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CHARACTER COMPLEXITY AND THE HEROIC FIGURE: A THEORETICAL
DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This dissertation consists of a theoretical development regarding the figure of the hero in literary and filmic narratives based on E. Cámara-Arenas' theory of the villain. This theory allows us to provide a clear and precise definition of the hero as a fictional character and distinguish between an inner hero and an outer hero. Once these two notions are defined, we will proceed by analyzing and exploring whether we can talk about complexity in the figure of the hero or not. As a result, one the one hand, we have discovered that inner heroes who subconsciously behave under the influence of impulses (libidinal, thanatal, etc) are more complex and attractive than stereotypical moral and just heroes since there is a clear confrontation between conscious and subconscious desires. Along this line, on the other hand, we have also found that deviations from the stereotype in relation to core traits and peripheral traits point to more complex and realistic outer heroes.

Keywords: fictional character, theoretical development, complexity, heroism, characterization.

Resumen

Esta tesis consiste en un desarrollo teórico sobre la figura del héroe en la narrativa literaria y cinematográfica a partir de la teoría del villano de E. Cámara-Arenas. Esta teoría nos permite ofrecer una definición clara y precisa del héroe como personaje de ficción y distinguir entre un héroe interior y un héroe exterior. Una vez definidas estas dos nociones, procederemos a analizar y explorar si podemos hablar de complejidad en la figura del héroe o no. Como resultado, por un parte, hemos descubierto que los héroes interiores que realizan acciones inconscientemente bajo la influencia de impulsos (libidinales, thanatales, etc.) son más complejos y atractivos que los héroes morales y justos estereotipados, ya que existe una clara confrontación entre sus deseos conscientes y subconscientes. En esta línea, por otra parte, también hemos comprobado que las desviaciones del estereotipo en relación con los rasgos nucleares y los rasgos periféricos apuntan a héroes exteriores más complejos y realistas.

Palabras clave: personaje ficticio, desarrollo teórico, complejidad, heroísmo, caracterización.

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1. Introduction

Heroes have been exalted and revered since the earliest literary works and they hold an important place in many societies. Heroes play a vital role for they are moral role models who display extraordinary bravery. Although nowadays the word *hero* is used in a broad sense, in this essay, we are focusing on heroes found in myths, tales, and comic books, thus not on everyday-life heroes, or heroes of the modern world, but on heroes who are prominent and distinctive for having exceptional abilities, or powers, as well as other qualities such as resilience and altruism.

The figure of the hero has been vastly explored before by many authors such as Zeno Franco, Scott T. Allison, Daryl R. Van Tongeren, Elaine Kinsella, and Philip Zimbardo. These scholars have actively defined heroism and deconstructed the figure of the hero by focusing on his social and cultural functions. Furthermore, scholars have explored how heroes are conceived as inspirational and moral exemplars for many audiences around the world, as well as the common traits all heroes share, and whether heroism can be learnt or not. Franco and Zimbardo submit the hero to a conceptual analysis in order to differentiate between heroic actions and altruism, while other authors such as Goethals and Allison use Social Psychology to reflect upon what role notions like courage, competence, and virtue play in the figure of the hero.

Defining heroism is a challenge since some authors consider that everyone can bring out their inner hero and display hero-like attributes while other scholars such as Jeffrey D. Green et al., argue that "heroes and heroic actions go beyond garden-variety friendliness or helpfulness; rather, they are characterized by a constellation of traits that represent the best in humanity." (Green et al. 2016, p.508). Hence, this topic has been extensively explored by many authors, however, few have tried to challenge the conventional view on

heroism and investigate beyond traditional qualities such as courage, altruism, bravery, etc.

This dissertation's contribution to heroism consists of a progressive refinement of E. Cámara-Arenas' theory of the villain. By using the author's paper as a fundamental guide, we will explore the possibility of submitting the hero to a technical and systematic analysis which will help us a create a theory of the hero of our own and provide a clear and precise definition of it. Moreover, we will also define the main features of the hero in comparison to the main characteristics of the villain. As a result, we have found that the hero and the villain share common traits: they are both roles that must be always played by a character, we can provide a strong definition and a weak definition of both terms, and both figures must have some degree of self-awareness, among other traits. Nonetheless, the distinction between hero and villain is clear. Although both have the ability to transform the world around by exercising their will, the hero uses this ability to bring peace and safety to all citizens, while the villain uses it for chaotic purposes.

In the next section of the essay, we will proceed by identifying two types of heroes based on Cámara-Arenas' theory of the villain: the inner and the outer hero. In the inner hero section, we will discuss subconscious and conscious desires, pathological personalities and whether the hero can be neurotic, psychotic, or perverse, and finally what role beliefs play in the hero's behavior and actions. In the outer hero section, we will use the NEO PI-R model by Robert McCrae and Paul Costa in order to, in the first place, find whether the hero's personality is bound to be relatable to any of the five basic dimensions of personality, or the Big Five, and, in the second place, analyze the hero's core traits and peripheral traits.

The matter of complexity will be explored in both the inner hero and the outer hero. It is important to mention that the term complexity is used in an intuitive way. That is, our

exploration of complexity is not subject to prior analysis, but is born of evident sensory perception or intuition. Intuitive thinking is used in this essay concerning complexity as it serves as a basis for establishing behavioral patterns.

Complexity in the figure of the hero is an interesting topic since as members of the audience we are used to stereotyped and often unrealistic heroes in literary and filmic narratives for media has accustomed us to Captain America-like heroes: heroes who are always correct, ethical, unwavering, and noble. Nevertheless, this dissertation has found that deviations from the stereotypical hero-like features point to more realistic and complex heroes who at times might be flawed. We are talking about complex heroes who might make mistakes just like any other human being, heroes who might possess a great sense of justice but still be alienated from society, or heroes who do not have an exemplary behavior on all occasions, but still perform philanthropic deeds.

