The concept of anti-hero or anti-heroine in contemporary audiovisual transmedia

El concepto de antihéroe o anti-heroína en las narrativas audiovisuales transmedia

O conceito de anti-herói ou anti-heroína nas narrativas audiovisuais transmídia

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ABSTRACT | This article studies the concept of anti-hero or anti-heroine, with emphasis on the characters cataloged as such in transmedia pop culture and their contrast to classic and modern heroes and superheroes. From a bibliographical and theoretical review from the origins of the concept to the present, we conducted a virtual ethnography on Instagram to extrapolate the traits and attributes of the so-called anti-heroes who star in some of the most successful contemporary transmedia audiovisual narratives between 2015 and 2021. The above, with the objective of proposing an updated definition of the term and establishing common characteristics that shed light on the lack of unified criteria and regarding the different perspectives that address it.

KEYWORDS: anti-heroes; heroes; audiovisual transmedia; transmedia storytelling; virtual ethnography; pop culture.

RESUMEN | *Este artículo estudia el concepto de antihéroe o de anti-heroína, con énfasis en los personajes catalogados como tal en la cultura pop transmedia y su contraposición a los héroes y superhéroes clásicos y modernos. A partir de una revisión bibliográfica y teórica desde los orígenes del concepto hasta la actualidad, se condujo una etnografía virtual en Instagram para extrapolar los rasgos y atributos de los denominados antihéroes que protagonizan algunas de las narrativas audiovisuales transmedia contemporáneas de mayor éxito entre 2015 y 2021. Lo anterior, con el objetivo de proponer una definición actualizada del término y establecer unas características comunes que permitan arrojar luz ante la falta de criterio unificado y respecto de las diferentes perspectivas que lo abordan.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *antihéroes; héroes; narrativas audiovisuales; relatos transmedia; etnografía virtual; cultura pop.*

RESUMO | Este artigo estuda o conceito de anti-herói ou de anti-heroína, dando especial atenção às personagens catalogadas como tais na cultura pop transmídia e seu contraste com heróis e super-heróis clássicos e modernos. A partir de uma revisão bibliográfica e teórica desde as origens do conceito até a atualidade. Foi realizada uma etnografia virtual no Instagram para extrapolar os traços e atributos dos chamados anti-heróis que protagonizam algumas das narrativas audiovisuais transmídia contemporâneas de maior sucesso entre 2015 e 2021. Tudo isso, com o objetivo de propor uma definição atualizada do termo e estabelecer características comuns que evidenciem a falta de critérios unificados e sobre as diferentes perspectivas que os abordam.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: anti-heróis; heróis; narrativas audiovisuais; relatos transmídia; etnografia virtual; cultura pop.

INTRODUCTION, ISSUES, AND JUSTIFICATION

The concepts of anti-hero and anti-heroine are subject to numerous interpretations, both by authors who have studied their narratological configuration, by the way they are treated in the media, and by the ambiguous use of the concept in user-generated content (UGC). This fact is mainly due to three causes.

The first originates in the plastic, symbolic, and conceptual omission of the character of the anti-hero or anti-heroine in the great classical literary works of the Homeric world, such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and of Greco-Roman culture. Consequently, the term has been neglected by the influential research works of most of the renowned mythologists of the 20th century, such as Jean-Pierre Vernant or Carlos García-Gual.

The second cause relates to the anecdotal presence or absence of the anti-hero character in reference works in the field of narratology and the construction of literary characters such as *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, by Joseph Campbell (2020), *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, by Christopher Vogler (2020), or *The Screenplay. Substance, Structure, Style and Principles of Screenwriting*, by Robert McKee (2013), which is remarkable considering that these are three of the most influential works for literary writers, screenwriters, film directors, and experts in contemporary film narrative.

Finally, the third cause alludes to what Sosa (2015) calls "semantic distortions between the hero/anti-hero binomial" (p. 1), understanding that the concept of anti-hero has evolved in consonance and dependence on the treatment of its genesis: the hero has mutated in the different literary and cultural stages and dimensions. However, considering that the anti-hero has no terminological representation until Enlightened Despotism (Absolutism), a schism is created between the (re) configuration of the anti-hero as a response to the evolution of the hero before and after the 18th century.

