Tragic Tale of A Titan: Towards A Typology of an Anti-Hero Journey

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Abstract: The recent conclusion of *Attack on Titan* has ignited discussions about Eren Yeager's character in the anime series-to say, he represents conflicting tales of being the heroic figure for the Eldians and the anti-hero driven by his anger and desire for revenge. This leads to the ultimate question: was he really a hero? Rather than engaging in this debate, the researcher first presents the classical hero typology as it was first defined and exemplified by Gilgamesh and later developed by Joseph Campbell. The next section of the analysis will follow Eren's path in order to highlight the complicated circumstances that have created these contrasting stories. The textual analysis will then explain the anti-hero typology, leading to a suggested structure for an Antihero Journey story. This paper seeks to expand on the existing monomyth or Hero's Journey framework by adapting the Anti-hero narrative structure ideas of Bartley (2023) & Drake (2014) and providing a more complete chassis with which to understand modern antihero narratives.

Keywords: Eren Yeager, Attack on Titan, anime, Hero's Journey, antihero.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of a 'hero' both in the social discussions and academic delineations, has its historical roots in the classic journey of a hero as reflected in the ancient Mesopotamian epic, Gilgamesh. In reflecting on the *Attack on Titan* anime series, there are those who have dramatically ascribed heroic characteristics onto Eren Yager (Pramuditha, 2022; Truong, 2018). On the other hand, some view his actions as self-serving, therefore he cannot be classified as a hero (Anderson, 2023). This leads to the question of how these varying interpretations can relate to the same individual and same story. This paper's findings contribute on two levels. First, it aims to clarify the misleading binary of epic versus tragic hero by introducing the anti-hero typology as a theoretical framework. The study also intends to expand present literature on hero and anti-hero narratives to modern examples, especially in relation to the *Attack on Titan* anime as a medium of heroic storytelling through a proposed alternative to the traditional monomythic structure which is the Antihero's Journey narrative framework.

Kohen, (2013) argues that when there is a cluster of interrelated texts, with no apparent hero character, the narratives will always try to structure the action using roles conventionally associated with a hero. This is well understood in the anime series *Attack on Titan*, where several creative re-imaginings are consistently contingent upon the presence of its main character, Eren Yeager, to fulfill this heroic role.

The created stories are effective to varying degrees, with some narratives appearing like heroic tales that have been hailed with much applause, while others are not believable at all. Eren Yeager is one of the main characters in an anime, who leads two heroic quests that are quite different in nature, one as a hero and the other as an anti-hero.

1.1 Heroes – From Gilgamesh to Campbell

Ancient Mesopotamia played an important role in shaping the literary tradition through five early Sumerian poems that have survived to this date. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* narrates a quest by a king for the elixir on mortality and provides a model for the archetypal hero's journey, which reflects the values of society. Expectations about heroes and the theories that accompany them do not just fall from the air or come fully fleshed out. They are developed and honed over time through people's shared experiences (Campbell, 2003). Similarly, today's audience has established broad expectations and requirements for heroes and their narratives. Eren Yeager is a perfect illustration of how drama merges with the ordinary desire to witness the rise of heroes admired by many.

The dominant forms of organizational interpretation seem to be very strongly influenced by the quest narrative according to Vogler (2007). This form indicates a very important fight to achieve success and ends up in the triumph of a hero (Campbell, 2008). Usually, there is a quest against obstacles developed by antagonists within an oppressive society, and it is by getting through the challenge that there is passage to a new unified state in society (Caserta, 2021). Whatever the motivations for the search and whatever the results, there is a profound and multifaceted journey by the protagonist toward a perilous y*et al*luring goal (Vogler, 2007). The process of

transformation occurs in three stages: the stages of departure, initiation, and return (Campbell, 2008).

The call to adventure, according to Campbell (2008) which is the starting point of the hero's journey, has an initial refusal by the protagonist but ultimately accepted. In the case of Gilgamesh, the moment he was called to take action on the problem brought about by "a fellow who comes from the mountain" (Kovacs, 1989, p.8). It is at this stage that he usually feels doubt and hesitates to respond to the call, as can be seen through Enkidu trying to discourage Gilgamesh from an action.

Following the initial stage and the beginning of the hero's journey, the first common characteristic is for the protagonist to develop supernatural powers. The powers often come from a powerful figure in the story that symbolizes fate. Gilgamesh gets his powers from the sun god, as Chase established in his outline of the story pattern. His mother asks for such powers through a ritual of purification, where she obtains a purity plant, puts on a dignified robe, and places a crown on her head (Kovacs, 1989, p. 17). It is through such supernatural powers that Gilgamesh gets the courage to confront his enemies and this part of the journey is characterized by the absence of doubt or hesitation.