In conclusion, the concepts analyzed and explored throughout this essay will allow us in the first place to create a complete theory of the hero and in the second place to distinguish and consider different situations in which complexity might arise.

1.2 Theoretical background

In "Villains in Our Mind: A Psychological Approach to Literary and Filmic Villainy", E. Cámara-Arenas examines different psychological perspectives in order to define, analyze and qualify villainy in literary and filmic narratives. In particular, the author uses Personality Psychology and Social Psychology to provide clear formulations on the topic.

The author is in favor of a more humanizing approach regarding the nature of the fictional character; therefore, he argues that the villain is a fictional entity that can be approached in two ways: with a weak definition and a strong definition. Villain in the weak definition encompasses all uses of the word *villain*. Within this category, a political system,

a city, a catastrophe, and even a real-life acquaintance could be considered a villain. A villain in the strong sense must be first identified as a character, as according to the author (2011), character and role should not be confused by the reader or spectator.

Next, Cámara-Arenas (2011) informs the audience of the main characteristics of the villain as a fictional character. Such characteristics consist of "the ability to transform the world around by exercising their will." (p.7), [the ability to] "have some sort of reactive and adaptive intelligence, so that they can choose alternative ways of reaching their goals, defend their interests, and fight back."(p.7), and [the ability to] "have a certain degree of self-awareness, which is what turns mere physical movement into intentional (social) behaviour," (p.7). In addition, regarding the villain's figure, the author argues that an anthropomorphic body is not an absolute requirement for being a villain due to the fact that we can also find borderline villains who challenge traditional anthropomorphism.

Having defined what a villain is, in the next section of the paper, the psychoanalytical approach to personality allows the author to distinguish between an inner villain and an outer villain. The inner villain is inner because there is a motivation, a belief, a desire, inside him which is shaping, influencing and causing his external behavior. We can distinguish between two levels: a subconscious level and an interior-conscious level. In the subconscious level, the villain can be identified by searching for unconscious desires or impulses, libidinal or thanatal, that fuel the way in which the character behaves. Over and above that, the author briefly mentions the method used by Lacan to distinguish between three types of pathological personalities: the neurotic, the psychotic, and the perverse. According to Cámara-Arenas (2011), many villains could be considered perverse and psychotic, and certainly pathological.

Another theory used in this section is the Transactional Analysis theory by psychologist Taibi Kahler. This theory states that people organize their behavior around "five basic inner drives or conditions, in the belief that they will be OK if they abide by them: Be Perfect, Be Strong, Try Hard, Please (People), Hurry up." (qtd. in Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.9). Under these five unconsciously accepted life mottos, villains behave in certain ways since these drives combine and create attitudinal habits which impregnate the character's discourse, actions, speech tonality, and more.

In the next section, in the interior-conscious level, the author reflects upon what role concepts like beliefs and desires play in the figure of the villain and how they can influence behavior. According to Cámara-Arenas (2011), by combining these two notions, we can find explanations for the behavior of others: someone did something because they believed that if they do such a thing, they will achieve what they desire.

In the next section regarding the outer villain, the author maintains that certain manifested traits by a fictional character, or even a real-life person, lead us to expect other traits related to those manifested to us. For example, if someone is described as introverted, we would not picture this person, or character, as talkative, but as more reserved and reticent. Personality traits can be psychologically analyzed in order to conform theories about a person's behavior and even to predict future behavior. Cámara-Arenas uses the NEO personality trait inventory (NEO PI-R) by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae (1992) in order to explore whether the villain can be analyzed in terms of character traits, in particular core traits and peripheral traits. This system of traits proposes five basic dimensions, also known as the Big Five, by which anything we could say about personality can be successfully analyzed by using five basic dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion,

Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. In addition, each domain is further developed into six facets which allow more precise descriptions.

The core characteristics of the villain are those related to low Agreeableness, meaning that in the figure of the villain we can find lack of Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, and Tender-Mindedness. Moreover, peripheral traits are those related to the other four domains, where we can also find different possible combinations because peripheral traits do not affect the character's condition as a villain. The villain could be extraverted, Neurotic, or more responsible or irresponsible, depending whether he is a high scorer on these domains or not. What is important is that "deviations from the stereotype in relation to core characteristics points to more realistic and complex villains who at times may show pity, or trust, or admiration towards the hero, or remorse, etc." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.17).

Finally, the Cámara-Arenas introduces concepts like consensus, consistency and distinctiveness for the audience to think about whether there are mitigating factors in the figure or the villain which might change our perception and views on villainy.

2. Characterization and definition of the figure of the hero

In his paper, the Cámara-Arenas maintains that characters, such as heroes and villains, "have been created for us to suffer and celebrate them, for us to discuss them and speculate about their motives, their traits, their vices and virtues, etc." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.4). Although aware of the fact that characters are indeed textual patterns within a text, the author is in favor of a more humanizing approach considering the fact that fictional characters "manage to trigger intense emotional responses; patterns against which we project our fears and desires." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.4). Let us tackle other approaches to characters as fictional entities.

With the arrival of Modernism which brought fresh ideas such as the faith in the scientific method and the assumption that human behavior was ultimately rational as opposed to irrational, many writers buried the character in view of the fact that they could not accommodate its figure within their theories. Structuralism, for example, as an intellectual movement, favors the character's death as it opposes individualism, and psychological depth.

Authors such as Marvin Mudrick maintain that we can find a dichotomy concerning the character's existence. On the one hand, the purist argument states that:

characters do not exist at all expect insofar as they are a part of the images and events which bear and move them, that any effort to extract them from their context and to discuss them as if they are real human beings is a sentimental misunderstanding of the nature of literature. (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 1983, p.31)

On the other hand, the realistic argument insists that "characters acquire, in the course of an action, a kind of independence from the events in which they live, and they can be usefully discussed at some distance from their context." (qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan 1983, p.31-32). According to the author, this argument sees characters as "imitations of people and tends to treat them - with greater or lesser sophistication – as if they were our neighbors or friends, whilst also abstracting them from the verbal texture of the work under consideration" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, p.32). This allows authors to speculate and analyze the character's unconscious motivations and even construct a past and future beyond what is specified in the text. One of the advantages provided by the realistic argument is that it "facilitates the construction of a theory of character because it legitimatizes the transference of theories from psychology or psychoanalysis" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983, p.32).