These three causes lead to a lack of homogenization in the use and treatment of the term, despite some attempts to promote canonical definitions (Frye, 2006; Pavis, 1966; Ruiz & Contreras, 1979, among others), and to the absence of mythical and folkloric structures to support it. In this regard, the popular treatment of the concept of anti-hero has been linked to the sociocultural context in which heroes have developed, thus treated from innumerable prisms, causing a certain theoretical and conceptual abyss between some perspectives and others, as well as the concept's denaturalization. This can be seen in the term's treatment with different purposes or meanings that distance it from the hero: false hero (Valles, 2002), justiciero (Rico et al., 2019), protagonist lacking heroic qualities (Ruiz & Contreras, 1979), non-hero (González-Escribano, 1981), villain (Villegas, 1978),

protagonist antonym to the hero (Dietz, 1983), another type of hero (Linde & Nevado, 2016), or heroic anti-hero (Ardanaz, 1983), and, according to Gupta (2021), it cannot be equated to the villain either, who possesses cruel and evil intentions. Likewise, he/she may not be treated as an independent character but as a residual and particular behavior of the characters, specifically the shadow, one of the archetypes that are part of the hero's journey described by Campbell (2020).

Considering the above, this research aims, through a bibliographical and conceptual review of the term, to establish common points of the different theories and the characteristics of the contemporary anti-hero to propose an updated definition of the term, oriented to homogenize its treatment and to establish a structural basis for future lines of research related to the anti-hero and the anti-heroine and their role in transmedia audiovisual narratives. This analysis will be delimited by the current pop culture conception of the anti-hero character and his or her protagonist role according to the only meaning proposed by the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy on the term: "Prominent character or protagonist of a work of fiction whose characteristics and behaviors do not correspond to those of the traditional hero" (Real Academia Española, n.d.).

ANTI-HERO ORIGINS

If we compare the concept of the hero or even villain with that of the anti-hero or anti-heroine, we observe that the latter lacks a deep historical and cultural background and can be considered, to a large extent, alien to deep theorization by the literature theory (González-Escribano, 1981), possibly because it is not present in a reliable and plastic way in Homeric mythology or in classical culture. The figure of the anti-hero, therefore, has not only been omitted in the classics and in the Homeric world from which the great exploits and myths starring heroes and heroines emerged (García-Gual, 2017; Vernant, 2000), but its use is relatively late. It is believed that the first appearance of an anti-heroic character occurs in Denis Diderot's satire work *Le neveu de Rameau ou La satire seconde*, written at the end of the 18th century and published in Germany in 1805 translated by Goethe (Bonnet, 2013). In that satire, as Brans (1984) writes in *The Dialectic of Hero and Anti-Hero in 'Rameau's Nephew' and 'Dangling man'*, the dialogue is presented with the greatest confrontation between the figure of the hero and the anti-hero as far as the modern novel is concerned. The character devised by the Enlightenment writer and philosopher reflected in his thought and dialectic a veiled criticism of the idealism and decadence of his time.

However, other authors such as García-Peinado (1998) consider that the first literary representation of the anti-hero is the main character in *La vida de Lazarillo*

de Tormes y de sus fortunas y de sus adversidades, dated for the first time in 1554 according to Garfield and Schulman (1990). This picaresque and critical work of the Spanish idealistic novel narrates the adventures and misadventures in epistle format of Lázaro, a character that does not always meet the characteristics and conditions of the contemporary anti-hero. Nevertheless, he is considered one of the first representatives of the anti-hero because he does not embody the characteristics of the heroic characters of previous or contemporary literary works. García-Peinado (1998) states that Lázaro "is the first novel anti-hero" (pp. 104-105), while Monte (1971) considers him a prototype of anti-hero and anti-knight.

Therefore, the two works to which the original constructions of the anti-hero are usually attributed have in common the protagonist or very prominent role of the character. They also coincide in the absence of representation of the attributes proper to the classical and traditional hero (A_h), unattainable for society, and part of the characteristics of the protagonists of literary works (A_i); for their part, those of the anti-heroes (Aa) are contrary to those of the idealistic collective imaginary (A_i). Thus, $A_h = A_i$ versus $A_a \neq A_i$.