The character must also undergo, and succeed at, an impossible task if he is ever to be fully transformed into a hero. This begins when Gilgamesh and Enkidu "stood at the edge of the forest…gazing at the entrance to the forest" (Kovacs, 1989, p. 41). The completion of the initiation involves the passing of many trials that Gilgamesh successfully completes (Kovacs, 1989, p. 93). The monomyth ends and the hero partially transformed when, after some doubts, the hero goes back home as a victor. Also, Gilgamesh, after undergoing various ordeals, defeats his enemy and starts going back to Uruk and share the boon which he himself has earned from his journey. The recorded Mesopotamian tale is seen by many as the first epic quest story ever told in hero narrative writing (Das, 2024).

1.2 The Anti-hero's Journey

The Anti-hero's Journey may not be as well-defined or rewarding, but even anti-heroes receive a Call to Adventure. Furthermore, anti-heroes often are wracked by doubt and often face alienation or rejection, which can trigger their call to adventure-situations that a classic hero would

seldom be exposed to. Anti-heroes are typically driven by more selfish needs or an insatiable hunger to attain things that seem beyond their grasp. They arrive at their threshold much more conflicted, and therefore, they may have more difficulty with a linear transformation. Anti-heroes seem to oscillate between heroism and their own selfish morals and motivations. Drake (2014) claims that anti-heroes usually deviate from the path of the Hero's Journey in the Meeting the Mentor stage. She further elaborates that an anti-hero does not have a mentor. Rather, he or she has an "instigator" (p. 6, 2014) or a partner who tempts him or her into various trials or challenges. While heroes have challenges as well, their mentor often aids them in overcoming them. The anti-hero's 'partners', in contrast want the anti-hero to fall or succumb. Bartley (2023), however, argues that the anti-hero is born from continuous refusal of the call. The protagonist at this stage has a power he or she gained from the previous journey and used in a particular way that creates a particular downfall for him or her. At this stage, Bartley (2023) calls 'Reservation, the protagonist is reserved for purpose. He or she has reached rock bottom and denies any possibility of reinvention of self.

Following this, Drake (2024) continues that the next step of an anti-hero's journey is Challenges and Temptations. She also terms the stage as "Path to Power" (p. 7). Here is where the path darkens for the anti-hero. The anti-hero's journey is not characterized by the gains which the traditional heroes have, but rather by their growing loneliness, an inflated arrogance born of self-serving ambitions, and a fight with fate. That is just a road of defeats that culminate in a grand failure, which doth change the trajectory of the character and might just give rise to this deep transformation as they seek to regain some sense of virtue in their character. Bartley (2023), on the other hand, believes the next stage of an anti-hero's journey is his or her recognition of his or her reservation for purpose and the recognition of his or her power. Afterwards, the anti-hero begins to rebel against his or her call which ends in ruination in the part of the protagonist. At this point Bartley (2023) resumes the character narrates a strange and sadistic story to himself or herself that his or her current state or plight is who he or she is all going to be. The protagonist here swing to and fro between rebellion and ruination eventually deepening the rock bottom of his or her fall until an opportunity of brief repentance presents itself.

The protagonist decides to turn and change for the better.

Repentance, however, is not enough. To turn around is not enough. There is a repositioning that needs to happen (Bartley, 2023). The anti-hero shifts from the mental base of change to the physical. His or her triangular paradigm changes all the way from the foundation – values and beliefs. Everything is revamped to realign with Hero's Journey. Then, the anti-hero goes from repositioning to restoration – the going back to the Hero's Journey at the stage where the hero finally answers the call.

Drake (2014) terms this stage as Revelations and Redemption. Some anti-heroes are greatly changed, while others remain the same. Yet, each one reflects a change that connects to a broader narrative beyond their personal tales, no matter how small. Even though the end of an anti-hero's journey might not always be happy or especially dramatic, and they may never fully win the audience's love, their quest for redemption helps viewers see the possibility of their own humanity.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher utilized a critical textual analysis to analyze the events of Eren Yeager's quest chronology in order to make plain the complex conditions and situations surrounding the authorship of both Eren's hero and antihero narratives. Critical textual analysis aims to reveal various ideologies present in texts or groups of texts that might be hidden and are most often shaped by political influences. (Jeffries, 2007, p. 5). Critical textual analysis has been used to examine texts for the dynamics of power relations. These can be verbal and/or visual; hence, it is possible to analyze dialogue as well as scene composition or physical representations as textual elements (Rose, 2022). The verbal text can, in turn, be analyzed on various levels; this report focuses on how heroic/antiheroic traits were conveyed through language. Additionally, the researcher outlined which visual elements express how the mentioned characteristics are represented. Hence, the analysis is going to discuss whether or not Yeager's heroic journey through the linguistic and visual elements of the text justifies his monomyth or not regarding the attributes of heroism and anti-heroism. It, too, gives a better understanding of the anti-hero typology, which is even more developed by the adaptation of Bartley's (2023) and Drake's (2014) Antihero's Journey framework. These results contribute to the present hero typology, providing a critical extension of the categorization necessary for the understanding of modern anime antiheroes and antihero stories in general.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussions that have emerged from the research, focusing on the research questions that were formulated. The research questions are: 1) How is Eren Yeager's hero journey portrayed throughout the story? 2) What insights can be gained from this journey regarding his evolution into an anti-hero? The results show that events surrounding Eren have closely followed the structure of the hero's journey. At the core of this work, the analysis evidences Eren's role of antihero, underlining a journey both similar to and different from that of a conventional hero's.