In short, from the formalist point of view, the fictional character is nothing more than a dispersed textual structure; that is, a collection of linguistic signs distributed throughout a narrative. For example, a sentence that describes the character's appearance, a sentence that describes a movement performed by the character, a phrase that gathers a sentence that the character has said within the narrative world, etc. In other words, from the formalist point of view, the character is a constellation of linguistic signs.

From the humanizing point of view, the character is an entity generated by the reader's mind taking into account certain signifiers of the text. Such entity is enriched with contributions from the reader who perceives and constructs in the figure of the characters all the dimensions and properties that empirical human beings possess. Hence, from the humanizing point of view, characters acquire personality, intentions, emotions, aspirations, virtues, defects, and more. In this dissertation, we will work guided in favor of a humanizing approach regarding the figure of the hero.

In his paper focusing on villains and villainy, the author defines the villain by allowing two possibilities: a strong definition and a weak definition. In the same way, this essay will provide a strong, and more complex, and a week, and simpler, definition of the term hero based on the author's work as a fundamental guide.

A week definition of the term villain "encompasses all possible metaphorical uses of the term *villain*" (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.6). Within all the uses, a political system or a city could be considered a villain, the same happens with an abstract idea, such as anxiety, a catastrophe, such as a storm, and much more. Now, in the strong sense, the term villain must allow us to distinguish between an abstract idea and Patrick Bateman. Cámara-Arenas proposes that a villain is a character, then proceeds to make clear the difference between character and role. "Character implies a higher degree of specification in the sense that characters play roles,

but there are other things – like storms, or objects, or accidents – which also play roles within a narrative structure and are not characters." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.6). The author continues by stating, "in certain narratives, the villain is a role; but according to the strong definition I propose, the villain is a kind of role that must always be played by a character." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.6).

In the same way, I propose that the hero is a character within a narrative, and that this concept also has several metaphorical uses, like the term *villain*. A heavy rain or storm could be considered a hero if we think about farmers who are experiencing a prolonged drought and are not able to cultivate the land. In addition, our real flesh-and-blood neighbor could also be considered a hero, as she or he is always there to help others, but we will be using the term hero in a weak sense, just like in the example above. A form of government such as democracy, which allows people the right to choose who will govern them could be considered a form of heroism, as opposed to absolutist monarchy, for example.

Just as the villain, the hero is a kind of role that must always be played by a character. As we have seen, there are other things in a narrative that play a role: the storm, and the form of government, but they are not characters. In the strong definition of hero, we must be able to differentiate between a storm, an impersonal force, and an epic hero, such as Beowulf.

A villain, in the strong definition, is a character, and that implies a degree of anthropomorphism, although "a legitimately owned human body is definitely not a requirement for being a villain." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.7). In addition, a villain must be able to use his willpower to change the world around him, and they must "have some sort of reactive and adaptive intelligence, so they can choose alternative ways of reaching their goals, defend their interests, and fight back." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.7).

In a stronger and more complex definition, the hero, like the villain, is a character in a narrative and that implies a degree of anthropomorphism, as other things in a narrative such as a storm can play roles, but are not characters, as we have mentioned above. Now, concerning whether an owned human body is a definite requirement or not for a hero, we can conclude by saying that is not strictly necessary. However, an anthropomorphic hero would increase the effectiveness of qualities such as empathy and sympathy in the audience as we would be able to identify more with a human-like figure rather than an abstract figure. For, as heroism researchers Goethals and Allison state, "Hero narratives, we argue, are highly effective delivery systems for imparting complex truths and for elevating humans toward a higher emotional and behavioral state." (Goethals & Allison 2016, p.2).

Similarly, heroes must have the ability to transform the world around by exercising their will. With his actions, a hero must bring peace and order to the world we inhabit and protect us from any harm. According to P. Di Stefano and E. Jayawickreme, "a hero is not simply someone who engages in helping behavior where no cost is attached to her actions, but an actor who displayed sustained courageous action, aimed at furthering the welfare of another without expectation of reward regardless of the negative consequences." (Di Stefano & Jayawickreme 2021, p. 167). Furthermore, they must also have adaptative and reactive intelligence so they can choose alternative ways of reaching their goals, while defending their interests and fighting back any form of danger and evilness. If things do not go according to the initial plan, the hero must be resourceful in finding another way to achieve his objectives. Here I would add that a hero must have a high level of confidence and determination in order to rush in where others fear to tread. Franco et al. (2011) claim that, a straightforward and simpler definition of heroism is "to act in a prosocial manner despite personal risk." (p. 99).

Returning to villainy, the author claims that "a villain must have a certain degree of self-awareness, which is that turns mere physical movement into intentional (social) behavior." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.7), and lastly, unlike abstract ideas and supernatural forces, anthropomorphic villains "are connected to ethics and morality, since they can be measured in terms of social responsibility and are easily perceived as negative figure against the background of expected humane behavior." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.7).

In the same way, the hero must also possess a certain degree of self-awareness. The hero is an individual who has accepted the fact that he is risking his own life for the sake of saving others. In addition, he must also be aware that he represents goodness, morality, and justice on the contrary to the villain. Heroism researchers, S. T. Allison and G. R. Goethals (2011) argue that heroes project good behavior and motivate people to pursue lives that are meaningful and purposeful. The latter is supported by another claim by both authors which states that , "Stories of heroic action impart wisdom by providing mental models, or scripts, for how one could, or should, lead one's life." (Goethals & Allison 2014, p.170).

