



## An Analysis of Anti-hero in Joker (2019) Movie by Todd Phillips

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### Abstract

This research aims to analyze the main character which is Arthur Fleck as anti-hero, therefore the characterization divided into 7 parts which is 1) Petty 2) Ignominious 3) Passive 4) Ineffectual 5) Dishonest, 6) Fragile and 7) Lonely. The study focuses on intrinsic parts of the movie, especially the plots in the movie that depict the character as an anti-hero of the main character which is Arthur Fleck. To illustrate the characterization, the researchers apply a qualitative method by using Theory of anti-hero proposed by Abrams to describe each trait from Arthur Fleck. The primary data is taken from the movie under the title "Joker (2019)" by Todd Phillips. After the analysis is done, the researchers discover three characteristics of Arthur Fleck depicted in the movie as an anti-hero, which is lonely, fragile, and ineffectual.

**Key words:** Anti-hero, characteristics, joker, modern literature, role changes

### Introduction

Literary work is the structure of the fictional world, meaning the reality in the literature work is a fictional reality that is not the same as the reality of the real world. Even though literature is fiction, it still refers to the reality in the real world [1]. Movies represent most people's real life. Unveil almost all aspects of social reality, covering all aspects of our personal and collective lives. Villarejo [2] pointed out that the power of movies lies in its order and ability to reorganize time and movement, revealing the profound significance of movies, politics, psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, personal, industry, technology, and other aspects. According to Mario & Clarer [3], movies are a semi-text type, influenced by literature and literary criticism. In addition, it is also determined by literary means. On the contrary, literary practice was developed under the influence of movies with certain characteristics. He added that, although the movies have its unique characteristics and terminology, it can be analyzed using literary criticism because it is closely related to traditional methods.

Furthermore, in this research, the researchers try to explain another characteristic, which is an anti-hero. Mostly, people barely know about the anti-hero itself. In this research, the researchers are necessary to provide the definitions of it to make the reader have better knowledge dealing with the issue about the characteristics of an anti-hero itself. Maryani [4] stated that an anti-hero in literary works acquaints a new type of character to be analyzed since the anti-hero is neither a hero nor a villain. Furthermore, Brombert [5] added that the anti-hero is often presented as a weak, ineffective and unhappy character.

Wilson et al. [6] suggested that the anti-hero sees the world from another perspective, which leads him to find a more reliable solution to any conflict in the story. Abrams [7] stated an anti-hero as the main character of a modern

novel or play that is distinct from the traditional protagonist of a literary work. If a hero possesses mostly positive traits such as the use of courage or strength like those in old epic stories, an anti-hero will not heroically use these actions or even do not own any of these features. This leads to the anti-hero character in a story to not possess the traits of a typical hero. An anti-hero usually mirrors society's quandary regarding morality. Abrams argued that the anti-hero is mean, ignominious, passive, ineffectual or dishonest instead of showing greatness, dignity, power, or heroism. The anti-hero can come as an outsider, a loner, this anti-hero often possesses fragile self-esteem, has failed in love, and sometimes distanced himself from people from his past. Furthermore, Abrams classified the characterization of the anti-hero as 1) Petty: Take care of the little things that do not matter, especially when it comes to rudeness; 2) Ignominious: What makes or should make someone ashamed; 3) Passive: Accepting everything without trying to change anything or be against them; 4) Ineffectual: Without the capacity to accomplish much; weak; unable to get the desired; 5) Dishonest: Not honest; with the intention of deceiving people; 6) Fragile: Weak and uncertain; easily destroyed or spoiled; and 7) Lonely: The state of being alone and do not have companions.

It is interpreted that the anti-hero is a character with many roles. The sphere of anti-heroes is very wide and colorful. The nature of the anti-hero seems more complicated than that, as it shrouds huge emotions and traits, however the anti-hero character is too complex to be described in a simple aspect because the anti-heroic actor impersonates quite a hard and ambiguous literary concept, allowing several interpretations. The character of an anti-hero is a little bit different from a hero character. Even though, an anti-hero is called a protagonist character. The character of an anti-hero does not bring a heroic action or even noble character in a story. The character of the anti-hero sometimes acts not in a heroic way.

A movie by Todd Phillips entitled *Joker* (2019) shows a man at a dressing table putting on clown makeup as a newscaster on the radio says that the governor is declaring a state of emergency. As the newscaster talks about garbage, poverty, and general squalor in Gotham City, the man forces a smile in the mirror. The man stands outside of a large music store dancing and holding up a sign, while someone plays the piano. When a group of kids knock the sign out of his hand and run off, the man chases them down an alley. The boys hit him with the sign and beat him up as he lies on the ground, groaning.

*Joker* (2019) tells the story of Arthur Fleck as the Joker. This film also shows us the life of Arthur Fleck, a low-class citizen suffering from a mental illness who lives in Gotham and makes a living by becoming a party clown. Arthur lives and cares for his delusional mother, Penny Fleck. The conflict begins when his billboard is stolen by thugs. Later, his co-worker lends him a weapon to protect himself. He later gets fired from his job for illegal possession of firearms while entertaining hospitalized children. Furthermore, he learns that the government have stopped providing him with health care for his illness.

