar to heroic epics. Even the narrative form of the text is similar to that of several epic tales. It can be argued that some of the metaphors for his qualities and struggles seem farfetched. But looking at the way Assange structures the events of his life, there is a pattern of several important "adventures" that shape his life. He also clearly describes what he has gained

⁷⁰ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 67.

⁷¹ *Idem*, 70.

⁷² *Idem*, 77-81.

⁷³ *Idem*, 98-100.

from his experiences. Furthermore, as it turns out, the events of this particular part play an important role in the inevitable confrontation of his maturity. By using the metaphors for journey, Assange, much like during the presentation of his childhood, enhances the idea that he is destined to confront the oppressive authorities. This is very similar to the argument of Egan on how journeys can be used to create the possibility of narrative. Assange uses the metaphors to give the actions of his youth a specific meaning; it is all part of his journey towards the inevitable confrontation and his destiny. This makes it hard to escape the conclusion that the autobiography follows the structure of a heroic epic.

Regarding the role of women, his mother plays an important role in how Assange takes up his responsibilities. As explained in the second chapter, men often accompany female characters for different reasons. The fact that his stepfather and his mother divorce plays an important role in the presentation of Assange's youth. As his mother has lost her protection, he has to step in to take make sure she stays safe. This is illustrated by his confrontation with Leif Meynell. Another important female character is the leader of Leif's cult: Anne Hamilton-Byrne. She is presented as someone with almost a magical hold over her followers, including men. Assange refers to the mythical status that she has, to the use of LSD and sex among the cult members, and describes how Hamilton-Byrne uses a machine to simulate a blue aura around her.⁷⁴ Assange clearly describes her as seductive and deceitful. After the young girl with the scooter from his childhood, Anne Hamilton-Byrne is the second woman that embodies the negative role that women can play. Where the young girl can be seen as a symbol of selfishness, Hamilton-Byrne can be seen as the manifestation of the seductive and immobilising nature of women, thereby endangering the life of the hero.

The use of the 'journey'-metaphor recurs often in *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*. The adventures of his youth are all presented as necessary for his destiny. In other words, the end seems to justify the means. Until the story of the actual founding of WikiLeaks, Assange refers to his organisation in the chapters five, six and seven, and the skills that he has acquired in his youth are all fundamental in the founding of the whistle-blower organisation. Chapter eight is called 'The Birth of WikiLeaks'. By referring to WikiLeaks, Assange effectively eliminates the element of surprise in his story, similar to the way in which the Holy Grail is used in *The Quest for the Holy Grail*. We already know where his journey and actions will lead to: his confrontation with the authorities through the use of WikiLeaks. Another important aspect of this phase in Assange's presentation of his life is the acquisition of a vision on the use of cyberspace and his computer skills.

⁷⁴ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 49.

6. Assange's Maturity

The use of the phase of maturity in Assange's autobiography plays an important role in the presentation of his life story, as this moment in his life that is used to give meaning to most of his actions. It is therefore necessary to keep in mind the purpose of maturity in heroic epics and, ultimately, autobiography. An insight in the use of this phase of maturity will help in determining its role in Assange's autobiography and which moments in his life are presented as the boundaries of this phase. As I described earlier, the metaphorical journey does not need to end with the hero's youth. In fact, the phase of maturity or 'conversion' can, in a Christian metaphor, be seen as a journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.⁷⁵ In classical epics it is more common to present this as a confrontation with a monster or the necessity to enter the Underworld. Often the battle with the monster shows similarities with the entrance of the realm of the dead.⁷⁶ The hero emerges from this dark place or this confrontation as reborn. As Egan describes it: 'Victory is not experienced as survival, but as a second birth'. The journey that started after the expulsion from the paradise of childhood has taken the hero through his youth and results in a confrontation with death. In a classical epic this is symbolised by a deadly duel with a monster or by travelling to the Underworld, the place where the dead reside.