Authors such as Goethals and Allison claim that, "We have taken a somewhat craven approach to the definition of heroes. We do not specify the characteristics of heroes, or outline what makes a hero." (Goethals and Allison 2012, p.186). This dissertation has not taken a craven approach to heroism, but has provided a clear definition of the figure of the hero and his main characteristics. Nevertheless, this theory of the hero will be further developed along the essay. In conclusion, to clarify, we are not analyzing the hero as in the weak definition; therefore, we are not talking about the hero as an impersonal force, but the hero as the character in literary and filmic narratives who performs heroic deeds and possesses some kind of extraordinary ability, or abilities, and is perceived as a positive figure in society. We are

focusing on the hero, in the strong sense, as a fictional character who is known for being impetuous, strong, skillful, cunning, kind, generous, and courageous.

Finally, E. Cámara-Arenas' article has helped us create a clear definition and structure of the hero as a fictional character in the weak sense and in the strong sense by using the defined figure of the villain as our guide.

2.2 The hero's aesthetics

In this section of the essay, we will briefly touch upon the visual aesthetic properties of the hero by contrasting it with the visual aesthetic properties of the villain. According to Cámara-Arenas (2011), villains, among other characters, are constructed in such a way in which it only takes a quick look at the external features of the character for viewers or readers to categorize them as the baddies and associate them with a number of personality traits that are a result from what social psychologists call a "snap judgement". The author (2011) proceeds by giving an example in which he mentions that in puppet theatre, the message of whom the audience should hate, fear, and be afraid of is clear due to a number of normalized stereotypes.

Regarding appearance, a stereotyped villain is the one whose outside ugliness mirrors their inner evil nature. If we take the author's example of the puppet show, the villain will certainly look cruel: his eyes will be cold and sharp and his voice harsh and sinister, informing children about who they must fear. Nevertheless, we can distinguish other type of villain: the type of villain whose outside appearance contrasts with their inner evil nature. We can encounter graceful and intelligent villains with melodious voices and dashing appearances. This is the case of Patrick Bateman from *American Psycho*, for example. On the outside, he is a handsome and muscular man who loves dancing and listening to music from the 80s, but on the inside, he is a vicious murderer[COMMENT].

Concerning the psychical appearance of the hero, just as in the figure of the villain, we can also find a dichotomy: on the one hand, a simpler hero whose outside appearance mirrors his inner goodness. Here we can encounter a stereotyped hero: young, handsome, masculine, usually with a good physique and defined features, kind-looking and especially approachable. On the other hand, a more complex hero whose inner goodness is not reflected on his appearance. Here is where we find a less stereotyped hero, a flawed one. Think for example of Shrek. He is a big, ugly and rotund green ogre. He is short-tempered, as most of the time he gets angry easily. Among his hobbies, he loves mud baths and enjoys scaring people who threat the peaceful life he leads in his swamp. Despite those negative characteristics, Shrek displays hero-like features: he is cunning, clever, strong, and independent. Although hostile and hideous on the outside, Shrek is altruistic on the inside: he defeats the evil Lord Farquaad and he is also willing to turn himself into a human, as he apparently loves Fiona more than being an ogre.

Shrek is a complex hero because he flounces away from the pre-established hero aesthetics audiences might have. The person who looks like a hero in *Shrek,* Prince Charming, is actually one of the villains, and Shrek, who looks like a villain, is actually the hero. *Shrek's* complexity lies in the fact that it plays with those preconceived stereotypes we have and teaches audiences that how you look like does not determine your ability to become a hero. In short, heroism is not reflected on the outer appearance, on the periphery, but on the virtues that lie in the core, in the nucleus, of the character. This will be further developed in the outer hero section which focuses on core traits and peripheral traits in the figure of the hero.

Although much more could be said about the hero's aesthetic properties, this brief section was of use for us to explore whether we could find complexity concerning the appearance of the hero or not. In conclusion, a degree of complexity related to preconceived notions about the hero's aspect was found.

3. The inner hero: the subconscious and interior-conscious level

In this section concerning the inner hero, the author takes into account psychoanalysis, as he mentions that the twentieth century has provided numerous villains who act under the influence of their subconscious minds and are somewhat modelled by psychoanalysis. The psychoanalytic approach to personality is "characteristically causal and pathological. It starts from a theory of mind structure and implies the belief that his hidden structure causes characteristic modes of behavior." (qtd. in Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.8). Hence, this approach allowed the author to distinguish between an inner and an outer villain.

According to the author, the inner villain is "a collection of impulses – libidinal and thanatal – which are symptomatically expressed in behaviour." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.9). In the same way, the psychoanalytical approach to personality allows us to distinguish between an inner hero and an outer hero. The inner hero is inner because there is a motivation, a belief, a desire inside him which is shaping, influencing and causing his external behavior. Now, concerning impulses and desires, according to Sigmund Freud, the subconscious of human beings possesses an impulse tending towards self-destruction (thanatos), and an impulse oriented towards the attainment of pleasure (libidinous desires or eros). If we think about heroes in literary and filmic narratives, a hero who is secretly and unconsciously driven by erotic or libidinous impulses is more attractive and complex than a standard, correct and unswerving hero.

In the conscious level, the hero could be moral and virtuous, but in the subconscious level we could find a degree of complexity regarding erotic impulses this hero is not able to consciously control. There is a clear distinction between a hero whose conscious and unconscious desires match perfectly and a hero whose conscious and unconscious desires are in confrontation. In the conscious level the hero believes he is a moral and just person, and, in

the unconscious level, this thought is reflected in his actions: he performs good deeds with an iron will and seeks only the safety and well-being of all citizens. Now, think for example of a hero who, in the conscious level, desires to do righteous and ethical deeds, however in the subconscious level, this hero is conquered by subconscious libidinal, or erotic, desires which push him to perform immoral or unethical actions. If this is the case, then we could talk about a degree of complexity concerning the subconscious sphere of action. In order to illustrate this example, let us focus on a concrete hero. Think of Paris from the movie *Troy* (Petersen, 2004). We could argue that at a conscious level, Paris is well aware of the problem that could emerge if he continues his secret romance affair with queen Helen, king Menelaus' wife, however his libidinal impulses subconsciously fuel his behavior, and unable to give up this desire, Paris reveals to Hector that he has sneaked Helen onto the ship to Troy. Finally, as we all know, Paris' decision leads to a war between Troy and Sparta.