In cultural and artistic movements such as Romanticism or Gothic there are also characters far removed from the more classical heroic figures. This same conceptual rupture with respect to the class hero also occurs in later periods, which adds historical complexity to the aforementioned demystification of the classical cultural substratum with the late heroic values. In conclusion, this disparity between the attributes, values and behaviors of the picaresque characters and the satires of Enlightened Despotism is the turning point between the traditional heroic character and this new batch of characters who, with the secular passage of time, receive the epithet of anti-heroes, creating the aforementioned schism and semantic disparity between the hero and the anti-hero (Sosa, 2015). This, instead of being minimized, has been dilated with the proliferation of new theories and studies with opposing approaches.

STARTING POINT FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Vogler (2020) states that the concept of anti-hero "is a slippery term that can cause a lot of confusion" (p. 78), an argument based on the plurality of approaches to the will, attributes, and determinism of these characters. For example, Ruiz and Contreras (1979) state that the anti-hero is a "character who lacks the qualities necessary for heroism [...], does not demonstrate an attitude characterized by good intentions" (p. 29).

In parallel, the figure of the anti-hero has a role aimed at explaining that which departs from the virtuous and heroic when "the values emphasized by the classical

hero fall into disrepute and even become suspect, and then the anti-hero appears as the only alternative to describe human actions" (Pavis, 1966, p. 255). On the contrary, for Rico and colleagues (2019), "they are characters with a high sense of justice and of doing good [...], however, they are also capable of performing acts very characteristic of villains such as taking life or using a high degree of violence" (p. 11). Along these lines, Greenwood et al. (2021) state that they are protagonists who are often described as Machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic (Dark Triad traits). González-Escribano (1981) considers that the anti-hero need not be the one who "embodies the values contrary to those of the hero" (p. 371). For this author, this type of character can also be one "who does not subscribe to the values linked to the hero but to others", which need not be 'negative', but may simply be 'different', although equally 'positive', or at least equally positive from other points of view" (1981, p. 371).

Therefore, it is possible to state that there is a clear dichotomy between the anti-hero's ultimate goal or end and his initial purposes, which may be:

- Selfish, contrary to the hero, such as revenge.

- Positive and heroic, yet motivated by self-interest, with the search for truth or its origins.

- Neutral or dissimilar to the classical dialectic between what is considered good and evil.

Concerning the origin or human nature of the anti-hero, there is a greater homogenization of the term, with a total distancing from the mythological hero, as it does not respond to the semi-divine nature of the latter, since the hero of Greek mythology comes from the fruit between a god and a human, as is the case of Perseus, begotten by Zeus and the mortal Danae. Other similar cases are Hercules, son of Zeus and Queen Alcmene, or Achilles, son of the nymph Thetis and the mortal king Peleus. Therefore, the main feature of the classical hero, with notable exceptions such as Ulysses, is his semi-divine nature and his conception of demigod, a characteristic from which the anti-hero is totally alien, since he is a character who, generally, has no divine provenance, origin, or genealogy.

Hero is one of the terms that encompasses the extraordinary attributes of the characters that has had more presence in narratology and literature from Homeric times to the present. At the same time, it is one of the concepts that has been most distorted with the transmission of texts to different cultures and languages during the secular passage of time. It has also been trivialized in the process of assimilation and absorption by popular culture, which has definitively distanced it from the divine terrain to which it was originally subscribed. Campbell (2020)

stresses that a large part of the stories and tales of humanity could be summarized in the narrative pattern of the hero's journey and Arbona (2008) asserts that the stories "respond at the same time to the historical context in which they are inscribed" (p. 45). Therefore, we can affirm that the anti-hero is a response to the hero and to mythical stories. On the other hand, the contemporary anti-hero is not chivalrous, noble, but is, in general, uncertain.

Regarding the characteristics of the anti-hero's personality, there is a series of traits that seem to be a common denominator according to different authors. For Rico and colleagues (2019), "they are characters, in general, with a high degree of internal conflict and have lived disastrous or violent experiences. Generally motivated by revenge or by the ideal that this is the only way to do permanent good" (p. 11). Vogler (2020) states that they are "these are flawed Heroes who never overcome their inner demons and are brought down and destroyed by them. They may be charming, they may have admirable qualities, but the flaw wins out in the end" (pp. 78-79). This principle of conflict and imperfection alludes to the separation of Manichaeism in the construction of characters and moves away from the historical duality between good and evil, adding new depolarized tonalities.