In autobiography the phase of maturity is presented in another way. In *Patterns of Experience in Autobiography*, Egan depicts this confrontation as a moment of conversion and describes it as a 'state of despair or total apathy, followed by disgust, trial, or crisis, and then by a new illumination, [...] a positive ecstasy'.⁷⁷ It is not difficult to see the similarity between this description of Egan and a hero that is confronted with the toughest enemy of them all, death, and eventually overcoming it. In other words, in autobiography the confrontation of death has been replaced by a time of crisis. It is important to stress that this crisis, so similar to death, is inevitable in the life of the classic hero. The overcoming of this episode in life will create a new outlook on one's existence. So, to determine when Assange's maturity starts, it is necessary to look for the inevitable crisis in *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*. Looking at the conclusion of the previous chapter in this thesis the 'usual suspect' would be the organisation of WikiLeaks itself, because during the story of his youth Assange leaves his readers little to guess where his personal development is leading to.

Yet, obvious as this conclusion may seem, the founding of WikiLeaks is not presented as the journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, nor does it symbolise a confrontation

⁷⁵ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 138.

⁷⁶ De Vries, *Heldensage*, 205-206.

⁷⁷ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 141.

with a monster. Instead, it is the weapon used in the inevitable confrontation with the governments and corporations in the struggle for freedom of the individual. The acquisition of this weapon is the result of Assange's youthful journey. This is similar to the epics of Theseus and Perseus. For Theseus, the slayer of the Minotaur, his time of crisis and his trip to the Underworld starts with his travel to Mycenae and the land of King Minos. Before he enters the lair of the Minotaur, he receives an enchanted sword and a ball of thread. With these items he is able to slay the monster and return to Athens, ending his trial and metaphorical journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.⁷⁸

WikiLeaks is used in a similar way. The organisation enables Assange to take up a fight with great governments and corporations. In his autobiography he presents all this in chronological order, in a way almost reminiscent of the *Labours of Heracles*. Just like in the epic of Heracles, Assange accomplishes several tasks, which are the leaking of information using WikiLeaks. The titles of the autobiography's chapters clearly state which task is presented and are named after these leaks. For instance, chapter ten is called 'Iceland', referring to the leaks about the collapse of the bank Icesave. Chapter eleven is named 'Collateral Murder', which is the name of the video that showed an American attack helicopter firing at unarmed and wounded civilians and journalists. Lastly, chapter fourteen is titled 'Cablegate' after the leaking of multiple 'cables' of different embassies all over the world. Yet, although these WikiLeaks operations created a lot of resistance from different institutions and people, Assange does not present this as a time of crisis.

The true crisis in the life of Assange occurs when he is being charged with rape allegations⁷⁹. At the same time, WikiLeaks is confronted with the fact that two of its important media allies, the newspapers *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, have deserted them⁸⁰ and that it faces a banking blockade, resulting in a financial crisis.⁸¹ This period of crisis is the result of the inevitable confrontation in Assange's life: the struggle for individual freedom against governments and corporations. Interestingly, the reader is not surprised to read about this moment, as Assange has referred to this time of crisis from the beginning of his story. The autobiography makes it clear that Assange is convinced that his problems are the result of actions by his opponents. If they are not, the governments are at least politicizing his court case and pressuring finance companies. In the case of the double rape allegations, Assange introduces the

⁷⁸ Schwab, *Griekse Mythen*, 184-186.

⁷⁹ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 263-265.

⁸⁰ Idem, 231-236.

⁸¹ Wikileaks.org, 'Banking Blockade' (version 24 October 2011), <http://www.wikileaks.org/Banking-Blockade.html> (12 February 2012).

story of his encounter with the two women only after he says friends had warned him that the United States government might make a move against him personally or WikiLeaks:

The word was that the US government acknowledged privately that I would be difficult to prosecute but were already talking about “dealing with you illegally”, as my source put it. The source specified what that would mean: gaining evidence about what we had in the way of information; unearthing, by whatever means, some sort of link between Private Manning and WikiLeaks; and, if all else failed, deploying other illegal means, such as planting drugs on me, ‘finding’ child pornography on my hardware, or seeking to embroil me in allegations of immoral conduct.⁸²

Not much later another friend warns him of the dangers of mingling with the wrong people:

The American had possibly murky connections, but the girl was nice, and I was chatting her up with Donald frowning across from me. Donald later said I should watch what I was doing: he said the threat of a “honeypot” was high at that moment, and I remember he went into detail about how Mossad had captured Vanunu. [...] and felt I was so hyper-aware of security that the sort of thing he was describing could only happen to naïve people who hadn’t had the kind of experience I had. I wouldn’t have to wait long to see how massively my hubris would backfire.⁸³

Assange goes on to describe his encounters with the two women who eventually accused him of rape. He makes it clear that he was seduced and that he was grateful to receive some affection.⁸⁴ As a result of one of his flings with one of the women, Assange found himself staying at the apartment of one of his lovers. One of his remarks about this is reminiscent of the immobilising aspect of ‘bad’ epic women: “I’d spent long enough at A----’s [...], I was feeling paranoid: I didn’t like being in one place for too long”.⁸⁵ In other words, Assange is immobilised after being seduced by women. The idea of immobilisation is further enhanced by the fact that the rape allegations impede WikiLeaks’ activities. Even though Assange suffers because of these women, he does not seem to hold anything against them. This is very similar to what happens in classic heroic epics. When sailing past the Sirens, Odysseus treats it as a dangerous, but natural phenomenon. Assange does something very similar. He does not blame the women he slept with, but sees it as though he fell into their ‘honey trap’. By presenting the two women as classical

⁸² Assange, *Julian Assange*, 256.

⁸³ *Idem*, 257.

⁸⁴ *Idem*, 258.

⁸⁵ *Idem*, 260.

seducers who put the hero to the test, Assange seems to play the incident down and plead innocence. This is interesting, as the publication of Assange's autobiography coincides with the rape accusations.

As described earlier, in the classical epic the phase of maturity is often characterised by a journey through the Underworld or the Valley of the Shadow of Death, sometimes symbolised by the confrontation with a monster. So far there is not a clear symbol for this confrontation with death in *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*, but it can be found. The book opens with a chapter in which the WikiLeaks-founder writes or speaks to us from prison. In a way he has entered the realm of his opponent, an institution under control by the government. 'They tried to crush me in that little prison', states Assange when he is on his way to the bail hearing.⁸⁶ He remains defiant in the face of 'death', so to speak, and overcomes the challenge. Upon hearing that the Swedish appeal for extradition is rejected, the following feeling comes upon Assange:

I was about to be free. How long that freedom would last was questionable. I was to be kept under a kind of house arrest at the home of a supporter in Norfolk pending the extradition hearing in February. But at the High Court the moment was for jubilation. In a private way, I felt the time in jail had been traumatic, emboldening and instructive; I finally saw the size and scale of what WikiLeaks was doing. The experience sent me reeling back into my own past, and it conformed the future. We were now officially up against the power of the old order, up against its assumptions, up against its power to silence people, up against its fears.⁸⁷

It is clear that Assange sees his time in prison as his own personal moment of despair, his own inevitable personal confrontation with 'death'. The result of this battle is a new insight in the impact of his organisation, which is similar to the journeys of Odysseus⁸⁸ and Aeneas⁸⁹ into the Underworld. There, both heroes gain knowledge about how to bring their adventures to a conclusion. For Assange it seems that his particular revelation is conveyed to him through the impact of WikiLeaks and that he must remain defiant to defeat the governments and corporations.

The founding of WikiLeaks can be seen as the start of Assange's inevitable confrontation with the authorities. The publications through WikiLeaks inherently cause problems among

⁸⁶ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 22.

⁸⁷ *Idem*, 24.

⁸⁸ Kabat, *The Epic Hero*, 121-122.

⁸⁹ Egan, *Patterns of Experience*, 139.

governments and corporations, and retaliation can therefore be expected. In the previous chapters, I have also argued that Assange presented his childhood and youth as instrumental for his inevitable confrontation. The acquirement of several important skills leads to the ‘weapon’ WikiLeaks that is used by Assange during his ‘battle with the monster’. The phase of maturity in his autobiography therefore seems to play a very similar role as this episode in heroic epics. The structure of the presentation of Assange’s life does seem to raise one question: it seems as though the moment of reflection or confession comes before the revelation that comes with the overcoming of the inevitable confrontation. Furthermore, is this a moment for jubilation, as quoted above, the end of his struggle for individual freedom? In order to answer these questions I will first determine whether it is possible to distinguish an episode of confession, as is often used in the use of heroic epics in traditional autobiography, in Assange’s autobiography.