In this case, complexity arises since there is a clear confrontation between two opposing desires. On the one hand, the conscious desire to do what is right and, on the other hand, the subconscious desire to let oneself go and get carried away by carnal impulses. A hero who has an inner conflict because his conscious desires and his subconscious desires do not complement each other, nor are equivalent, but total opposites, would be more complex than a hero whose conscious and subconscious desires match perfectly.

Concerning the three basic types of pathological personalities which Lacan distinguishes: the neurotic, the psychotic and the perverse, in this essay, we are adopting these concepts, but in a broader sense in order to closely analyze whether the hero as a fictional character can fit into any of these pathological typologies of personality.

Neurotic subjects do not endorse the standards required by society; thus, they tend to construct an alternative reality based on their own ideals in which they can fulfill their wishes.

The standard hero is not neurotic for he does not perform irrational or negative deeds, nor isolates himself from reality. On the contrary, the hero is sociable, popular and friendly. He is completely involved in society's problems in view of the fact that he acts for the service of others who are in need. Nonetheless, a deviation from the stereotype regarding isolation from reality for example, would result in a more complex hero. This type of hero still performs good deeds but is not so involved in society, meaning he is not extroverted and does not tend to maintain close relationships with other people. This is a perfect example of what we would call a "lonely hero" or a "lone wolf vigilante". Batman, Wolverine or Jessica Jones would be a good example of this type of hero in view of the fact that they are lonely superheroes who live in isolation. What is curious is that these heroes share a common similarity: they have gone through some kind of personal tragedy. Bruce Wayne became a hero because his parents were murdered, thus he swore to eradicate crime in Gotham city. Likewise, Wolverine also has gone through the process of missing a loved one, and Jessica Jones was abused by the villain Purple Man. We could argue that there are heroes who possess some sort of neurotic features which make them more complex and realistic given that they possess what could be considered a negative trait in their personality without losing the hero status.

Next, psychosis affects the way in which your brain processes information making you lose touch with reality. Symptoms of psychotic behavior are hallucinations, or delusions, thoughts of suicide, depression, anxiety, alienation from society, paranoia, and more. When we think about heroes, we usually depict them as sociable, extroverted, cheerful, and emotionally stable. Heroes such as Spiderman could come in mind here. However, we could think about, and even find, more complex and humane heroes who suffer from mental illnesses or psychotic behaviors. This is no astonishing claim since the life of a superhero entails a significant amount of suffering and sacrifice; ergo, it is not surprising that some heroes might experience

depression or anxiety as a result. For instance, Tony Stark, also known as Iron Man, suffers from alcoholism, depression, and anxiety as a result from losing control of his corporation. The idea of a hero who is battling a mental illness, or carries with him a trauma, but is able to overcome it and leave those traumatic experiences in the past is interesting. Audiences could even sympathize more with this type of hero in comparison to the sane and joyful neighborhood hero since it demonstrates that heroes can also have problems like an average person.

Last not but least, concerning perversion, on the contrary to villains, heroes are not perverse. We understand perversion as the corruption of the self. A corrupt person does not only perform evil actions but enjoys being vile. The hero is virtuous and righteous, he performs good actions without any expectation of reward more than the mere satisfaction of having preserved peace. The idea of a perverse and corrupted hero is appealing; however, it is highly contradictory to the main characteristics found on the nucleus of the hero. These notions will be discussed in the fourth section of the paper regarding core traits and peripheral traits in the figure of the hero.

In short, on the contrary to the previous section where complexity arose when there was a clear confrontation between conscious and subconscious desires, in this section, we can argue that complexity can be identified when we face more realistic and complicated characters. Heroes who might possess some sort of negative trait, or flaw, which make them for humane, approachable, and specially more relatable to the audience.

Besides using the psychoanalytical approach to personality, the author uses an alternative and popular theory in order to develop two-layered personality types: The Transactional Analysis theory. This theory maintains that "people organize their behaviour around five basic inner drives or conditions, in the belief that they will be OK if they abide by them: Be Perfect, Be Strong, Try Hard, Please (People), Hurry up." (qtd. in Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.9). These

drives converse with one another in transactions which influence the way we speak, we behave, our facial expressions, and more. On the contrary to psychoanalysis which maintains that personality is pathological, the Transactional Analysis is stylistic rather than pathological as "befits a humanistic approach to personality." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.10).

Now, can the Transactional Analysis theory be applied to heroes? In his article, the Cámara-Arenas (2011) mentions that villains, like normal people, can behave in certain ways under the influence of unconsciously accepted life mottos, such as the mentioned above. Out of the five basic inner drives, to answer the question above, I argue that we can find hero-like characteristics in the "Please Others" type and "Try Hard" type.

Firstly, let us start with the "Please Others" type. Although this theory was not created to analyze heroism, Taibi Kahler would say that this type of hero is always smiling and has a friendly expression, that is always seeking to please others and that other people's happiness is more important that his own. Furthermore, this type of hero is comfortable working with other people and is considered sympathetic and well-liked by everyone. A typical hero from a filmic narrative is a perfect fit for this description. Think for example of the popular fictional character Captain America from the *Avengers* franchise (Whedon, 2012). All in all, we cannot argue that the type of hero who fits into Kahler's model is a complex character due to the fact that is a stereotypical representation which encompasses all the good qualities and principles a hero must have.