This causes the anti-hero to be as close to the hero as to the villain. As Linde and Nevado (2016) state, "in much of contemporary cinema the hero has been transformed into the anti-hero, who is very close to the villain in relation to the integrity of his ethical code" (p. 57). However, for Gil and García (2016) the dichotomy occurs between bright heroes and dark heroes, especially in their cinematic representation. Considering that there is a clear parallel between the anti-hero and the dark hero, their definition that "he possesses a significant personal experience and executes evil in his quest for good. He presents a more accentuated moral depth, in constant questioning and conflict with the evil that resides within him" (Gil & García, 2016, p. 7). In the same way, González-Sánchez (2011) believes that he is also very close to the viewer, who empathizes with him because he feels identified with his life or past experiences. Regarding that human characterization, "the anti-hero is based, instead, on contradiction; he is, above all, a man, with his flaws and his virtues" (Cappello, 2007, p. 172).

Based on these authors, it is clear that the anti-hero does not have a divine or semi-divine origin, nor does he respond to the stereotype of the classic and traditional hero or to the model of virtue symbolized or embodied by heroes, or the classic stereotype of the villain. However, the authors do not agree on the purposes or motivations that move them. For example, for Vogler (2020) and Gil and García (2016), the anti-hero differs from the traditional villain, while for Villegas (1978) and Ruiz and Contreras (1979) the term refers to a character close to him. However, as interpreted by the rest of the authors, it is an intermediate

character between the hero and the villain, either by his quest based on positive purposes and the common good or his own selfish purposes, but always governed by his own ethical code and means that are different from the traditional hero's way of acting. Common points are also established in the character traits, with contradiction, internal conflict, and the questioning of the ethical code being the attributes most present in the anti-heroes.

METHODOLOGY

After establishing the basis on which to build the contemporary concept of anti-hero or anti-heroine, without gender discrepancies, we selected a representation of characters classified as such by the current pop culture and who play the leading role in contemporary narratives. The selection depended on five variables: representation, time frame, typology, role in the narrative, and categorization of the characters according to the systematic study in the digital medium of the pop community (Ruiz & Aguirre, 2015). For a character to be considered representative, it must be present in more than one million cumulative user-generated content (UGC) posts on Instagram by March 2021. Secondly, it must have a leading role and be part of a transmedia audiovisual narrative, so antagonistic or secondary characters were discarded, as well as those from non-transmedia narratives. In the temporal variable, we considered narratives created between January 2015 and March 2021. Finally, for a character to be considered an anti-hero or anti-heroine by contemporary pop culture and, therefore, to be part of the study, he or she had to have a presence under the tags #anti-hero or #anti-hero or #antihéroe on Instagram. The virtual ethnographic search is not limited to specific online communities or to specific criteria of the universe of each narrative, but limited to the two tags cited above, encompassing the entire representation of the social network, including the UGC.

Once the characters were selected according to these variables and virtual ethnography as a research method, we determined the traits they fulfill according to the literature review. Subsequently, the relationship or connection with the four main virtues –wisdom, justice, fortitude, and self-control– that heroes should possess (Sánchez-Escalonilla, 2002) was established to analyze whether an anti-hero partially or totally complies with them, and thus know their closeness to the figure of the hero or that of the villain. Third, using the inductive method proposed by Sosa (2015) on the anti-hero in various works of crime literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, the most characteristic features that define them were extrapolated.

CONTEMPORARY ANTI-HEROES AND ANTI-HEROINES

The digital ethnographic study conducted on Instagram determined that the 15 characters with the highest presence of user-generated content (UGC) under the tags *#anti-hero* and *#antihéroe* are (table1) Deadpool, Venom, Wanda, Thanos, Loki, Mystique and Punisher (Marvel); Batman, Joker and Harley Quinn (DC Comics); The Mandalorian (*Star Wars*), Geralt of Rivia (The Witcher), Kratos (*God of War*), and Vegeta (*Dragon Ball Z*). In addition to being tagged on Instagram as anti-heroes, all these characters belong to a transmedia audiovisual narrative comprised between 2015 and 2021. However, the character of Mystique was discarded because she did not reach the million references through tags, as well as Thanos, Loki, and Vegeta, since they do not have the role of protagonist but that of antagonist or secondary character. Finally, The Mandalorian, Batman, and Joker were discarded because their presence in the *#anti-hero* and *#antihéroe* tags is residual and significantly lower than that of the other characters.