7. Assange's Confession

In the analysis above, a phase of maturity, or conversion, has been determined in Assange's autobiography. To fulfill all the required aspects of the classical epic, one more period, that of 'confession' or 'old age', has to be identified. However, such an episode cannot be found in *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*, but Assange does use several functions of this phase. In the previous chapter, Assange's stay in prison was briefly mentioned. This happens in the first chapter of his autobiography. After his arrest, Assange is transferred to Wandsworth prison; he describes the position he finds himself in. At this correctional facility he presents himself as defiant.⁹⁰ It is this defiance that sustains him while he is awaiting his bail to be posted. When this happens Assange states that "while it was a time for celebration I was also thinking of those men and women around the world still in jail, still in solitary confinement, ignored by the media, with no one to put up bail money and with no prospect of release." While these thoughts linger in his mind, the first chapter ends with the following words: "[...] and it occurred to me on the steps of the court that I had travelled a very long way to see such snow."⁹¹

Assange's introduction gives the reader the idea of settling him- or herself by Assange's side to hear of his endeavours and the justification of his actions. On the other hand, it does not seem that the story of Assange has a clear ending, but neither had Odysseus's account at the court of Alcinous. The land of the Phaeacians, Phaeacia, was merely another stop on his long road to Ithaca after he managed to escape the clutches of the nymph Calypso.⁹² After the king and his people have heard of the hero's endeavours, they agree to help him return to home. The actual odyssey ends here, but the story goes on. Odysseus still has to free his house and family from his wife's suitors. A similar structure can be seen in the poem *Beowulf*. The epic tells mainly of his encounter with the monster Grendel at the hall of the Danish king Hrothgar. This episode of Beowulf's life is later retold when the epic ends with his last adventure. There is also mention of more adventures at the start of the last section.⁹³ The first chapter of *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* may well be seen as the recollection of Assange's odyssey as it does not necessarily has to cover his life until death.

Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography has been written in the time of Assange's crisis, as described earlier. It therefore seems to lack the phase of 'confession' or 'old age', also relating to the fact that there seems to be no end yet to his battle for individual freedom with

⁹⁰ Assange, *Julian Assange*, 12.

⁹¹ Idem, 25.

⁹² Church, *The Story of the Odyssey*, 41-54.

⁹³ Kabat, *The Epic Hero*, 156-158.

governments and corporations. On the other hand, the reader is welcomed into the story by Assange, which starts with his time at Wandsworth Prison. As described in the third chapter of this thesis, this gives the writer the possibility to construct the narrative of a heroic epic. The following question arises: why does this moment of self-reflection overlap with the previous phase of conversion? In other words: for what reason does Assange look back on his life during his inevitable confrontation with his destiny? As I have argued earlier, according to Egan, this is the result of the modern use of epics. People tend to write from a time of crisis in order to make a statement or to determine their own identity. Older writers of autobiographies reflect on their lives from a moment in time when they were already renowned for their achievements. There is a notion of completion. Like Beowulf, they can look back on their victories. These older writers, Egan claims, can ‘assume their value to society’.⁹⁴ They do not need to create an identity and status for themselves, as they have already proven themselves in their lives. Egan’s article suggests that modern autobiographies are often written at a younger age. In this case, the presentation of one’s life is important, because it is through these texts that writers try to assert a certain status. They have not achieved their desired status through their actions. Assange, like these younger writers, still has to earn that place and the presentation of his life story could help in achieving that.