A more complex hero could consider that his own happiness is more important than other people's, therefore he will not be always seeking to please others, nor giving his utter best in all situations. Perhaps this hero is afraid of death and for this reason, he might hesitate and even reject situations which are extremely dangerous, for he values his safety and happiness more than saving other people. Nevertheless, this hero could still display positive traits such as being

comfortable working with other people and being sociable and well-liked by everyone. The essence of what it means to be a hero, and therefore fitting in the "Please Others" type, is still there, however there are small changes, deviations from the stereotype, which make the figure of the hero more complicated.

Next, let us discuss the "Try Hard" type. Kahler (1975) would say that this type of hero will always give of their utmost in all situations, is persistent in difficult situations, is good at helping others, and works towards noble causes. Moreover, this type of hero is not good at refusing requests as he thinks he might at least try to give his best, and this type of hero is constantly trying to improve and get better. Once again, a stereotypical hero would fit quite perfectly into this description. We could find a degree of complexity if the "Try Hard" hero although good at helping those in need, would give the bare minimum instead of his utmost in all situations and would not try to improve and get better with time. A complex "Try Hard" hero would still perform noble actions but would not be so persistent and might even refuse requests, on the contrary to a simpler hero.

To give closure to this discussion, the examples above using the Transactional Analysis theory were used in order to, in the first place, demonstrate that this theory is not hero-blind, and in the second place, to illustrate the difference between a stereotypical hero who behaves under the influence of unconsciously accepted life mottos, such as the two mentioned above, and a more complex hero who strays away from the standard hero-like behavior and mottos.

Let us move into our next discussion concerning the role concepts like beliefs and desires play in the figure of hero. As stated by the author, "by combining the notions of beliefs and desires, people do often find satisfactory explanations for the behaviour of others [. . .]" (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p. 12). Thus, someone does something because they believe that by doing what they desire, they would obtain what they want. This simple method can be applied

to fictional characters, both villains and heroes. For example, a hero would believe that by fighting evil, he will achieve the safety of all the citizens, which is what he desires. Hence, beliefs and desires are interconnected to the fictional character's actions since they work as basic drives which subconsciously fuel the character's behavior. Moreover, these basic drives can also be "located at more superficial levels, even within the reach of the villain's consciousness, which is what happens if the villain states his or her motives openly to other characters or to the fourth wall." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.13).

Depending if these basic drives are located on the subconscious or the conscious part of the hero's mind, we could talk about a degree of complexity or not, however this claim is highly intuitive. If the beliefs and desires are subconsciously fueling the character's behavior and actions, then we could argue that this hero is not as complex as a hero who consciously states his motives and desires for performing certain deeds. As we previously mentioned, the hero must have some degree of self-awareness, he ought to be aware of the fact that he is a hero, and that he is potentially risking his own life in order to save others. In short, a hero who is conscious, able to communicate his feelings and beliefs, as well as his desires, gains in complexity since he is acting guided by his own manifested volition and not by subconscious desires.

4. The outer hero: core traits and peripheral traits

According to Cámara-Arenas, "Psychologists claim that in dealing with people and characters we handle lay theories of personality, which include person categories. The presence of certain manifested traits often leads us to expect other traits not yet manifested." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.13). Thus, if the hero is depicted as altruistic, as members of the audience, we would most likely attribute other characteristics or traits to his persona. For example, we expect the hero to be pure, ethical, virtuous, compassionate, etc. In a similar way, we expect the villain

to be evil, cruel, inhuman, and unkind, basically the total opposite of the hero. As stated by the author:

> We store traits inter-connectedly within a very productive matrix, and this allows for a particular kind of reasoning we all use - psychologists and lay observers alike - in conforming theories about people, explanations for what they have done, and predictions about their future behaviours. (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.14)

In order to discuss the personality of villains in an appropriate and systematic way, the author uses a method based on English psychologist Hans Eysenck. This method basically consists of observation, as we observe and detect a number of responses, repetition, as some of these responses are repeated over time, and association, in view of the fact that we relate those responses to a number of traits (Cámara-Arenas, 2011). By using this method, "any possible human traits we can think of or attribute, will invariably belong to one of the three basic types - Neuroticism, Extraversion, Psychoticism." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.15). Now, every villain scores on these three scales, but heroes do not, and if they were to score, we would be talking about a more complex hero. What is important is that on the contrary to villains, a stereotyped hero would not score on these three scales. Even though this method is useful, the author suggests that we should be careful when using it in view of the fact that we are classifying fictional characters within very fixed personality traits, and we are reducing the character's potential richness.

A more accessible system of traits is the NEO personality trait inventory (NEO PI-R) presented by Robert McCrae and Paul Costa. McCrae And Costa have gone beyond the simple identification of factors, since they proposed a model comparable to that of Eysenck or Cattell.

This model is not only descriptive, for they intend to justify the nature of the traits and describe their relationships, as well as proposing different utilities of the model in the professional and applied context.

McCrae and Costa have proven that by using different instruments and different application formats, they arrive at the same five-factor solution, referred to as the Big Five. Now, according to Cámara-Arenas, "Absolutely anything we could possibly say about the personality of a villain is bound to be relatable to one of these five basic dimensions of personality, which in the case of McCrae and Costa's model are: Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.15). Each of these domains is further developed into six aspects which allow more precise descriptions concerning personality.