On his way to home, Arthur is harassed by three businessmen who disturb a woman on the train. Arthur kills them and it becomes a trigger for a social movement to protest the government. The protesters wear masks to represent the anti-government movement. When arriving at home, Arthur later finds and opens his mother's secret letter and it is written in the letter that Thomas Wayne, a politician and a mayoral candidate is his father. Being disappointed by the truth that his mother keeps a secret from him, he begins to uncover the truth for himself. Arthur Fleck then becomes even more depressed when Thomas Wayne told him he was an adopted child and his mother was suffering from delusion. This leads to his psychological characteristics change and he becomes a different, cruel person who brutally kills people he doesn't like.

The movie is chosen because the main character has certain criteria which are classified as anti-hero and which are supposed to be able to provide data on how the anti-hero is portrayed and how his role changes from a good character to a villain seen as an anti-hero.

## Theoretical Reviewers

Character elements are important to illustrate the concept of the movie. Perrin and Thomas [8] divided character presentation into two types: 1) direct presentation which directly shows the characteristics of a character by exposition about what the character is or, by a narrative explanation from the movie's narrator; 2) indirect presentation shows us the character based on the action or thoughts. In Addition, Sutton [9] divides fictional characters into four types. 1) Flat character with one or two characteristics that can be summarized in a single sentence; 2) Round character with complex and diverse traits; 3) Static character that remain unchanged from the beginning to the end of the story; and 4) Dynamic character which experienced certain changes of purpose and behavior during the entire plot.

According to Pratista [10], there are two types of character elements, namely primary character and secondary character. According to Altenbernd and Lewis in Nurgiyantoro [11] divided these character elements into protagonists and antagonists based on their appearance and function. The protagonist is part of the plot concept of the movie. One type is often called a hero, a character we adore. They were formed to support the idea of stories with problem making characters that would complicate the narrative or trigger conflicts introduced as antagonists. These two elements have their own roles in making the story more alive. However, these views are not so relevant in some

movies where the villains play as the main characters. 'Villain' is a term that is often used contrary to the term 'hero', whose job is to interfere with the rescue efforts made by the hero as the protagonist [12].

According to Bolay [13], the term Anti-hero has emerged in modern times and is a recent development as it originated in the 19th century with the creation of the modern hero by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, in his novel "Notes from the Underground". "From the middle of the 20th century and especially from the 1960s, its use increased and has never weakened since then". The term "Anti-hero" is therefore a modern term to describe an entity present in literature from the beginning to the present day.

Wulandari, Santoso, and Ocktariani [14] did an analysis of the anti-hero main character of Robert Stromberg's Maleficent movie which was constructed as a dynamic character who turned from a good fairy into a bad fairy because she was betrayed by her lover. Although the lack of resources in the introductory part, and it would have been great if the researchers had included some useful information in the beginning of the paper such as the types of character proposed by Sutton and types of character presentation by Perrine and Thomas considering their relation with this research, the researchers served some good information about the main character's personality changes by providing some reliable proofs such as several dialogues and screenshots of the movie scenes. Another research held by R. Moputi and D. Husain [15] which tries to analyze the main character's ambition of Perfume: The Story of a Murderer movie directed by Tom Tykwer by using descriptive qualitative method with the applying of Henry Murray's Theory of Psychogenic Needs. As the story tells, the main character is gifted with a natural talent of sensitive nose to smell scents and because of that, he decided to use the talent in order to create the best perfume ever which is only can be achieved by killing 26 beautiful women following by extracting the requirement materials which comes from the victims' body. The research found that the movie shows us how the main character's ambition has turned him into a serial killer to fulfil his psychogenic needs; the need of achievement.

This research focuses on analyzing the portrayal of the anti-hero of the main character named Arthur Fleck. The analysis underlines Anti-hero theory by Abrams (1999) which reflects a character through their actions, conversations, environment, and appearance.

## Methodology

As this research aims to uncover how Joker's main character Arthur Fleck who is portrayed as an anti-hero, a qualitative study was used. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative method to be able to deepen the understanding of the representation of the anti-hero in the works of movies. More specifically, the study takes the form of textual and visual analysis. Therefore, the data from this study was used to develop the concept and theories explained previously.

The data was collected from the movie directed by Todd Phillips, Joker (2019). Before collecting the data, the researchers watched the movie twice. The data came in the form of scenes and dialogues between the characters in the movie. Additionally, the data had been framed from the point of contention by identifying certain events and narratives considered to be the presentation of the anti-hero in the movie.

The research is limited to discussing and analyzing how each scene and dialogue shows the presentation of the anti-hero in the movie. As for the research question, asking how the anti-hero is played by the role of the main character, the procedure for analyzing the anti-hero portrayed in the Joker (2019) movie was conducted in three steps. The first step is to pay attention to the methods of characterizing the main character of the story. The collected data is presented in the form of scenes and dialogues. The second step is to interpret and analyze some selected conflict points and events. The analysis focuses on the presentation of the anti-hero in the main character. This passage investigates the characteristics of the anti-hero presented in the movie suggested by Abrams (1999). The last step, once the analysis is done, a conclusion is drawn to see how the anti-hero is treated in the movie. The analysis is presented below.

