

Pick a Hero

I've been struggling with my latest project, a novel tentatively titled *Empty Luck*. I know what it is about and I have a pretty good sense of the story, of the plot and the characters. What I don't know is who the hero is. I don't know who the book is really about. Right now I have an ensemble cast, where at least three of the main characters are on their own journeys. You may ask "What's wrong with that?" Maybe it is all right for some stories. After all, it was fine for Robert Altman, the filmmaker, and fine for any number of TV shows, such as "Friends."

But maybe it is not all right for my novel. For me, a good novel needs one principal character the reader can focus on and root for. I think it is more engaging for the reader to have one person primarily in mind. It might be the narrator or maybe the individual who really has some monumental hurdle to overcome.

Of my three conceivable heroes in *Empty Luck*, I just realized I do know who the hero is. It is the man who has to and will change the most, the one who will learn the most from their experience. The other two important characters would have less to conquer in their lives and so their struggles are less heroic.

That feels right. The hero must undergo the most significant change, must come to understand their own struggles and those of others more deeply than before. And they have to learn something important. That lesson should not be forced on the reader in a heavy-handed pedantic way, but more subtly so the reader perceives it for themselves.

This presents me with the immediate problem of where to begin the book. I've heard from the usual suspects, the critics, who say there is a right way to write, that the first chapter must introduce the hero and his problem. Otherwise, they claim, you confuse your reader. Maybe. I need to think about that. But regardless, I need to work on my hero's problems, the hurdles, as it were, and the struggles to ultimately overcome them and consequently grow.