On the contrary to Cámara-Arenas who applies this model to villains and villainy therefore focusing on the results of low scorers on the Big Five, we will focus on the figure of the hero and on the results of people who score high on the Big Five. First, let us explain each basic dimension defined in Cámara-Arenas' paper (2011):

Extroversion corresponds to the "extraversion-introversion" factor identified by Eysenck and is "related to a tendency to establish and maintain social relations." (p.16)

Neuroticism has to do with "the tendency of an individual to experience negative emotions– like guilt, anger, sadness, etc. (p.16)

Openness to experience describes "the tendency of an individual to accept and enjoy the new, or reject it." (p.16)

Agreeableness has to do with "the readiness of the individual to trust others." (p.16)

Conscientiousness refers to "the ways individuals face their duties, work and plans - acting and controlling versus postponing and neglecting." (p.16)

In this dissertation, we are going to focus on the domain of Agreeableness which is further developed into: Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty and Tender-Mindedness. It is important to remember the Agreeableness domain consists of the hero's core traits, while the other four domains refer to the hero's peripheral traits.

Everything we could say about the hero's personality is going to be relatable to at least one of these five basic domains of personality. Heroism is associated to a high score in Agreeableness, and although Costa and McCrae (1992) do not talk about heroes in their model, the NEO PI-R model would say this about heroes as high scorers, according to each of these six facets:

Trust "[Heroes] believe that others are honest and well-intentioned" (p.17)

Straightforwardness: "[Heroes] are frank, sincere, and ingenuous" (p.17)

Altruism: "[Heroes] have an active concern for others' welfare as shown in generosity, consideration of others, and a willingness to assist others in need for help" (p.18)

Compliance: "[The hero] tends to defer to others, to inhibit aggression, and to forgive and forget. [They] are meek and mild" (p.18)

Modesty: "[Heroes] are humble and self-effacing although they are not necessarily lacking in self-confidence or self-esteem" (p.18)

Tender-Mindedness: "[Heroes] are moved by others' needs and emphasize the human side of social policies." (p.18)

Agreeableness high scorers tend to be courteous, flexible, trusting, cooperative, non-grudging, and tolerant individuals. These features can be perfectly attributed to heroes from literary and filmic narratives. Nonetheless, we would be talking of stereotyped heroes who do not present any type of complexity nor complication concerning their core traits or peripheral traits. Heroic figures such as Superman come in mind here. Also known as Clark Kent, Superman has superhuman strength, he can fly, he is super-fast, he can regenerate, and a long etcetera. His only known weakness is the kryptonite, a poisonous substance coming from Krypton, Superman's birthplace. Concerning core traits, Superman displays a decidedly noble personality, to the point that it can be difficult to find notable flaws in him. He is gentle, kind and dauntless. He is also determined, with a firm grasp of what is right and wrong, and shows great ability to act decisively in a crisis. Moreover, he is sincere, ingenuous, and humble and demonstrates great concern for protecting civilians from any kind of harm.

Regarding peripheral traits, Superman would be a high scorer on Extroversion as he possesses good social skills. He maintains close friendships and relationships with both ordinary citizens such as photographer Jimmy Olsen and other superheroes such as Batman and Wonder Woman. Concerning Neuroticism, Superman does not show any principles of anxiety nor depression, and possesses a high level of emotional stability. In addition, apropos of Openness, Superman displays sensitivity and intellectual flexibility as he works as a reporter for the greatest metropolitan newspaper. Finally, on the subject of Conscientiousness, we can definitely argue that Superman fulfills his duties since he fights crime by using his superpowers, almost to the point where we could say that he never rests. He is responsible and careful. If in trouble, Superman will always be there in order to protect citizens from any kind of danger.

Now that we have seen the example of a standard hero who is a high scorer on the NEO PI-R model and does not present any apparent complexity, let us now focus on heroes who challenge the traditional view on heroism, and are therefore more complex.

In Cámara-Arenas' version, if a villain was at times extroverted and at times introverted, inconsistency was detected and one could speak of a degree of complexity, but it was a peripheral complexity in view of the fact that it did not affect the villain's villainy, or the condition of being a villain. However, if it turns out that a villain was generous, courageous, and a defender of noble causes, then we would be talking about inconsistency in the concordance/discordance plane, and therefore of nuclear complexity.

On the periphery, the hero can be an extrovert, emotionally stable, sensitive, careful and responsible. Nevertheless, on the nucleus, if the hero is sincere and well-intentioned but is also aggressive and arrogant, then we would be facing a case of nuclear complexity. Inconsistency or incongruency in the concordance/discordance plane is what makes nuclear complexity arise. The number of combinations is vast: we could find well-intentioned but dishonest heroes, humble but aggressive heroes, arrogant but altruistic heroes, honest but not tender-minded heroes, reliable but not straightforward heroes, and a long etcetera. A hero who presents at least one of these diverse combinations will be more complex since he breaks the pattern of the traditional and stereotyped hero features. In his paper, Cámara-Arenas states the same about villains, "Deviations from the stereotype in relation to core characteristics point to realistic and complex villains, who at times may show pity, or trust, or admiration towards the hero, or remorse, etc." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.17).

Concerning peripheral traits, the number of possible combinations is likewise extensive: we can find a substantial number of heroes that differ peripherally. A hero could be an introvert, therefore a low scorer on Extroversion, but, on his nucleus, the hero could be sincere, humble,

straightforward, reliable, tenderminded, gentle and calm, therefore a high scorer on Agreeableness. Furthermore, a hero could be emotionally stable or an anxious person, could be creative or unimaginative, could be responsible or irresponsible, could be open or close to experiencing new things, and a long etcetera. All of this are peripheral traits, traits which do not affect the hero's nucleus, or the Agreeableness domain. Hence, if we have an unimaginative but reliable hero, or an irresponsible but tenderminded and honest hero, then we would be facing a case of peripheral complexity. In the topic of villainy, the author states the following about peripheral traits, "Villains can be Neurotic or emotionally stable, extraverted or introverted, open or close to experience, conscientious or non conscientious." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.17), and "The number of combinations and, therefore, the possible number of peripherally different villains is immense." (Cámara-Arenas 2011, p.17).

