Robert Langdon’s Hero’s Journey
- Reading the Novels of Dan Brown with the perspective of the Monomyth

Robert Langdons hjälteresa
- En läsning av Dan Browns romaner med perspektivet av monomyten

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Abstract

This essay investigates the characteristics of Robert Langdon and his female helpers in Dan Brown’s novels Angels and Demons, The Da Vinci Code, The Lost symbol and Inferno. In each of these novels, the quests are always solved by a male-female team. This essay is therefore going to focus on the character of Robert Langdon and his female helpers with the perspective of the Monomyth by Joseph Campbell. The protagonist Robert Langdon is a Harvard University professor specialised in religious iconology and symbology, but in these four novels he is thrown into breath-taking adventures with dangerous situations, however, with the help of several females he always manages to survive. The aim of this essay is to show how Langdon and his female helpers have the characteristics of a contemporary hero and helper, with the perspective of Campbell’s the Monomyth.

Keywords: Character Analysis, Robert Langdon, Hero, Female Helper, the Monomyth, Angels and Demons, The Da Vinci Code, The Lost Symbol, Inferno.
Introduction

“In modern societies, the hero has moved beyond the sphere of legend and of superhuman features. Contemporary heroes are diverse, ranging from fantasy superheroes to ordinary people who engage in extraordinary behaviour” (Mercadal).

Over the whole inhabited world, in all times and under all circumstances, the human myths flourished; and they have been a living source of inspiration for everything that man has created with their body and soul. It is no exaggeration to say that myth is the secret door through which the cosmos inexhaustible energy flows into the human cultural manifestations. Religions, philosophies, arts, ancient and historical forms of society, the prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that fill your sleep, all welling up from the myths original and magical circle (Campbell 3).

Heroes of many kinds have always been present in literature. Throughout history, the hero myth has gone through different phases, from the ancient timeless hero characters of the mythological era with superhuman godlike attributes and powers, to various creation myths around the world. From the ancient myths to the myths and poems in the Middle Ages (Olsson and Algulin 108) to novels and superheroes of comic books today, the hero has changed over time, but survived (Anderson). The society that the gods once supported is no longer the social unit; it is not carrying any religious content, but is mostly an economic-political organization. This brings us to the author Dan Brown, who has created best-selling adventure novels about the intellectual hero, Professor Robert Langdon. These novels are currently among the “twenty most popular texts ever published”, and were also at the top of cultural production in the 2000’s (Schneider-Mayerson 194). With the popularity of Brown’s The Da Vinci Code and the myriad titles that followed in its wake, the adventure genre gained new energy and popularity. Heroes on missions, whether involving physical or more intellectual pursuits and puzzles, struggle to decipher the codes that lead to treasures and sometimes, to saving the world (Saricks). Brown’s four novels share the same main idea, they all take place in one day and the clues are always solved by a male-female team (Schneider-Mayerson 195).

The main theme in Brown’s novels is the problematic of authority and power. The protagonist is drawn into conflicts of power struggle and challenges to the existing order, unravelling the hidden knowledge that has been withheld from the public in order to maintain
a status quo and prevent states, societies and religious authority from being contested. It is often up to a few individuals, namely Robert Langdon and his female helpers to set things straight since the general public remains ignorant of the forces that move history; voters, members of Congress, and even presidents are impotent compared to the powerful individuals and secret organizations that manipulate the public and control the world (Schneider-Mayerson 196). These authors including Dan Brown “blend fascinating bits of information on art, science, religion, and more into provocative puzzles that readers enjoy trying to solve from the safety of their own armchairs as they follow adventure heroes on their quests” (Saricks 21). Epic tales like these have always explored the most important mysteries affecting man: the tantalizing intellectual puzzles and clues from art, history, and ancient manuscripts (Saricks).

Joseph Campbell, an American mythologist has been one of the most outstanding academics of hero studies. He has defined the Monomyth, which means that a common pattern exists beneath the narrative elements of all great myths, regardless of their origin or time of creation, which is called “the hero’s journey”, which he separated into three main stages called “separation, initiation and return” (Mercadal). Brown created the fictional character Robert Langdon, a Harvard University professor, who teaches about religious Symbology and Art History (Angels 3), for whom he drew inspiration from different real-life people he had admired, one of them being Joseph Campbell and the adventures of Robert Langdon can be said to be loosely structured on the monomyth. “A teacher who I admire very much is Joseph Campbell, a historian of religion, researcher of symbolism and partly the inspiration for my character Robert Langdon” (Campbell). Brown wanted his character to have a set of skills that would help him to move the plot forward and to introduce new information (Knight). Robert Langdon is the main character throughout the series, whereas the female protagonist is changed in every novel. Vittoria Vetra, Sophie Neveu, Katherine Salomon and Sienna Brooks are the female helpers who accompany Langdon on his quests. This series so far contains the four novels Angels and Demons (2000), The Da Vinci Code (2003), The Lost Symbol (2009) and Inferno (2013). This essay will show that Robert Langdon and his female helpers have the characteristics of a contemporary hero and helper, with the perspective of Campbell’s the Monomyth.