3.1 First Quest: Eren as Hero

This analysis will follow the heroic journey of Eren Yeager, a key character in the story of Attack on Titan. As described by Campbell (2008), in the first stage of the quest, the hero is called to undertake an adventure. While the hero may refuse initially, he eventually gives in and follows the Call to Action. The Call to Action for Eren Yeager happened in year 845 of the story. After nearly a century of comparative peace behind the walls, a 60-meter Colossal Titan appeared and broke through the outer gate, allowing an enormous number of smaller Titans to swarm in. Eren felt the true horror of the Titans when one of them devoured his mother. This traumatic experience sparked a fierce resolve in young Eren Jaeger to eradicate all Titans and reclaim freedom for humanity. He is joined by his childhood friends, Mikasa Ackerman and Armin Arlert, as they set out on a journey to fulfill this shared goal. Eren may have felt trepidation at first when he fled and left his mother to be eaten, but it also awakened a certain Call to Adventure in him. According to Campbell's framework, a hero can show reluctance initially, but an important event will ultimately push him to embark on his journey.

The road of the second stage consists of a series of tests and battles that gradually become more difficult and challenging. First, the hero may be assisted in these combats, but in the further development of the plot, he will have to rely on his own decisions and the experience of mentors in order to successfully pass these ordeals. The second stage marks the meeting of Eren with Levi Ackerman, the leader of the Survey Corps squad.

While Eren was training to join the Survey Corps in his endeavor to wipe out the last Titan, the second wall was breached, and that compelled him to act; his action got him swallowed by a Titan. While inside the Titan's belly, Eren realized that he has the ability to become a Titan, which allowed him to save the military from the attack. As the attackers were beaten, the military arrested him afterward to research how he can transform. During this time, it was required of Eren to decide on a branch for supervision; thus, he chose a unit that Levi is currently leading. Known as the strongest warrior, Levi plays a vital role in leveling up Eren's battle skills and further teaching him more effective fight techniques.

Eren's trust in his powerful, guarding, and very capable mentor meant that he could carry out his mission even in grimmer circumstances. A part of this challenge came when Eren and the Survey Corps came to know that Interior Military Police Brigade, the force considered to be the heart of the kingdom's security force, had been hindering all the investigations conducted by the Survey Corps. As such, Eren and his squad postponed their work to overpower them. Shortly thereafter, they discovered the government's involvement in those activities.

The discovery can be considered as a trial in Eren's hero journey. During this stage, the hero experiences a series of tests, ordeals, and initiations with the assistance of a supernatural ally. The hero may also begin to realize a benign power that guides his universe (Campbell, 2008). Upon uncovering the government's plans to thwart investigations, Eren and the Survey Corps decided to take matters into their own hands. The group eventually learned that the Reiss family is the actual blood of royalty, as opposed to the Fritz family that had been ruling for over one hundred years. They further uncovered the secrets about the walls. These findings have a connection with Campbell's (2008) theory of the benevolent factor that guides the hero journey. Eren's supernatural ally at this stage is not much of an ally per se but a supernatural power.

Eren is able to harden himself as a Titan after consuming a serum that gave him such an ability. When he and the Survey Corps find out that the walls were made from hardened bodies of Titans, he starts using those hardening skills. They devised a plan to take down the government and uncover hidden truths; however, this mission turned out to be more difficult than they expected.

They were supposed to work in secret and try to achieve their goals without bloodshed. Therefore, the Survey Corps takes extra measures to keep away potential spies and scouts from the Military Police Brigade and other government affiliates.

At the stage of Trials, in accordance to Campbell's (2008) monomyth, the protagonist, Eren, passes through increasingly dangerous situations by relying on his decisions. During the Approach stage, isolation occurs as the hero faces the most immense test of his journey. The Survey Corps, along with Eren, are at odds with the government, causing an uproar over the breach of the second wall, to which the King responds. He and his advisors are concerned that should the residents of the second wall seek refuge within the third and smallest wall, this will drain resources and reduce their wealth. This is when the leader of the Survey Corps, Erwin Smith, discovers this situation and launches an invasion. They lock up the leaders, force their compliance, and successfully take over the corrupt government.