In the case of *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*, there is a certain notion of completion, as Assange also states that he now knows the full impact of his endeavours with WikiLeaks. There is also a parallel with the development of the ‘life stories’ of St. Augustine and Rousseau. Both writers used the structure of a heroic journey to awe their audiences in the same way the stories of ancient heroes impressed their audiences. To compare their own lives with those of Odysseus, Heracles, Beowulf and Gilgamesh, St. Augustine and Rousseau sought to relieve themselves of judgement by God or others. Later, in modern autobiographies, the epic structure was used by writers in crisis to impress their audiences and to create a heroic identity.

In the case of Assange, the fact that there is no reflection afterwards, but during the time of crisis, discerns his autobiography from the traditional heroic epic. It is clear, however, that he follows a modern variant. Like other literary genres, the epic has, through the centuries, changed its face. ‘Old myths have been rewritten in new ways’⁹⁵, as Egan writes, and they will most likely be adapted again in the future for the use in autobiographies in order to impress their readers. *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* is an example of such a development. It has changed the use of the phase of confession. There may be no clear moment of reflection, but Assange does use his opening chapter in Wandsworth Prison to create a moment of reminiscence. By doing so he creates the narrative needed to project the structure of a heroic epic on his own life.

⁹⁴ Egan, *Changing Faces*, 21.

⁹⁵ *Idem*, 35.

As described earlier in this thesis, this narrative plays a large part in epics because it allows for inevitability and makes the phase of reflection possible. In the case of Assange, it seems this confession forces his life story into the structure of a heroic epic, although it could be argued that all autobiographies are a form of self-reflection and not all autobiographies follow an epic structure. The moment for reflection, as used in Assange's autobiography, differs greatly with that of classical heroic tales, but this can be seen as an inevitable development of the modern use for autobiographies. Not different from other classical epics and autobiographies that follow a similar structure, however, is the use of reflection. Apparently, Assange wants to show that he means no harm and is fighting for a just cause. By doing so he strengthens the idea that he is a modern manly hero, fighting for individual freedom.

8. Synthesis and Conclusion

It can be concluded that, looking at the case study of Assange's autobiography, Conway's claim is still legitimate: 'Culture gives us an inner script by which we live our lives'.⁹⁶ Though we may not be aware of it, it seems that epics from the Classical era still provide a standard to which many men compare their own lives.⁹⁷ In this thesis I have tried to find an answer to the question if the structure of the ancient heroic epics can be found in the modern autobiography of Assange. It is quite clear that this is the case. The book has a similar structure and narrative, and presents certain occasions in Assange's life the same way as in the traditional epic.

Classical epics can be divided in four phases: childhood, youth, maturity and old age. Each of these phases starts and ends with turning points that change the hero's life drastically. As childhood is threatened and inevitably comes to an end, the hero is forced to go on a journey to show that he is ready to take up the burden of responsibility. When he returns to society the hero has acquired a skill, power, intelligence or an item that will help him in the confrontation that he is destined to have with a monster or mortality. This particular time of crisis in the hero's life leads to the phase of maturity. Having fulfilled his destiny, the hero can look back on his achievements at old age, the final phase of a classical epic. The old hero tells his story to an audience and as a result this eliminates the element of surprise in the story: the hero was destined to overcome his time of crisis.

According to Conway and Egan this structure is also present in Western autobiographies. They refer to the four phases in an epic in autobiography as the loss of paradise, a journey, conversion and confession. The first phase is characterised by the loss of innocence; the child has to come to terms with reality. Youth in autobiography shows similarities to traditional initiations rituals: the young male has to prove his value to the society and has to acquire a certain skill, much like the hero of a classical epic, to prove this to the community. According to Conway and Egan the phase of maturity is a time of crisis. The writer has to face an obstacle that he was, as the heroes in epics, destined to confront. The victory over that obstacle results in the acquisition of a certain status. In the final phase, confession, the hero reflects upon his success and tells his story through an audience: the readers of his autobiography. In modern life writing, however, that moment of reflection can also come at a time of crisis, especially when the writer is still a young man. Egan argues that autobiographies can be used to make a statement or assert a certain identity.

⁹⁶ Conway, *When Memory Speaks*, 13.

⁹⁷ Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* (2000) is a good illustration of how not just men, but also women tend to compare themselves to the ideals of epic stories. In this thesis, however, I have limited the analysis to the use of classical heroic epics by men.