To begin with a stipulative definition of the hero concept is needed. A hero is “a public figure of great accomplishments” (Anderson). This figure is frequent in society's culture, as for an example in religion, arts, mythology inherited in mankind through the centuries. Heroes are
ideal figures with exceptional traits like bravery, courage, strength, and leadership, and who are willing to sacrifice themselves. These persons are also typically male but there are examples of female heroism. If we look back to ancient mythologies, the hero character was “sometimes compared to the gods and heroes of ancient myth” (Cates 832). In addition they would also have a quest to solve, which would involve great dangers but they would return in triumph (Mercadal).

Heroes would disregard normal patterns of behaviour and put their life at risk (Miller 1). The monomyth or hero’s journey by Campbell consisted of three stages called “separation, initiation and return” (Mercadal). These three stages need to be defined. The first stage about separation means that the hero in question leaves his or her normal life behind, in order to go out on this quest. The second stage about initiation is how the hero encounters different obstacles and how lessons are learned. In this stage, the hero also gets some help from different helpers. Finally, the last stage involves the return of the hero. The hero discovers a solution and the quest is unveiled, afterwards the hero returns to society (Mercadal), with the experience and wisdom gained on the quest. These modern hero stories are also often entangled with events of the past or the future (Cates 839). The traditional adventure hero passes through an array of frightening perils to reach some goal, as can be exemplified with such classics as The Odyssey and Beowulf. Thus, novels in the adventure genre are action-packed, featuring a hero on a mission, and are often set in exotic locales during times of war or peace (Saricks).

Campbell describes a universal structure of myths in which the hero travels from the known world into the unknown; there he faces challenges and temptations, and engages in battles with superhuman forces. In his struggles, the hero sometimes derives hope and assurance from a helpful female figure, by whose magic he is protected, but eventually he is let down, defeated, and descends into an abyss connected with death and despair. Heroically, he picks himself up, and taking advantage of his descent into despair, he is able to gain important self-knowledge—sometimes, for example, through a visit to the underworld. This knowledge makes him powerful and allows him to recover the confidence to embark on further adventures (Steiner). Campbell compares the hero’s journey to the inner journey each of us is obliged to make in order to understand ourselves. The mysteries are about origins and nature, about freedom and destiny, about vocation and, most important, about death. It is possible to find a journey to the realm of the dead not only in the oldest accounts of the mythical age or in ancient and medieval literature but also in the plots of scripts written for film heroes.
If we look at heroes and literacy, heroes can often read or write anything they want. They are capable to do so wherever and whenever. Even if the hero is under a lot of pressure he or she can interpret any kind of text (Williams 682). This literacy skill outmanoeuvres the villains and as a result, sometimes saves the day. Another power the hero has is action, as “the hero is a man of action” (Williams 683). The physical hero performs a daring act that saves a fellow human being. Calmness is one of the other traits that are very important because of the fact that the hero needs to be calm and keep focused during pressure. If they did not have this skill they would not last for long. Remember that despite the danger and obstacles, the hero is successful. Others may be lost along the way, but the hero almost always prevails and survives—often to embark on further adventures in later novels. Conclusions may not be the typical happy ending of the Romance genre, but they are certainly satisfactory; the mission is carried out, and among the survivors are those we as readers care about the most (Saricks 18).

Today “the hero has moved beyond the sphere of legend and of superhuman features. Contemporary heroes are diverse, ranging from fantasy superheroes to ordinary people who engage in extraordinary behaviour” (Mercadal). The concept of heroism can be problematic in today’s society. Heroes in contemporary media may be willing or unwilling actors, tragic or comic, sympathetic outcasts and rebels (known as "Antiheroes" or "Byronic heroes"), individualists ("Randian") or communitarians. Figures that people perceive as heroes also tend to have a set of heroism traits, including leadership, and find themselves in unique circumstances (Mercadal). Must a hero possess extraordinary powers or abilities? Or can a hero be someone who shines a light on the inequities of the world? To be heroic may mean nothing more than this, to stand in the face of the status quo, in the face of an easy collapse in to the madness of an increasingly chaotic world and represent another way. To be heroic does not have to mean possessing the ability to stand successfully against the evils of the world, but just that one is willing to stand (Alsford 153).

The plot of heroic novels is often about one central conflict, the conflict between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ (Ramaswamy). For the hero to be able to display his heroism there also has to be a villain. The villain often comes across as a highly literate criminal mastermind who plots for world domination. The villain, in order to execute their tasks, must remain hidden from the public and not draw attention from society. The villain in these circumstances often relies on henchmen or thugs to carry out physical tasks (Williams 684). The villains or antagonists that we meet in Brown’s novels are as typical as Williams portrays them. They all have henchmen who carry out the deeds and they exercise power in anonymity.
Proceeding from the hero, the function of the helper needs to be defined. According to Williams, the helper is “a supporting player” (683). “The hero frequently has partners, companions, or a supporting cast of characters fitted to his feats, though some will be only modest ancillaries in the heroic adventurous enterprise” (Miller 102). In Campbell’s research and books on the monomyth there are many examples of the importance of the helper in the stages of the hero’s journey; sometimes the helper is female, for example, in the Greek hero story of Theseus, Minos’ daughter Ariadne, after falling hopelessly in love, helps Theseus navigate the Labyrinth. She does this by holding one end of a golden thread while Theseus works his way inward to slay the Minotaur. Without her help, Theseus would never have fulfilled his quest or found his way out of the maze once he did so (Campbell). Like in the story of Theseus the female helper that accompanies Robert Langdon on his journeys plays an equally important role.