At the climax of the journey, the hero is ready to go back to his unremarkable life to pick up where he had left off in his mundane life (Campbell, 2008). After helping the Survey Corps, Eren is finally free and no longer considered untrustworthy or a monster. Additionally, Eren has learned to control his powers as a Titan; he can harden his body and fix the wall, restoring humanity's defenses with all three walls intact once again. According to Campbell's (2008) Hero's Journey framework, the protagonist, now with a deeper understanding of both worlds, comes back to rejuvenate his community and nation. Eren goes back to a relatively normal life, returning to his old home. Not too long after, he finds out that more people were found beyond the walls by the Survey Corps, who are terrorized from the residents on their island named "Paradis". That signals the Hero's Journey to the end and into a new beginning with the different protagonist-now referred to here as the 'antihero'.

3.2 The Anti-hero
The attributes of the epic hero have been well defined from classical literature to modern tales. This type of structure necessitates a thesis and an antithesis, provided by both the hero and the anti-hero. While a tragic story usually serves as the antithesis to the epic format, the tragic hero does not provide a full resolution or a sharp contrast to the epic form. These plots are designed for the success of the epic hero and the failure of the

tragic hero. An effective foil must have a valid possibility of success, as well, which is found in Eren's struggle to break the cycle of hatred and oppression that has devastated the world by seeking to eliminate all life beyond the walls of Paradis.

The concept of the anti-hero has often been inaccurately presented in both literary and popular culture, not as a true dialectical construct, but rather as a mere equivalent to the tragic hero. A significant aim of this paper is to clarify what an anti-hero truly is to rectify this prevalent misconception about the term. The two archetypes can easily be conflated; therefore, one may refer to Aristotle, Reeves (1952) says, for clarification, who characterizes the tragic hero as a successful individual of high standing, an intermediary figure whose downfall is not due to moral failing but rather a misjudgment. Aristotle further asserts that a tragic narrative must revolve around a singular conflict, with the hero's fortunes shifting from happiness to despair, and the root cause of this change must stem from a significant error on the hero's part rather than from any moral corruption. Consequently, the distinction between epic and tragic heroes lies not in their characteristics but in their circumstances. This characterization is entirely inadequate for depicting Eren Yeager. As will be illustrated in the subsequent section, his personal circumstances ultimately improved as a result of his endeavors. This section will demonstrate that Eren Yeager navigated a multitude of intricate issues and motivations, both personal and external, and unlike the tragic hero archetype, he was not undone by a misjudgment. On the contrary, he achieved notoriety and power. The remarkable advancement of his journey can be attributed to the anti-heroic traits that led to cunning and self-serving actions throughout the dramatic events surrounding Paradis' implosion, rather than to the heroic attributes typically assigned by traditional media.

Another two dramaturgical distinctions are in place that need to be addressed before one proceeds. The first is that the anti-hero has sometimes been confused with the antagonist, or villain; however, an antagonist's role is necessarily narrow and subordinate to the movement of the hero (Khayatovna & Davronovna, 2024). The anti-hero is not just a character with qualities that are the opposite of heroic ones; this hero is made of very antisocial qualities fundamentally. Quite to the contrary, the character analyzed in this paper is a multi-dimensional anti-hero who enjoys more

freedom and control over his destiny. The anti-heroic plot is powered by a will to power, rather than a will to serve. As a parody of the epic hero, Eren's anti-hero role aligns more closely with Oba's 2005 depiction of the anime trickster, manga bandit, or heroic criminal in his manga, *Death Note*, whose will to power stands in opposition to that of established authorities. In Eren's case, his actions for Paradis were not to rid his nation of its internal wrongdoers but to fight against another nation called Marley, which views him and his people as threats to humanity.

3.2.1 Quest 2: Eren as Anti-hero

This section now examines Eren Yeager as an anti-hero. In the hero setting, Eren was seen embarking upon a quest of ridding his world of titans after witnessing his mother being eaten by one. Eren's story of avenging his mother and protecting humankind proliferated throughout the first two seasons of *Attack on Titan*. Eren's intense personality and impulsiveness hint at great character development in future episodes. By the end of the second season, Eren begins to question his identity and the weight of responsibility. He discovers more about his father's past and the secrets regarding the Titans. However, his goals remain - the safety of humanity, eradicating the Titans, and avenging his loved ones. This is the last time Eren is seen simply as a typical hero.

By the third season, Eren learns that his enemies are not just the mindless Titans that destroyed his home. His view of the world starts to shift as the hidden truths about Marley, Eldia, and the origins of the Titans are revealed. Eren learns that the Titans were once humans, transformed and manipulated as part of a larger, darker political agenda. This revelation now turns Eren back onto his previous understanding of right and wrong in order to make him face the real enemy, which is beyond the walls. The storyline in this season exposes Eren to the real world: how walls, once protective shelters against the Titans, have kept humanity locked inside as a method of oppression by a foreign state, Marley, who intend to commit genocide against Eldians within those very walls because of the Eldians' supposed threat. Eren's role as a scout shift from being a guardian of humanity to embodying Eldian resistance against Marley's tyranny. The clear moral lines that once guided him have blurred, and he has to reassess his enemies and himself.