In short, one the one hand, a hero could be a high scorer on the Agreeableness domain, and present normal core traits, but could also be a low scorer on the other four domains: Extroversion, Neuroticism, Openness (to experience) and Conscientiousness. If this is the case, then we would be talking about peripheral complexity. On the other hand, when there is an inconsistency or an incongruency on the nuclear traits, those belonging to the Agreeableness domain, then we would be talking about nuclear complexity.

These different combinations are what make the hero more complex or simpler. A stereotyped hero would be a high scorer on the four domains, and on the Agreeableness domain. A more complex hero, one who strays away from conventional heroism, would be a high scorer on some things, but a low scorer on others, as we previously mentioned. Now, if the hero does not score high on any of the five domains, it means he is not a hero, but a villain since they are low scorers on the NEO PI-R model, according to Cámara-Arenas' theory of the villain.

In order to further develop our explanation of the complex hero, let us illustrate it through an example. Han Solo, from the *Star Wars* franchise (Lucas, 1977), is the perfect example of nuclear complexity. He is one of the main characters of the original trilogy along with Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa. Let us focus on the first impression we get of this character. At first, Han Solo does not display hero-like features: he is introduced as a greedy, cynical and selfish money-hungry smuggler who works for the notorious gangster Jabba the Hutt. If we follow the NEO PI-R model, then Han Solo would definitely be a low scorer on some of the facets in the Agreeableness domain, therefore on the core traits of the hero. For instance, he is neither modest nor tenderminded. He is arrogant, sarcastic, and does not want to get involved in other people's business if he does not get a generous compensation for it.

Concerning Compliance, when he is first introduced, Han Solo does not seem like a meek and mild person, but rather aggressive. Before joining the Rebellion, Han Solo lived in a world among thieves and smugglers. He had to learn how to take care of himself since an early age, therefore when Greedo threatens to take away his ship, Han Solo does not hesitate to shoot him. Ergo, it is clear that Han Solo does not inhibit aggression.

Nonetheless, despite the negative traits, Solo would be a high scorer on Straightforwardness since he is frank and sincere. He never lied about his true intentions and did not try to be someone he is not. In addition, he would also be a high scorer on Altruism as he displays altruistic features. The only thing he cares more about other than money is his only friend, Chewbacca. As members of the audience, we can tell that they have been together for a long time, and that they have a great friendship. Last but not least, concerning Trust, we cannot really argue in favor of Han Solo being a person who considers that other people are well-intentioned. On the contrary, he does not trust anyone. His main concerns consist of looking out for himself, his ship and Chewbacca.

Nonetheless, after joining the Rebellion, Han Solo's character seems to gain in complexity since he displays hero-like features by being more, loyal, caring, trustworthy, and moral. He goes against his own basic principles by defying his selfish nature and helping Skywalker and Organa fight the Empire. Solo's character evolves from being a pirate who only looks out for himself and who only accepts saving Princess Leia after Luke Skywalker mentions a huge reward, to being concerned with what happens to his comrades, therefore growing both as a person and a hero.

Although through the *Star Wars* franchise Han Solo makes it clear that he is not interested in being a hero in view of the fact that he leaves after getting the reward for rescuing Princess Leia, when Luke Skywalker is in trouble, he appears out of nowhere and saves his friend and helps the Rebellion destroy the Death Star, becoming one of the galaxy's saviors. We cannot argue against the fact that Han Solo is a hero, however he is not a conventional and stereotyped hero, but more of a complex one. He is a rebel hero, a great leader and general who, from time to time, displays black humor, sarcastic behavior and pirate tendencies. At the same time, Solo is one of the most heroic characters in fiction and one of the biggest scoundrels to ever inhabit the galaxy.

Now, on the periphery, Han Solo could be more responsible or irresponsible, emotionally balanced or anxious, more sociable or not interested in having social interactions, more open or more closed to experiencing new things, etc. The key element of heroism, as we have previously mentioned, lies in the core characteristics on the hero, on the Agreeableness domain, therefore if Han Solo is a low scorer or a high scorer on the other four domains, those regarding peripheral traits, is not significant for his status as a hero is not affected.

In conclusion, Han Solo's example has helped us illustrate one among the immense possibilities of what we can call a complex hero in literary and filmic narratives. As we have

seen, there are several possible combinations, both in the periphery and the nucleus. Deviations from the stereotype in relation to the core traits and the peripheral features of the hero point to more realistic and flawed heroes who at times might be sarcastic, irascible, and cynical, but who are still willing to risk their life in order to fight against evil and preserve peace.

5. Conclusion

I reach this final section of my dissertation with the thought that much more could be said and theorized about heroes and complexity. Nonetheless, I stop here by presenting a general guideline adapted from E. Cámara-Arenas' theory of the villain which allows for a richer and programmed type of reading of the hero. In addition, by following this outline, readers will be able to identify complexity and think about whether they are facing a stereotyped hero or a more complex hero.

1. Analysis of the Inner-Hero

    a) Subconscious level. Look for:

        - Unconscious impulses (libidinal, thanatal, etc.)

        - Pathological personality (neurotic, psychotic, or perverse)

        - Life mottos

    b) Conscious level. Look for:

        - manifested desires

        - manifested beliefs

        - manifested plans

    c) Conclusion: Think if the hero strays away from the stereotype, and if so, how?

2.   Analysis of the Outer-Hero

   a) Core Traits. Verify whether the hero is a:

       -   [High scorer on] Trust

       -   [High scorer on] Straightforwardness

       -   [High scorer on] Altruism

       -   [High scorer on] Compliance

       -   [High scorer on] Modesty

       -   [High scorer on] Tender-Mindedness

   b) Conclusion: Does the hero score low on any of these core traits? If so, can there be nuclear complexity?

   c) Peripheral traits:

       -   Neuroticism

       -   Extroversion

       -   Openness

       -   Conscientiousness

   d) Conclusion: Does the hero score low on any of these peripheral traits? If so, can there be peripheral complexity?

3. Conclusion: Relate findings to heroic behavior.

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