Compared with the hero, the helper is often less masculine. The helper is often a nerdy male or female. Traditionally action heroes in movies and television programs often have a literate helper who acts as literacy surrogate for the action hero, doing the reading and research necessary to help the hero achieve his goals so he can be free to be a man of action. The traditional role of the helper has changed over time and they are often more agile and capable than before, displaying a more multi-faceted personality (Williams 683). In Brown’s novels however the hero is a man of action but he is also a man of extraordinary intellect who can take on any challenge, and so are the helpers.

When we now know the definition of a hero, let us look at the characteristics of Robert Langdon to see how he can be defined as a hero. In Brown’s first novel Angels and Demons we meet Langdon for the first time. He seems at first to be an ordinary man going about his own life, a professor that walks around campus on weekends, seen with his students discussing history or at the museums lecturing (Brown, Angels 5). He is talked about as a “clean-cut, conservative, obviously very sharp” man (Brown, Angels 98). As a professor and lecturer at Harvard University in symbolism and iconology, Langdon should live a calm and normal life. However, he has got some unique academic skills as well as some personality traits that make him perfect for solving mysteries involving symbolism and old conspiracies long forgotten in modern society. Often in these novels Langdon must decipher and follow a coded trail that requires a bright intellect, but also physical challenges with possible life-threatening consequences in which he has to be equipped with both psychological and physical skills. Brown drew inspiration for the character of Robert Langdon from the author and mythologist Joseph Campbell:
His writings on semiotics, comparative religion and mythology in particular "The Power of Myth" and "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" helped inspire the framework on which I built my character Robert Langdon.... I remember admiring Campbell’s matter-of-fact responses and wanting my own character Langdon to project that same respectful understanding when faced with complex spiritual issues (“Dan Brown: By the book”).

In a way, the character of Robert Langdon keeps in tradition with action heroes like James Bond or the archaeological adventurer Indiana Jones, but with a more intellectual and developed approach to the riddles and enigmas he faces, although action-packed. It is after all, all about the mind. The novels about Langdon are mostly set in the adventure/action genre. Code breaking is an integral element, sometimes involving computers, science, art, or text. Throughout the novels there are few signs of inner development in Robert, he is set in his ways, always lecturing and searching his eidetic memory. In Brown’s novels, the plot, intrigue, exotic locales, and ancient architecture are more important than the inner psychological development of the main characters. In all of Brown’s novels, Robert Langdon first gets the call to adventure and reluctantly begins the hero’s journey. He meets the female helper who assists him and contributes with additional skills. They then travel through the abyss of challenges and temptations only to return to society with new knowledge and spiritual power.

The prime motivation for Langdon is his lifelong curiosity and fascination for the unsolved mysteries in the world around him. His inner motivation is his love for symbols and icons (Brown, Angels 16). This goes back to his intellectual upbringing by his parents who gave him one of his earliest and most possessed belongings, his childish Mickey Mouse arm wristwatch, at the age of nine. This watch is very important to Langdon and he never goes anywhere without it. The Mickey Mouse watch was the thing that started his interest in symbolism as he discovered the world of Disney. Disney animations had been his first introduction to the magic of form and colour, and Mickey now served as Langdon's daily reminder to stay young at heart (Brown, Da Vinci 114). Throughout his entire life, Disney had been hailed as "the Modern-Day Leonardo da Vinci." Both men were generations ahead of their times, uniquely gifted artists, members of secret societies, and, most notably, avid pranksters. Like Leonardo, Walt Disney loved to infuse hidden messages and symbolism into his art. For the trained symbolist, watching an early Disney movie was like being barraged by an avalanche of allusion and metaphor, according to Langdon (Brown, Da Vinci 105).
There are many examples in the novels where Robert’s fascination takes over and makes him distracted and detached from reality. In the beginning of *Angels and Demons* Langdon is summoned to the CERN headquarters in Switzerland to investigate a murder with symbolical implications and immediately his obsession for history and symbology kicks in. When Robert is shown the murdered body of Leonardo Vetra at CERN it is obvious he has never seen a dead body before, but this does not distract him. As he circles the body he is totally focused on the symbol in front of him. ”Mr. Langdon?” Langdon did not hear. He was in another world...his world, his element, a world where history, myth, and fact collided, flooding his senses. The gears turned” (Brown, *Angels* 30). Another example when his mind wanders off is in *The Da Vinci Code* when Robert explains to Sophie about the Priory of Sion; Robert asks Sophie if she had seen the letters P.S sometime in her youth. This triggered Langdon’s mind: “Langdon heard only the faint murmur of her voice. He wasn’t going anywhere. He was lost in another place know. A place where ancient secrets rose to the surface. A place where forgotten histories emerged from the shadows” (Brown, *Da Vinci* 159).