Later in the third season, Eren really starts to feel guilt over his people's actions and this endless

cycle of violence between Eldia and Marley. He still wants to protect his people. That's still the main drive, but he begins to change in terms of methods and beliefs as he realizes the threat is not just from outside forces but in the very fabric of the world. Added to Eren's growth, these foreshadow the major change he undergoes in season four. The fourth season and the finale of *Attack on Titan* really brought in some controversial changes for Eren's character, making him truly an anti-hero that resembles mostly to a villain. Now a fully grown man, Eren carries with him all the weight of the knowledge he gained, and even more so, a very heavy burden called freedom. His vision of the future has changed greatly; he does not want just to protect his people. Eren has come to believe that the only way Eldia can survive is through a brutal campaign of genocide against the rest of humanity. It is when Eren decides to unleash 'The Rumbling' that it really signals a serious character shift; indeed, into an anti-hero. This is a point of no return for the young Yeager. In fact, by being ready and willing to kill millions of lives or 80% of the world's population with an endless horde of Titans from outside the wall world, Eren proves that he can do anything in the interest of Paradis. And he does all that against his close friends and former allies, too. That boldness then gives a dimension of depth to this new-found brutality worthy of his new title of 'anti-hero'.

3.3 Eren's Anti-hero Journey

Eren's journey to become a hero started with quite a straightforward goal: the liberation of the human race from the tyrant rule of Titans. That determination was rather admirable since his spirit never got broken. It was deepening when he actually became a human with the power of the Titans he despised. A critical question arose: was he a savior of humanity or way more dangerous than that? Eren at first had seemed to be the ultimate weapon against the titans - a game-changing force which could turn the tide of battle. His transformation, however, meant much more than physical strength: the start of a psychological one in which the burdens of humanity's expectations began pressing upon him and his aggressive inclinations surged higher and higher, accompanied by doubts against the world. Bartley (2023) describes this stage as Reservation, when the hero struggles with his purpose and the consequences of his power.

The moment the Survey Corps stepped out of the walls; they were met with a brutal reality. The Titans were not the ones who had engineered their pain and suffering; it was the distant nation of Marley. Eren's understanding of the war completely flipped. His enemies were no longer some mindless hordes but a whole nation with a system engineered to oppress and control. By now, Eren had begun to see himself as not a protector of humankind but an avatar for vengeance for all Eldians. At this Recognition stage, Bartley (2023) describes how the hero's mission gets blurred by a deep desire for justice, revenge, and freedom. The goals became so different; it was no longer saving his friends nor all of humankind. It became a mission to break the oppressive chains that held his people down. Here is where Eren's noble intentions began to warp, showing a darker path. One that led to Rebellion (Bartley, 2023). This sprouted when Eren snuck into Marley alone, without full agreement from his comrades. From being a boy who promised to protect humanity, Eren became a force of relentless destruction. He stormed through Marley in a bloody massacre, killing many, both guilty and innocent. Eren reached a point where the line between hero and villain was blurred. It was no longer a question of revenge or the struggle for freedom but a belief that true freedom could only be achieved through general destruction. His methods became more and more brutal; his empathy seemed to vanish. He had become the very monster he had sworn to destroy. Was this the fall to darkness, or was it just the necessary end of his journey?

Eren's personality change was well and truly complete after the time skip, but the selfish attack against Marley was not the point at which the change occurred. Moments before the time-skip, Eren shook the hand of Historia, the last living member of the Reiss royal family, out of respect. This simple gesture was enough to flood the brain of Eren with information. It was a trigger to bring back his memories and foresight. Due to the connection between the royal bloodline and the Founding Titan, Eren had some sort of insight into the future and his supposed path in life. Faced with the reality that he was to become a mass murderer, Eren did not immediately resign himself to such a fate. First, he resisted accepting the future and sought another plan of action. This can be referred to as the Refusal of the Call stage of Campbell's (2008) monomyth. He and his friends were unable to find another way. This was the moment when Eren let go and embraced his destiny. He readied himself by taking the dark path of anti-heroism; he joined the group of Zeke and anti-Marleyan

volunteers. It is here when Drake (2014) commented on the time the hero fully embracing his anti-hero role, a time when he does not meet a mentor. Instead, he finds allies who guides him to discover the darker areas of heroism, having him succumb to his thirst for freedom for him and his people. Thanks to a special ability of his, Eren was able to issue commands across different timelines. He finally sent his Colossal Titans to rampantly destroy everything in the world as an end, which, according to Bartley (2023), was his Ruination: the phase wherein the anti-hero has lost his way and persuaded himself that his dark path was the only recourse left.