Similar to the way the classical hero's life changes in an epic, Assange's childhood is threatened and he is thrown out of his personal paradise. Just like an epic hero, Assange sets out on a journey during which he learns important skills, hones his extraordinary capabilities and receives his weapons to survive the Underworld. This journey through the Valley of the Shadow of Death can be seen as his time of crisis and the inevitable confrontation with the evil he was destined to face. Assange's autobiography, as I have shown in the previous chapters, contains all three of these episodes. The phase of 'confession' is less visible, but present nonetheless. What is even more striking is the way in which Assange presents women in his autobiography. They have very similar characteristics as the women in the classic epics. They are either seductive and impede the hero's progress or support, and nurture him. Assange only names a few women, who seem to embody the prominent aspects of women in classical epics. His mother stands for protection in Paradise, but also shows that women are in need of a male escort. The young girl at school, Anne Hamilton-Byrne and the two Swedish women represent the negative aspects of women: they seduce, are selfish and immobilise the progress of men.

Though there seems to be no phase of confession in modern autobiographies, by writing from their time of crisis writers still create a moment of reflection. This bird's-eye view is particularly important in a heroic epic, as it provides the narrative that gives the tale its inevitability and sometimes its tragedy. Without presenting a distinct period of confession Assange is still able to create this narrative of predestination and inevitability: by writing from his prison cell in the beginning of the book he creates the suggestion that the reader is, in a way, his cellmate and is invited to listen to the story of his life. This allows Assange to reflect on his life, thereby creating a traditional narrative. My conclusion is therefore that the autobiography has the same structure and narrative as traditional epics, in all aspects

Furthermore, because the book follows the structure and narrative of a classical epic, the WikiLeaks-founder is able to give certain incidents throughout his life a purpose. In *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography* we can see that ideas in his past or from his parents, his first computer, WikiLeaks and his time in prison play pivotal roles in his life story. As I have described earlier, these examples are used to legitimize his actions, portray him as destined to confront the corporations and institutions and as metaphors for weapons. A good example of the latter is the image of WikiLeaks as the head of Medusa or the magical sword of Theseus: WikiLeaks serves to defeat the monster. As these three features of the classical epic are clearly present and directly linkable to traditional heroic epics, I can conclude that, although this epic structure has been subject to change in autobiographies over many centuries, it is still clearly present in *Julian Assange: The Unauthorised Autobiography*.

This thesis raises a few questions. How can it be possible that today, unlike the Classical era, the heroes of epics are not perceived as such by everyone? Assange has tried to create a heroic image for himself to explain his actions and possibly gain support for his confrontation with his destiny. Yet, he has not succeeded: he is not seen as the champion of freedom as he portrays himself. An important flaw in the text is that its readers are too divided. They are either opposed to, or in support of Assange's vision. A classical epic is the tale of a hero that appeals to a majority of people. By structuring his life in the way he has done, Assange is not able to change everybody's view of his quest. Looking at the timing of the publication of Assange's autobiography, I am inclined to conclude that the aim of the book was to present himself as an innocent hero of freedom by presenting his motives through this autobiography.

This does not necessarily mean that it has been his conscious intention to paint a picture of himself as a *classical* hero. It is more likely that he intended to portray himself as a hero that appeals to the audience and used a structure similar to other, modern, autobiographies. This would explain why his text contains a lot of classical references to heroic epics; these stories are accepted by the readers as heroic. Yet, given the limited size of this thesis it is impossible to state that all other modern, heroic, autobiographies have a similar structure and narrative. More case studies will need to be conducted in order to make such an argument. Further research could have another benefit. If it can be determined that modern autobiographies have structures that are so similar to traditional epics as I have proven in this thesis, it could be a good argument to prove Conway right in her claim that we live our lives by an internal script, defined by the culture we live in.

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* E-books. Read on a second-generation Apple iPad, using the *iBooks* application, version 2.0.1. Annotations refer to the page numbers of the e-book, when holding the device in a vertical position with the text in the Palatino font, size five