As seen in other heroic novels, the hero has some kind of driving force or higher destiny, Langdon’s destiny is to understand and translate ancient codes and symbols. When he talks about symbols and icons, Langdon always gets swallowed up: “Langdon nodded, feeling a tinge of excitement, talking faster now” (Brown, *Angels* 180). “He needed every bit of self-restraint not to stop and read every treasure he passed” (Brown, *Angels* 208). These character traits are his strongest tools that make him irreplaceable as the literate hero in Brown's novels. His character is more of a historian turned reluctant hero, he is a combination of weakness and strength and does not always know what to do next. Langdon’s view of the world is often a fanciful exploration of image and ideas.

As someone who had spent his life exploring the hidden interconnectivity of disparate symbols and ideologies, Langdon views the world as a web of profoundly intertwined histories and events. “The connections may be invisible”, he often preached to his symbology classes at Harvard, “but they are always there, buried just beneath the surface” (Brown, *Lost* 16). But once again, we also notice that Robert has no intention to make the truth available to the world. This element of secrecy that ties Brown’s heroes to most of his villains provides a key to situating the Dan Brown phenomenon. The conclusions to Brown’s popular novels are rarely remarked on, but from a political perspective they prove telling. In each novel, a great truth is discovered, and the reader learns of it alongside Langdon; the general public, however, must remain ignorant (Schneider-Meyerson 198). It is a side of
Langdon, which can be interpreted as undemocratic and superior, but which also goes in line with his intellectual acumen and upbringing in the world of academics.

Another characteristic of Robert Langdon is his need to do the right thing; always helping, and keeping to his high moral standards and good ethics, which he displays on numerous occasions throughout the novels. As a scholar he knows the importance to safeguard rare objects and be professional in the handling of old artefacts. We can see this in *Angels and Demons* where he gets access to the old books inside the archival vault. He feels like a criminal when he puts down the spatula and takes the paper in his own hands: “Looks like I’ll burn in archivist’s hell” (Brown, *Angels* 215). And he is shocked when Vittoria takes *the diagramma* with her out of the archive, making him feel very guilty for “stealing a priceless relic” (Brown, *Angels* 220).

The hero is often “a central figure who is self-described, self-contained, isolate [sic!], solipsistic” (Miller 109). These features match Langdon’s life and relationships. Langdon comes across as a lone wolf whose focus lays in his all-consuming interest in symbolism and ancient mysteries. His relations are within the academic world and mainly with his students. As a teacher he is a strict disciplinarian but he also loves to have fun, and is always open to discuss different opinions in the classroom. In a way, his solitude is a precondition for the skills he possesses. In his spare time he continues to study ancient texts and symbols or travel to the recurring lectures he is invited to give, following his fame.

In all of Brown’s novels about Robert Langdon a new female helper is introduced who is highly literate and able. The female helper is almost as important as Robert himself in solving the plot. There are some hints in the novels of him occasionally having more intimate relations with his female counterpart. In the first novel *Angels and Demons* he feels a growing attraction to Vittoria, but as soon as he feels this emotion he tells himself to “get real” (Brown, *Angels* 238). As the story develops his feelings grow stronger, and when Vittoria is kidnapped by the Hassassin, he feels loneliness for the first time in years. This feeling of loneliness turns into pain, but it never drags him down, rather “The pain gave him strength” (Brown, *Angels* 397). Robert and Vittoria do have a small romance and he “felt wildly drawn to her… more than to any woman in his life” (Brown, *Angels* 567). However, when we meet Langdon in the next novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, and he looks back to the time in Vatican City, the readers understand that the romance between Robert and Vittoria has ended and the promise to meet every sixth month in a new romantic place is gone (Brown, *Da Vinci* 32). Nevertheless, Vittoria did mean something to Robert; she left emptiness and a
longing he never thought he could feel. “His lifelong affinity for bachelorhood and the simple freedoms it allowed had been shaken” (Brown, Da Vinci 57).

In The Da Vinci Code where we meet a new woman and helper, we notice how he has not left Vittoria behind yet, emotionally. He mentions her several times in the novel, but in the end she is no longer a part of Langdon’s life. Langdon promises Sophie Neveu a romantic stay at the luxury Hotel Brunelleschi (Brown, Da Vinci 587); however, we never know if the meeting takes place or not. Obviously there is no place in Roberts’s life for any longer relationships. Love or sexual relationships play a small role in the narrative of the novels. The primary difficulty lies in the way the heroic individual tries to escape the net both of familial-parental (especially paternal) authority and what we might call the shapes and obligations of ordinary human affection—here meaning the inclusive, adhesive forces of emotional commitment, either to family or to a woman who might become his wife (and thus allow him to continue the family line) (Miller 366).