The disastrous decision to release the Titans costed millions of lives, be it the enemies or the innocents. Eren, once a savior of humanity, had turned into a behemoth of destruction. But he still saw himself as a hero who was fighting for his people's absolute freedom, no matter the cost. And the cost was his life. In the Ruination stage, unless the anti-hero repents (Bartley, 2023), he or she will meet his or her death. In the second half of the finale to Attack on Titan, "A Long Dream," Mikasa had told Levi and Falco that Eren was inside the mouth of his Titan and asked them to assist her in getting to him. Falco had used it to help Mikasa and Levi close in while Levi uses a thunder spear to blow the mouth of the Titan. As Mikasa went inside, she saw that Eren's head hangs from a long spine. Resolute, she had cut Eren's head from the spine and ended the anti-hero's life.

3.4. DISCUSSION

A hero is on a quest that shapes his role according to Campbell (2008), which makes him the central figure or the subject of the story. Yet, he is not merely a character but draws significance from complex social associations of the incidents constituting his acts. The protagonist sets on a journey during a quest narrative inspired by something or somebody whom he values, that is, the object. Hence, the subject strives after the object. However, in the *Attack on Titan* story, the hero's character and values are the driving factors of the journey, thereby as a consequence, these two elements are combined into a whole – subject and object as one. Eren's character and his motivations blend the elements of both hero and anti-hero narratives, thus forming a complicated relationship and complex interplay between subject and object. The mentioned complexity demands a different storytelling model that sees

the boundaries of classical hero journeys but still stays within them; thus, creating an Anti-hero's Journey narrative framework.

The framework of the Anti-Hero's Journey, in particular, is probably a reimagining of what the classic Hero's Journey is, focusing instead on a very morally ambiguous protagonist making questionable choices and being in internal struggles rather than just facing good versus evil. This perspective underlines personal struggle and self-destruction more so than an aim to pursue the typical heroic goal. Key elements of this framework include a reluctant acceptance of the Call to Adventure, the willingness to engage in morally complex actions, a focus on self-interest rather than the greater good, and the chance of a tragic or uncertain ending. Ultimately, the anti-hero's journey explores the darker sides of human nature within or outside the framework of a traditional hero's story. Bartley (2023) argues the hero becomes an anti-hero after refusing 'The Call' a number of times. Drake (2014), however, believes that the anti-heroic transformation happens after 'Meeting the Mentor' or a partner who tempts the anti-hero into trials and challenges which deviates him or her from the heroic path.

In the case of Eren Yeager, rather than refusing the Call or Meeting the Mentor, he himself has completed a Hero's Journey as seen in the first three seasons of *Attack on Titans* before entering his anti-heroic phase. Campbell (2008) describes the journey as:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men (p.23).

Eren showcased phenomenal skills while fighting against other Titans and the Female Titan in his Titan transformation in season one. He also had a power called 'the Coordinate' through which he had the ability to control abnormal Titans, which saved many lives in season two. Moreover, he saved his homeland Paradis in season three from the Armored and Colossal Titans. Eren's story during the first three seasons of the anime perfectly fits into the monomyth described by Campbell (2008). The hero embarks on a quest, acquires significant knowledge, succeeds with the help of such knowledge, and comes back home - changed. Vogler (2007) mentions, the knowledge

that the hero gains from the adventure should be valuable enough so that the hero would emerge as a self-actualized individual who would impart positive impact to the world to which he returns and thus provide some form of deliverance to enrich it.

However, rather than knowledge in its literal sense, Eren learned a truth after his Hero' Journey. It was a realization that there's a world outside of the walls. Here Eren learned that the world he always wanted to see hates his kind. With this new-found realization, Eren began his road to becoming a notorious anti-hero in the anime world. Bartley (2023) calls the first stage of his Anti-Hero's Journey as 'Reservation'. Drake (2014) calls hers as the 'Threshold to Transformation'. These are Anti-hero variations of the Refusal of the Call by Campbell (2008). It aligns seamlessly with Eren's commencement of his villain-like transformation. With the knowledge that he was on the cusp of becoming a mass murderer, this fact could just not settle with him as reality. He could not take what was to come next and looked toward some other alternative option. Quite unfortunately for Eren, he and his friends could not find an alternative solution. It is at this point that Eren surrendered to what he saw as his calling. He steeled himself up and embarked on the path of villainy. This stage in Eren's story is what Bartley (2023) recognizes as 'Recognition'. Drake (2014) calls it as 'Path to Power'. It is here that the journey of the anti-hero takes on a darker direction. While the journey of the hero is marked by victories, that of the anti-hero is shaped by alienation, pride, the recognition of having power, and the need to challenge fate. Challenging fate, like when Eren firmly decided to unleash the 'Rumbling' – releasing a huge army of Titans to flatten the globe – is an act of Rebellion. And when rebelling against fate, Sui (2023) asserts, one must be ready to face death.