Character	Transmedia audiovisual narrative (2015-2021)	UGC networks +1M#	Presence #anti-hero #antihéroe
Geralt de Rivia	Yes	1.8M	High
Deadpool	Yes	5.9M	Very high
Harley Quinn	Yes	6.4M	Very high
Joker	Yes	13.1M	Baja
Venom	Yes	3.2M	Very high
Kratos	Yes	1.6M	High
Punisher	Yes	1.4M	Very high
Thanos	Yes	3.8M	Low
Batman	Yes	27.3M	Low
Mandalorian	Yes	1.3M	Low
Mística	Yes	5K	Low
Loki	Yes	4.5M	Low
Vegeta	Yes	4.5M	Low
Wanda	Yes	1.3M	High

Table 1. Anti-heroes and anti-heroines recognized by fans as such

Source: Own elaboration.

	Character	Mortal	Does not respond to classic heroic stereotypes	Own code of ethics	Internal conflict	Contradiction	Questioned
1	Geralt de Rivia	x	x	x	x	X	x
2	Deadpool	x	x	x	x	X	x
3	Harley Quinn	x	x	x	x	X	x
4	Venom	x	x	x	x	X	x
5	Kratos	x	x	x	x	X	x
6	The Punisher	x	x	x	x	X	x
7	Wanda	x	x	x	x	X	x

Table 2. Characteristics of anti-heroes and anti-heroines

Source: Own elaboration.

The characters selected as a representative sample meet all the previously mentioned conditions. Those with the greatest presence under the hashtags *#anti-hero* and *#antihéroe* on social networks are Geralt of Rivia in *The Witcher* (2019-2021), Deadpool, Punisher and Wanda (characters from the Marvel universe), Venom, from DC Comics, and Harley Quinn and Kratos, from the *God of War* video game saga.

The seven characters chosen are related to the six common characteristics of anti-heroes and anti-heroines that have been extracted from the literature review (table 2):

1. He/she is mortal, even though he/she may have supernatural powers.

2. Does not respond to stereotypes of classic and modern heroes.

3. Does not respond to traditional villain stereotypes.

4. Own code of ethics.

5. Internal conflict.

6. Presents contradiction and ambivalence.

7. Questioned by his/her environment.

All the characters comply, to a greater or lesser extent, with the common characteristics of the anti-hero derived from the literature review. They are mortal and their origin is human, even if they present extraordinary or paranormal conditions. In Wanda's case, it is a mutation derived from an exposure to one of the

power gems to which Hydra's army subjected her. Geralt of Rivia was involuntarily subjected as a child to various mutations in his process of becoming a sorcerer. Deadpool is the result of an experiment, while the supernatural conditions of Punisher and Harley Quinn come from extreme testing, combat training, and innate physical abilities. On the other hand, the Venom character is the union of a symbiote of extraterrestrial origin with a human. Finally, Kratos, although it is said that he was conceived by Zeus and the Spartan Callisto, is considered mortal, and would even be a mortal predestined to end with the gods.

The fact that they all have their own code of ethics and act outside the law is consistent with the fact that none of the characters fit the stereotypes of classic heroes. Deadpool and Geralt of Rivia are mercenaries, Punisher is a vigilante, and Harley Quinn is a thief; these are examples of characters who are not aligned with an established code and who act mostly out of self-interest. Likewise, they are all questioned by their environment, such as Venom or Wanda, or by the society that vilifies them and does not accept them, such as Geralt of Rivia and Harley Quinn. They also become feared, like Kratos, or wanted by justice, like Venom, Harley Quinn, or Punisher.