Another feature heroes are supposed to have is strength (Cates 832). The character of Robert Langdon does not have the invincibility heroes often have, but he has a good physique. In Angels and demons Brown describes his main protagonist Robert Langdon as six foot tall and thanks to his morning ritual, he has the body of a swimmer. He tries to take care of himself with a morning swim in the university pool which gave him his nickname “the Dolphin” (Brown, Angels 5). Although he later on in the novel The Lost Symbol admits that it is getting harder as the years pass. (Brown, Lost 13) His good physique comes to his help in various situations throughout the novels. One typical example of this is in Inferno when he has no other way then to go up: - “Then, with surprising agility and strength, the professor hoisted himself up through the opening and disappeared into the rabbit hole“(Brown, Inferno 196).

Something that serves Langdon well both as a teacher and a hero is his eidetic memory, sometimes carelessly called photographic memory, which is the ability to remember almost everything, especially images. It is a rare gift and is something he uses to his advantage as the puzzles are thrown at him in every novel. In the last novel Inferno, Langdon loses his memory for a while, he wakes up at a hospital in the beginning of the novel and does not remember where he is or what he has been doing the last couple of days (Brown, Inferno 15). Even when Robert loses his memory for a moment, his eidetic memory works just fine. “Langdon opened his eyes and studied her; pleased to see his eidetic memory was functioning normally” (Brown, Inferno 45), “Langdon’s memory was the intellectual asset he relied on most” (Brown, Inferno 79). Langdon’s mind and thoughts are always set to overdrive. His
mind is the one main thing that sets him apart from the other characters in the novels. This is his superpower. One example of his abilities is demonstrated in *Angel and Demons* when they have found *the diagramma* in the Vatican’s vault and Vittoria asks:

“You think you can decipher this thing? Or did we just kill all those brain cells for kicks?” Langdon took the document carefully in his hands. Without hesitation he slipped it into one of the breast pockets of his tweed jacket, out of the sunlight and dangers of moisture. “I deciphered it already.” Vittoria stopped short. “You what?” Langdon kept moving. Vittoria hustled to catch up. “You read it once! I thought it was supposed to be hard!” (Brown, *Angels* 221).

This trait however can sometimes make him seem slightly superior in the eyes of others, especially against government agents or police authorities. In other words he may come across as a “know it all”. Another example is in *The Da Vinci Code* where we see how his intellect once again works to his advantage, especially when he knows how he needs to act, as they are about to be outmanoeuvred Robert thinks one step ahead making sure that the door to the truck they are about to be locked up in cannot be closed: “Langdon paused a moment longer, eyeing the metal threshold. Then he stood. As he did, he discreetly brushed the shell over the edge onto the narrow ledge that was the door’s lower sill. Fully upright now, Langdon stepped backward” (Brown, *Da Vinci* 284). He also uses his famed memory skills to get out of questions he does not want to answer. When Sophie in *The Da Vinci Code* asks him about his opinion for the Grail, he drifts off, talking about faith and in the end of their conversation he asks: “What was your question again? ‘I can’t remember’ He smiled. ‘Works every time’” (Brown, *Da Vinci* 452). His intellect and eidetic memory also makes him a bit distracted as his thoughts sometimes wander off. As we read in *Angels and Demons* when he has just arrived to the Vatican City and Robert and Vittoria are talking to the commander of the Swiss Guard. They want to speak with someone in charge and when the commander tells Robert and Vittoria that there is not anyone who can greet them now, Robert starts to think about the Chamberlain, which means the same as the Italian Camerlengo, the administrator of the Catholic Church in Rome: “‘The late Pope’s chamberlain’. Langdon repeated the word self-assuredly, praying his memory served him. He recalled reading once about the curious arrangement of Vatican authority following the death of a Pope” (Brown, *Angels* 135).

Other character features are his ability to be open-minded and to adapt to his environment. He is always very careful not to discourage the beliefs of religious people even though he is not a believer himself. In *Angels and Demons* the Camerlengo asks Langdon about his own belief.
“Do you believe in God, Mr. Langdon?” The question startled him…. Although he studied religion for years, Langdon was not a religious man. He respected the power of faith, the benevolence of churches, the strength religion gave so many people…and yet, for him, the intellectual suspension of disbelief that was imperative if one were truly going to “believe” had always proved too big an obstacle for his academic mind. “I want to believe,” he heard himself say. (Brown, Da Vinci 108)

Through his own studies he often has a more holistic view on the Bible or a secret society than the people he meets, but he always tries to accept and understand the other’s view. Robert also possesses the ability to learn from previous mistakes and shows good judgement in difficult situations by making a calculation and understanding of risk and an acceptance of the consequences of action.

Langdon also has the self-sacrificial feature of a hero. In Angels and Demons, he and Vittoria are about to go into the church were the Hassassin could be at the moment, murdering one of the cardinals. Robert says to Vittoria to wait and to let him go first with the humouring phrase “age before beauty” (Brown, Angels 262). He does it several times.