Death in Bartley's (2023) Anti-hero framework is one of the outcomes when the protagonist reaches the Ruination stage. During the Ruination stage, Bartley (2023) explains, the anti-hero also has an opportunity to repent. Only in repenting will the anti-hero begin to turn away from the state of Rebellion and Ruination and walk his or her way back to the Hero's Journey. Drake (2014) states that at this stage of the Anti-hero's Journey some anti-heroes redeem themselves into the hero they were supposed to be while others do not. For those who do not, they usually end in their demise much like the anime *Death Note's* Light Yagami and *Code Geass's* Lelouch Lamperouge. Eren Yeager is no different. His death is a potent reminder that even heroes who are going to a Hero's journey and those that have undergone it with the best intentions can result in a person being led to misery and destruction if the path to goodness and justice is not treaded with vigilance and carefulness and whose story is best represented by the Anti-hero narrative structure below.
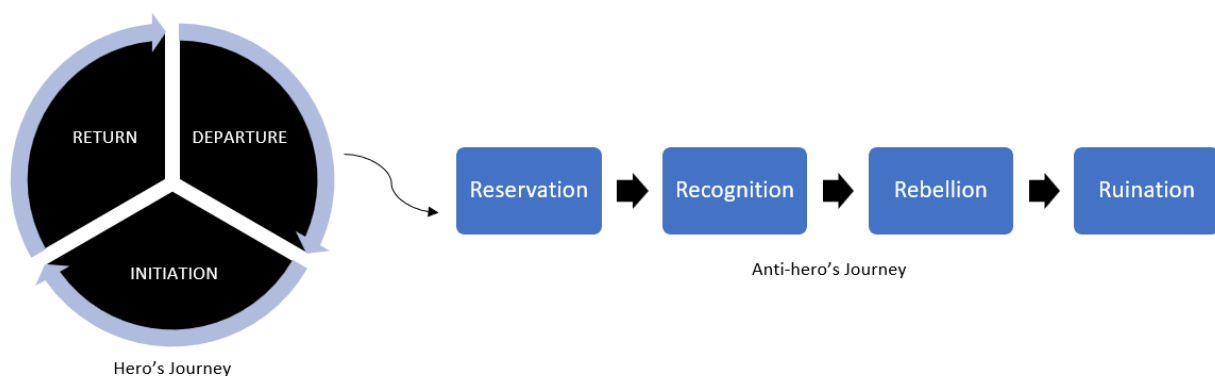

Figure 1: The Anti-hero's Journey Narrative Structure

4. IMPLICATIONS

Every story has a time and place, its essence, so to say (Vogler, 2007). The balance of the static opposition of the hero/anti-hero dichotomy presented in this paper may evolve into a well-defined narrative structure provided that the roles do not merge in the same character's timeline. Rather than being constrained by traditional frameworks and the established Hero's Journey, this study's researcher overcomes the narrative dissonance by introducing a new form of heroic journey. Bartley's (2023) Anti-hero's Journey goes into the unknown, exploring that ambiguous space between the contrasting identities of object and subject, hero and anti-hero. By analyzing Bartley's (2023) and Drake's (2014) views about anti-heroic transformation in the context of anime, especially through characters such as Eren Yeager from

Attack on Titan, it's clear that a hero or an anti-hero tries to understand themselves, their capabilities, and even their motivations. The narratives created by narrators and audiences alike build meaning into the quest and thereby shape both the form and significance of the hero's journey as it takes place within their perceptual frame. Where the anime narrative of a hero may be one that undergoes some transformation via the quest, that hero often remains largely oblivious to his growth in power and comprehension as he addresses challenges thrown his way. As a result, as they may or may not question or reflect on their desire to lead, serve, or wield power after completing their heroic journey, they succumb to the aftermath of what was supposed to be a boon in their Return journey back to the Ordinary World, and transitioning into anti-heroism. In Eren Yeager's Anti-Hero Journey, the transformation started after his recognition as a hero after three seasons of the anime series, *Attack on Titan*. Once he passed through the positive phases of his journey, he fell prey to the dark side of his story. The shift unleashed new malevolent forces and flipped his heroic journey. So, there is a consequent reversal wherein what represented a beginning now signifies a decline, integration has become alienation, strength has become weakness, love has become lust, unity has become division, the superhero has become a tyrant, and the expression of the hero's humanity has become the suppression of the anti-hero's humanity.

Heroes are the ones who are prepared to make a personal sacrifice in the name of others. They represent the selfless aspect of ego and their sagas bring to light the good part of the happenings. Anti-heroes on their part, represent an anti-social attitude in a big way. They represent the selfish harmful self of the ego; the reason people think bad of the term 'ego' and their stories focus on the not so good phases of their lives. Stories with these characteristics tend to be about corruption and not at all about any redemption for the anti-hero. The purpose of the anti-hero then is to assume control over any given situation and to manipulate it in such a way as to satisfy the individual desires and needs that are driven by the pursuit, domination, and enjoyment of resources critical to satiating an unquenchable thirst for material wealth, security, and territory. In Eren's case, this is well evidenced through his warped desire for freedom for himself and his fellow Eldians.