## Findings and Discussion

The results showed that Arthur Fleck is portrayed as an anti-hero in Todd Phillips' Movie Joker (2019). To obtain a more specific characterization of Arthur Fleck as an anti-hero, the data was analyzed using the anti-hero theory of Abrams (1999). The result shows that the movie depicts Arthur Fleck as an anti-hero which has the same characteristics as an anti-hero proposed by Abrams (1999) which are passive, ineffectual, fragile, and lonely.

Arthur Fleck is a dynamic character because of his complex characteristics as it develops throughout the story. It can be demonstrated by the changes which are brought through the story. Being a poor citizen who suffers mental illness and lives with his delusional mother, at first, Arthur appears to be a kind soul and lacks social interaction ability but his particular kind of strangeness is stirring up him as a bullying victim. This reflects Arthur's character as a fragile person. It can be seen in the first scene of the movie when Arthur performs his role as a clown in the street of Gotham City where he stands and acts while holding a billboard. As Arthur performs, some thug children run towards him and steal his billboard. Arthur chases the thugs in order to take the billboard again but in the end, when Arthur enters the alleyway, the thugs beat and put him down without any resistance. It seems like Arthur

realizes that he could not fight back and ends up receiving the fact that he has become a bullying victim. Another scene depicts Arthur's fragility when his friend Randall offers him a gun. At first, Randall seems to care for Arthur by lending him a gun as a self-protection tool in order to prevent the same incident. However, Randall's purpose is revealed in the next scene where Arthur unintentionally drops his gun while amusing the children who are treated in a hospital. Arthur then gets fired by the agency because of this. He later explains how the gun can be in his possession by mentioning Randall's name and the reason why he gave Arthur the gun. Surprisingly, Randall argues Arthur's explanation and completely denies his involvement in Arthur's gun possession. This scene shows us how fragile Arthur is in the realm of instigation. Arthur is a person who easily trusts anyone without thinking negatively, and it makes him easy to manipulate.

Arthur Fleck, as an anti-hero, also shows the characteristic of Ineffectual. His dream is becoming a comedian and struggles to make his dream come true by registering himself to perform a stand-up comedy in a café. Arthur has a notebook which he always brings everywhere to write down his stand-up comedy material in case he gets any idea. He is confident enough that his materials are able to make audiences laugh. Nevertheless, it turns out everything is not going as he has expected. When Arthur performs on the stage and delivers his material, apparently the surrounding of the stage is very solemn, there is no laughter and applause that can be heard in the room and the audiences seem to feel awkward. Arthur does not realize the atmosphere in the room is very awkward and still insists on continuing the performance. Realizing that Arthur's performance is not amusing the audiences, the manager comes up to the stage and interferes with Arthur's performance and tells him to step down from the stage. In spite of that, Arthur is constantly pursuing his dream even though it never bears any fruit from his hard work and eventually becomes delusional because of his ambition to be a famous comedian. This scene indicates the ineffectual side of Arthur Fleck where he tries to pursue his dream with struggle despite in the end it is still not accomplished.

Anti-heroes might also show their lonely side since it shows how Arthur Fleck grows up without interacting with friends at his age and how protective his mother is. Arthur has grown up to be a lonely person where his colleagues alienate and bully him. This loneliness starts to form his delusional state where Arthur begins to interact with one of his neighbors named Sophie, afterwards the relationship between them starts developing from friend turn into love between Arthur and Sophie where they kissing, hugging, and go to one of Arthur performance wherein the audiences amused, later Arthur receive news that his mother suddenly admitted into hospital where Sophie is there to accompany him and share his sadness with her, however it just one of Arthur delusion that he always dreams of where he wants someone to accompany him when he feels joy and sorrow. This scene denotes Arthur Fleck's lonely side where he really needs companions.

Joker (2019) movie ends with Arthur Fleck locked in an asylum after murdering Murray Franklin on live television and inciting turmoil across Gotham. The Joker has become a symbol of resistance for the low-class society who are sick with the corrupt government, inadequate infrastructure, and social gap of Gotham City.

## Conclusion

This research aims to uncover how the anti-hero is portrayed in Todd Phillips' Joker (2019). The previous chapter shows that the anti-hero is represented through the characterization of the main character using the anti-hero theory proposed by Abrams (1999). This theory is used as a tool to explore the characteristics of anti-hero within Arthur Fleck.

The result of the analysis shows that Arthur Fleck in Todd Phillips' Joker (2019) can be considered an anti-hero. Arthur's characterization shows similarities to the anti-hero theory proposed by Abrams (1999). As for theory, Arthur possesses three of the characteristics of the anti-hero, namely: fragile, ineffectual and lonely. These three characteristics affect Arthur Fleck's character development from a victim of bullying to a vicious criminal who represents the resistance of low-class society against the corrupt government of Gotham City.

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