“Langdon caught her arm.” ‘No, it’s dangerous. I’ll go’ ” (Brown, Angels 272). We can also see his self-sacrifice in The Da Vinci Code, when Leigh Teabing’s servant turns out to be working for the bad guy, and holds Leigh hostage: “‘Take me,’ Langdon demanded, his voice cracking with emotion. ‘Let Leigh go’” (Brown, Da Vinci 477). The same thing happens in Inferno, when Robert and Sienna are about to get trapped: “Langdon felt a chill. This killer is here for both of us. Langdon made a show of glancing away from Sienna, over his shoulder into the darkness from which they’d come. ‘She has nothing to do with this. You want me’” (Brown, Inferno 205). He uses his intellect and his thoughtfulness to remain calm under pressure, assess the situation and not take unnecessary risks. Another example is in the final crescendo in Angels and Demons when Robert takes the canister with the antimatter on board the helicopter knowing he is likely not going to survive:

Robert Langdon was surprised by how heavy the canister was. He ran to the other side of the chopper and jumped in the rear compartment where he and Vittoria had sat only hours ago. He left the door open and buckled himself in. Then he yelled to the Camerlengo in the front seat. “Fly, Father!” (Brown, Angels 495).
He offers himself in order to save others. Heroism has to do with abandoning oneself to the other, deploying one’s powers in the service of the others, irrespective of personal safety or reward, and irrespective of success or failure (Alsford 154).

Langdon also has the heroic feature of courage and it comes when he needs it the most. In Angels and Demons Vittoria gets kidnapped by the Hassassin and Langdon wants nothing more than to save her. Robert follows the Hassassin and confronts him when he is about to carry out yet another murder of a cardinal at Bernini’s fountain. Robert has the moment of surprise to his advantage: “Waist-deep in water, Robert Langdon raised his gun and stepped out of the mist, feeling like some sort of aquatic cowboy making a final stand. “Don’t move”. His voice was steadier than the gun” (Brown, Angels 411). The Hassassin acknowledges Robert Langdon’s bravery: “From the darkness of the van the Hassassin gazed out at his aggressor and couldn´t help but feel an amused pity. The American was brave, that he had proven” (Brown, Angels 412) The two men fight furiously in the waist-deep water, but with only courage against a highly trained murder Robert has to give in and the Hassassin disappears from the scene. Langdon does not give up and in the end he is victorious and saves Vittoria, and his courage grows. Robert is exposed to life-threatening situations in every meeting with the Hassassin. We can see how Brown is inspired by early mythology and even biblical undertones as he lets his main character experience a near death moment and a resurrection. It is almost an allegory of the Bible's tale of Jesus and with strong connections to earlier mythology with the hero figure as an immortal. When he is saved from the sealed tank he been forced into by the villain he experiences a primal feeling:

No! He tried to fight them off, but he had no arms...no fists. Or did he?
Suddenly he felt his body materialising round his mind. His flesh had returned and it was being seized by powerful hands that were dragging him upward. No! Please!”[…] and when Robert is freed from the capsule he experiences a profound “He felt like a child being born from a womb.” (Brown, Lost 414)

The narrative design of getting Langdon nearly killed four times by his opponents reflects his vulnerability. His fourth encounter with death produces pleasure through the revelation of his limits thereby confirming his non superhuman status despite his power (Dey 889).

The character of Robert Langdon also displays some flaws and features that are not heroic. He can occasionally, like all of us, be wrong; he has his drawbacks and social weaknesses. He is claustrophobic after an incident in his childhood when he fell into a well and had to tread water for a whole night (Brown, Angels 11). In The Lost Symbol we can see that Brown displays his main protagonist as unusually inept and helpless, he does not save
“the damsel in distress” and cannot even save himself. Of course he contributes with his sharp observations surrounding symbols, but he is mostly passive. He is often frightened and does not like physical challenges or violence, although he would never leave someone in the lurch, this is a personality trait that makes him heroic. In one scene in *Angels and Demons*, Robert reveals his vulnerability as a hero figure when he thinks, “what the hell I am I doing? I should have gone home when I had the choice” (Brown 106). This shows that he feels fear in completing the mission; otherwise he would not have expressed a desire to return home. However, because Langdon decides to stay and follow through on the task, he shows his courage. Sometimes his ability to assess situations in an intellectual manner helps him overcome his phobia, as in *Angels and Demons* when he is trapped beneath an overturned sarcophagus: “As the claustrophobic panic closed in, Langdon was overcome by images of the sarcophagus shrinking around him. Squeezed by delirium, he fought the illusion with every logical shred of intellect he had” (Brown, *Angels* 387). His personality also makes him a little odd in social encounters and he sometimes comes across as a little awkward and excessively focused on details overlooked by others. In *Angel and Demons* he suddenly understands he has made a terrible mistake:

“Langdon realized, it meant Vittoria had to be right. By default, Bernini was the Illuminati’s unknown master; nobody else had contributed artwork to this chapel! The implications came almost too fast for Langdon to process. Bernini was an Illuminatus. Bernini designed the Illuminati ambigrams. Bernini laid out the path of Illumination. Langdon could barely speak. Could it be that here in this tiny Chigi Chapel, the world-renowned Bernini had placed a sculpture that pointed across Rome toward the next altar of science? “Bernini,” he said. “I never would have guessed” (Brown, *Angels* 284).