By examining who takes the initiative, it is possible to understand the role of the protagonist in the cycle of the story. In the downward movement, evil is aggressive and good is defensive. On the other hand, during the upward phase, good becomes the aggressor and evil retreats to a defensive stance. Stories that end upwards usually have a happy conclusion while those that end downwards often are tragedies. The character's downfall is apparently definitely related to the overwhelming ambition and overwhelming emotion. The pain caused by the anti-hero may become overwhelming and alluded too well; his end destruction is inevitable. Readers and viewers of anti-hero stories owe a great debt to these tales. They are, in actuality, creating the problems that the heroes have to overcome, and that creates the need for a story in the first place to show the inner workings of the dark side of human selves. Without Darth Vader and the Evil Emperor, there would be no Evil Empire to which there would be any need to save the galaxy from. Without Voldemort and Sauron, there would be no problem for Harry Potter and Frodo Baggins to solve. And without those problems, there would be no revelations concerning the basic struggle between good and evil, and nothing to report in story. Without such action by negative forces, there would be very few stories to be told, and those forces that drove antiheroes in life, such as Hitler and Genghis Khan, would forever be a mystery to humankind. Coming to terms with the dark side in story, using the reconstructed Anti-hero's Journey story structure, helps audiences to come to terms with their dark side and shed light to its understanding as well as a comprehension of anti-heroes as a whole – fact or fiction. Such an outcome could be of use in English language and literature classrooms as well as those in the Humanities, Arts, and Letters.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
People can think of the way that heroes have conventionally been understood by humanity as a sort of quasi-object, in that heroes create social networks of meaning that otherwise would not exist. These spontaneous networks then change how people perceive these heroes. For example, the oral poetry about Gilgamesh has survived through many generations and includes various epic themes. Because of that, the poems which exist today do not reflect accurately the cultural and social contexts of any one single time; instead, they reflect a culmination of all those contexts from over the centuries (Das, 2024; Kovacs, 1989). In the epic of *Gilgamesh*, later adaptations

introduced a doubling of characters, presenting two of each type with intrinsic dualities (Tigay, 2002). In contrast, the anime *Attack on Titan* features Eren as a singular character who embodies both the hero and the anti-hero. This complex character dynamic was not foreseen by the Sumerians or Aristotle, leading to the development of a new narrative framework known as the Anti-hero's Journey. This framework thus creates the possibility to have two conflicting, co-existing, and very different social networks of meaning. The two apparently conflicting readings of Eren Yeager as a hero and anti-hero in his story can now be reconciled and lifted to highlight his character as one in transformation at every point in time, thereby framing his story within the Anti-hero's Journey paradigm (*see figure 1*).

The theatre today occupies a role in society that is quite dissimilar to the ancient Greek idea of teaching morals through tragedy. Nietzsche (2017) warns, however, that morality itself is no more than a manifestation of humanity's self-destructive instincts, suggesting that to a great degree, the theatre has lost its meaning for the moral instruction of the masses. He hence believes that humanity has largely reverted to a type of critical barbarism. The tragic hero according to Aristotle, the anti-hero character created by Bartley, and Drake's villainous protagonist all do not fit the complex, multifaceted perspective which characterizes the anti-heroic quest narrative presented by Eren on each of their own. A proper typology of anti-heroes was an important condition to understand the character of Eren as one, standing on the other end of the heroic spectrum. For this reason, it was rather useful to be able to provide and apply the researcher's own typology together with the narrative framework for the Anti-hero's Journey in analysis. Eren, like a number of other anime anti-heroes, does not repent and go back to answering the Call to Adventure. Instead, he like those others fall into Ruination. Tragedies does not have to be the end for anti-heroes, but rather they almost always involve the resurgence of social forces from their supposed powerful character.

The development of heroic and anti-heroic typologies in the quest narrative serves to frame this very problematic nature of the latter in contemporary times and digital culture. Given the level of diffusion and often uncritical acceptance that unethical actions assume in anime culture, the quest narrative therefore represents a highly useful tool for framing such issues. This narrative

structure is important to understand the rising popularity of anti-hero protagonists in anime, which can be seen in this year's releases: *Solo Leveling*, *Chainsaw Man*, and *Sakamoto Days*, with their characters navigating the gray areas between good and evil. They follow the recent conclusion of this paper's anime of study, *Attack on Titan*.

This paper focuses on explaining what heroism consists of as an initial step for creating a story pattern framework from which to address the anti-hero phenomenon in anime. To get to this point, it is important to more fully develop anti-hero typology, elaborate the Anti-hero's Journey concept, and explore the latter's linkage with the relationship between hero/anti-hero as ways to solve existing gaps. Further research is needed on the theoretical implications and broader applicability of such ideas vis-a-vis situating the divergent discourses of anti-heroes into largely omni diegetic roles in anime and other forms of storytelling.

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Cite this article as:
Marasigan, M.C.C. "Tragic Tale of A Titan: Towards A Typology of an Anti-Hero Journey." *Sarcouncil Journal of Education and Sociology* 4.3 (2025): pp 35-45.