But even though he displays an extreme focus on details, and are often distracted, as an intellectual hero he never loses sight of the big picture and has an open way of bringing in new facts.

In Brown’s novels the helper is almost as important as the main character and plays a significant role for the narrative, both as Langdon’s actual helper and as someone to project his knowledge on and furthermore helping Brown inform the reader and further the story. So let us look at the female helpers of Brown’s novels. Every hero needs a helper, without the assistance of the helpers the heroes would fail miserably. As Campbell says, ”One has only to know and trust, and the ageless guardians will appear” (Campbell). In the Robert Langdon series, the role of the helper is always a female with some kind of relation to
the plot, either as a researcher or scholar on their own or with some family ties to the victim. In contrast to the traditional helper in fictional stories who often comes across as less able or a little dumb, the helpers in Brown’s novels often display more initiative and often take matter in their own hands to help and push Robert. The female protagonist or helper also challenges Langdon to a more scientific and fact-driven personality by pointing to a more emotional and spiritual discourse. Although Robert is instrumental for solving the conspiracies or mysteries the female helper ensures the success of the task, and without the female protagonist Langdon would face obstacles too big for him to overcome.

In the first novel, *Angels and Demons*, we get to follow the young scientist Vittoria Vetra, who is the daughter of the victim (Brown, *Angels* 46). She is also partly responsible for the creation of the Antimatter, and because of her involvement in the project she needs to go with Langdon to find the Antimatter in time so she can bring it back to CERN and contain it (Brown, *Angels* 148). Vittoria Vetra has a huge part in the first novel and she both pushes Robert to act, but also questions Robert’s theories and finds some answers herself. As in the novel when they are on the path of Illumination and Robert believes it is at Raphael’s tomb the first assassin is going to be, Vittoria comes to the conclusion that Robert is mistaken, and she solves the clue in order for Robert to find the right path again:

Langdon pointed to the Roman numeral in the lower liner. ”That’s the pub date. What’s going on?” Vittoria deciphered the number. “1639?” “Yes. What’s wrong?” Vittoria’s eyes filled with foreboding. ”We’re in trouble, Robert. Big trouble. The dates don’t match.” “What dates don’t match?” “Raphael’s tomb. He wasn’t buried here until 1759. A century *after Diagramma* was published.” Langdon stared at her trying to make sense of the words. ”No,” he replied. “Raphael died in 1520, long *before Diagramma*”. “Yes, but he wasn’t buried here until much later.” Langdon was lost (Brown, *Angels* 248-249).

As a helper Vittoria has all the relevant skills needed to complement Robert Langdon. She is smart and courageous. She also steps up and takes the initiative when she and Robert cannot find an open entrance to The Church of Santa Maria del Popolo and Robert thinks they must wait for help, clearly losing the initiative for a moment:

“’There must be another entrance,” Vittoria said. “Probably,” Langdon said, exhaling, “but Olivetti will be here in a minute. It’s too dangerous to go in. We should cover the church from out here until-” Vittoria turned, her eyes blazing. “If there’s another way in, there’s another way out. If this guy disappears, we’re
“fregati.” Langdon knew enough Italian to know she was right (Brown, *Angels* 260)

This is an example of how Vittoria as the female helper is a driving force both to push Robert and the narrative forward.

In the next novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, professor Langdon gets teamed up with Sophie Neveu, a cryptologist working for the French police (Brown, *Da Vinci* 78). She is also the grand daughter to Jacques Saunière, the curator at the Louvre who is murdered in the beginning of the story (Brown, *Da Vinci* 105). However she broke with her grandfather after she discovered him participating in a sexual ritual in his house in Normandy. She had no contact with him until she found him murdered on the floor of the Grande Galerie in the Louvre. As a cryptologist Sophie matches Robert´s skills in solving riddles and puzzles and she makes the perfect companion:

“Amazing, isn’t it?” Sophie whispered. Langdon glanced up. “I don’t know. What the hell is it?” Now there was a glint in Sophie’s eye. “My grandfather used to craft these as a hobby. They were invented by Leonardo Da Vinci”.

Even in the diffuse light, Sophie could see Langdon’s surprise. “Da Vinci?” he muttered, looking again at the canister. “Yes. It’s called a cryptex.” (Brown, *Da Vinci* 269-70)

Sophie discovers the long hidden secrets about her family with profound implications to the whole Christian world. As in other novels, Langdon has met Sophie before when she was a child. Sophie Neveu was asked by her grandfather to seek up Robert Langdon in the beginning of the novel. She did not take her grandfather seriously, but when she found out that he had been killed Sophie did what her grandfather had asked of her (Brown, *Da Vinci* 115). Sophie is more of a traditional helper than Vittoria in the first novel. Sophie is a researcher (Brown, *Da Vinci* 78), and the traditional helper’s main power is literacy (Williams 683), which makes Sophie a classic female helper, although she is also brave and takes action when she must:

Sophie turned now and plunged her hand into the pocket of Langdon’s tweed jacket. Before Langdon knew what had happened, she had yanked out the pistol, swung it around, and was pressing it to the back of the driver’s head. The driver instantly dropped his radio, raising his one free hand overhead. ‘Sophie!’ Langdon choked. “What the hell” – “Arrêtez!” Sophie commanded the driver. Trembling, the driver obeyed, stopping the car (Brown, *Da Vinci* 226).
In this quote, we can see how Sophie does not only have the power of literacy but also has the power to act and take charge. This is a good example of how Sophie, the female helper, is more attentive and focused on the mission than the main character Robert Langdon and points out that they are about to get discovered. Without the female helpers’ resourcefulness Robert would have a much harder time throughout the novels.

Katherine Salomon, the female helper in *The Lost Symbol* is a Noetic scientist and sister to Peter Salomon, the head of the Smithsonian Institute. Peter Salomon had given his sister a lab in the facilities of The Smithsonian Institute so she could run experiments in using modern science to answer ancient philosophical questions. She experiments in metaphysical philosophy or how beliefs, thoughts, and intentions affect the physical world. This is something that Robert is very sceptical towards. However, their combined skills are the key to solving much of the enigmas in the novel and are therefore the perfect companion or helper to Robert. Katherine is very intelligent and able, and a true believer that our mind is having a real impact on our physical world. Robert and Katherine have met before at a party at Peter Salomon’s house. A phone conversation indicates some sort of relationship, in which Katherine expresses disappointment that Robert never called back (Brown, *Lost* 177). Although she is very fond of Robert most of their interaction is about intellectual matters. As they both are high performers, Katherine takes the lead in numerous occasions and is fundamental in unravelling the plot. The character of Katherine is there to reinforce the character of Robert Langdon and challenge his more scientific and intellectual approach to the environment around him.

In the last novel *Inferno*, we meet a different kind of helper than before. Even if the latest female-helper, Sienna, helps Langdon on his quest to find Zobrist’s virus, she also betrays Langdon and turns out to be Zobrist’s accomplice. This is a turning point in Brown’s fourth novel as the reader has become used to rely on the female helper to stand by Robert. In the other novels the helper is involved in the story but also a part of the conclusion, but not in this one. In the beginning of the novel Sienna helps Robert flee from a woman who wants him dead. She takes care of him, tending to his wounds and does everything to make Robert feel better. Sienna is a doctor and was a child genius, already at the age of five she was a celebrity in scientific circles (Brown, *Inferno* 36). Robert puts his trust in Sienna, but he should not have. Towards the end Sienna reveals herself, she leaves Robert behind getting a head start finding the virus. Robert Langdon, however, solves the riddle in the last minute and stops Sienna from releasing the virus that would have killed millions of people. However it turns out to be a less dangerous virus that alters the DNA in humans, rendering them less fertile. In
the end Robert’s affection for Sienna remains strong and Sienna helps both Robert and WHO by sharing all the information about Zobrist and the virus she is able to. In a way, even though she cheated Robert, he had not managed it without Sienna’s help.

To conclude, in the novels, Robert Langdon does not display much of a character arc over the course of the stories. Like other hero characters he is almost fully developed from the start and undergoes little or no inner change through Brown’s novels. Given his willingness to take risks, the physical prowess demonstrated through his swimming, and his willingness to tackle an international crisis, Langdon is almost like a comic book hero or a contemporary action hero like Indiana Jones or James Bond. Of course he has his inner demons, but he comes across as quite content with himself and his inner life is not crucial in the stories to solve any obstacles laid in front of him. As seen in many adventure novels featuring a male hero, Robert is dependent on a helper, who in Brown's novels always is female. The female helper is also highly literate and physically able and without her help Robert may not survive to see another day. Throughout the novels he follows the same pattern, though there is a small change in the latest novel. The hero’s journey presented above consisted of three stages. *Separation*; Robert gets summoned or kidnapped in one way or another. *Initiation*, Robert gets drawn in to a mystery and world changing adventure. And, finally, *Return*, as a true hero Robert solves the threat and saves the world returning with even more knowledge. Langdon and his female helpers, who always appear in the second stage or the initiation, take part in this hero’s journey in each and every novel. The female helper often plays the role of nurturers and supporters in the ancient myths, often with supernatural gifts, who protects and aide the hero on his journey. But in modern literature the female helper plays the role of the sidekick with extraordinary traits, but without any supernatural abilities. So in conclusion, Robert Langdon has the characteristics of a contemporary action hero, in tradition with the studies by Joseph Campbell and his Monomyth, sometimes flawed but a literate hero of our time.
Works Cited