They also present a deep-rooted internal conflict and constant contradiction is part of the character's evolution, creating plot twists in the narrative and leading to less linear stories. When Wanda loses her beloved Vision, she dissociates and creates a parallel reality in which her loved ones are still alive. In that internal conflict between what is right and what is wrong, Wanda decides to sacrifice the free will of other people to build that reality in which she could alleviate the pain she felt. Also known in the comics as Scarlet Witch, she is a totally contradictory character who, while usually aligned with the heroes, puts her own purposes before those of others, although she ultimately seeks the common good. As for Harley Quinn, she is a character who, a priori, does not present such a complex moral dilemma, but she does undergo drastic and behavioral changes in the audiovisual narratives she stars in, going from robbing a bank or trying to kill the hero Batman to dismantling a criminal gang that threatens world stability. Harley Quinn is contradiction at its most expressive. Similarly, it is contradictory that Kratos fights against the tyranny of the gods towards humans and yet does not hesitate to flood an entire city in his fight against Poseidon. This contradiction leads these characters to place themselves between the duality of good and evil; at times, they are considered as villains and close to the dark triad (Greenwood et al., 2021), such as Venom or Harley Quinn and, at others, they stand as protectors of humanity.

This conceptual break with Manichaeism, due to moral ambiguity, is precisely another of the pillars that distance the hero/anti-hero binomial. In this regard, a

qualitative analysis is proposed to measure whether they comply with the four virtues proposed by Sánchez-Escalonilla (2002): wisdom, fortitude, justice, and self-control. This analysis makes it possible to establish how far contemporary anti-heroes are from the heroic traits proposed by the author.

In all the characters the virtue of wisdom is partially fulfilled and in no case do they resemble the stereotype of the buffoonish or burlesque character. Their intelligence is equal or above average, but they cannot be considered wise, because they do not reach the category of masters in the first instance, but evolution, learning, and error are intrinsic to their path. Although they are not exempt from the mischievousness of the picaresque novel, they often fall into traps designed by the trickery of other characters, are betrayed or underestimated by their opponents, partly due to impulsiveness and lack of temperance. Nevertheless, all the characters possess superior strength and resilience, one of the most characteristic and common traits of anti-heroes, which demonstrates their ability to cope with or resist adverse situations, suffering and loss, even if this undermines their sense of empathy towards others and forges a more solitary and apathetic personality than that of the traditional hero. As for self-mastery or sense of justice, the anti-heroes and anti-heroines analyzed are far from both virtues. In the case of justice, Deadpool, Wanda, Kratos, Harley Quinn, and Venom do not consider whether their actions are just or whether they are within what is socially considered just. Similarly, Punisher and Geralt of Rivia subject the others to their own code of justice, more ironclad in the case of the sorcerer and which, at times, poses him some conflict over the decisions he must make. Regarding self-control, none of the anti-heroes have total control over their own power, nor do they control their capacity for destruction and the brutality of their actions, nor do they consider limiting themselves in the face of the addictions and vices they reproduce. We speak, metaphorically, of an inner demon that leads them to this contradiction and to not being able to control their impulses or the brutality of their methods. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that, of the four most characteristic traits or virtues proposed by Sánchez-Escalonilla, antiheroes, in general, only possess a total connection with the virtue of fortitude and, in the same way, partially with that of wisdom, moving away from the label of grotesque character.

Occasionally, the antihero is a temporary and circumstantial deviation from the hero or villain, as characters may go from villain to hero, such as Vegeta and Piccolo (*Dragon Ball Z*) or experience episodes in the character's arc that shift the line from antihero to villain, such as Walter White in Breaking Bad, Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*) or Jax Teller (*Sons of Anarchy*). Schubert (2017) considers that these villains are linguistically presented as anti-heroic characters, attractive, and sympathetic to the general audience. Brunn Vaage (2016) interprets this

phenomenon as the Lucifer effect, considering that a parasocial attachment is generated thanks to the masking, through the audiovisual narrative, of vile and brutal acts by characters with whom the viewer comes to sympathize and that, in reality, he would despise: a drug dealer (Walter White), a mobster (Tony Soprano), or a murderous gangster (Jax Teller). In this dichotomy, Garcia's (2020) proposal, reflected in his study on the villain Hannibal Lecter, is interesting, on the relationship between aesthetic pleasure and disgust to see if this parallelism can also be reproduced in more ambiguous and ambivalent characters between good and evil. Another perspective is that of Sosa (2015), for whom it is more correct to speak of heroes with anti-heroic traits: "the anti-hero, more than a categorization, is evidence that sprouts between the cracks emerged after the fragmentation of the hero of a piece […] being, therefore, preferable to speak of anti-heroic traits than of anti-heroes" (2015, p. 3). Therefore, using the same inductive method that said author uses to extract the anti-heroic traits in 18th century detective novels, this research proposes to do the same with the characters that make up the study, identifying the following common traits:

1. Revenge. While the traditional hero responds to the call of duty, to the aid of the innocent, or to the claim as the only possible solution, the anti-hero enters the fray mainly for two reasons: revenge and the search for his own individual purpose, which the narrative will gradually intertwine with the general conflict. In this regard, Frank Castle becomes the Punisher after the murder of his family, Kratos emerges as an anti-hero following the kidnapping and torture of his brother Deimos, Wanda acts for the death of her brother and, later, for the sacrifice of her beloved, Deadpool's motivation is revenge towards those who used him in an experiment, and Geralt of Rivia, Venom, and Harley Quinn act for their own purposes; at first, they only get involved when they can profit from their personal interests, although the narrative will lead them to become the only possible solution to a larger, overarching goal.

2. Dysfunctional behaviors, disorders, and addictions. Unlike heroes, anti-heroes move away from the example of Aristotelian virtue that emerged from the classical hero of Greek mythology, as well as from the perfection, honesty, transparency, or innocence reflected in characters such as Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*), Son Goku (*Dragon Ball Z*), Captain America or Spiderman (Marvel), and Wonder Woman, Flash or Superman (DC Comics), among many others. Antiheroes can show strong internal and moral conflicts, like Kratos or Punisher, be kleptomaniacs like Harley Quinn, frequent brothels like Geralt of Rivia or Deadpool, or be alcoholics, like Eddie Broke, the human host of the Venom symbiote.

3. Repudiation. Geralt of Rivia is rejected, feared, and despised by society for being a sorcerer. Wanda is labeled as a social threat because of the power she wields. Deadpool and Punisher act outside the law; society does not consider them heroes, but vigilantes. Venom is seen as a terrible abomination who must remain in the shadows. Harley Quinn is an outcast and Kratos is a disowned Spartan army and condemned by the gods. Social repudiation or rejection is another of the characteristic traits of the anti-heroes, even when they have performed a deed or taken sides in the conflict.

4. Sexualized characters. In the same way that the traditional or classic hero is usually kept free of vices or addictions, narratives usually keep them away from the sexual dimension, something that, on the contrary, is present in anti-heroic characters such as Kratos, Geralt of Rivia, or Deadpool in a more explicit way, or in Harley Quinn and Wanda in a more subtle way.

5. Uncertain origin. The origins of Geralt the Rivia are uncertain. As for Deadpool, both the comics, video games, and movies show inaccuracies regarding his origin, his profession, and his links with other characters. About Punisher there is a narrative void, his origin is unknown; it is only known that he is an ex-marine named Frank Castle who lost his entire family at the hands of the mafia. The different narratives reveal part of the past, although never holistically. The origins of Wanda or Harley Quinn are also uncertain, which means that the mystery of their backgrounds is part of the idiosyncrasy and motivation of the characters.

6. Empowerment. Most heroes do not show their true identity to society: Superman hides behind Clark Kent; Spiderman, behind Peter Parker; Hulk, behind Bruce Banner; Batman, behind Bruce Wayne; Arrow, behind Oliver Queen, and the list goes on with many others, although not all heroes are masked or hide their true identity. Usually, an antihero does not hide his identity and shows himself as he is, such as Geralt of Rivia, Kratos, Wanda, or Punisher. Deadpool's mask has the function of covering the horrible burns and disfigurements on his face, but he has no qualms about presenting himself as Wade Wilson, his real name. In the case of Harley Quinn, it is a process of identity cannibalization, as the character is the alter ego she ponders over the real person (Dr. Harleen), but she is not worried about it being unveiled. Venom is the only one who partially breaches it, but it is not about hiding his real identity, but the symbiote's host, to allow him to continue living and use it for his own purposes.

7. Own ethical code. All the characters are governed by their own ethical code, either outside the law and applying their own conception of justice (Punisher,

Deadpool, Venom) and seeking their own interests (Wanda, Harley Quinn), or by an iron code created to establish limits (the sorcerer's code, Geralt of Rivia) or under nihilistic parameters (Kratos).

8. Contradiction and metamorphosis. If, in general, the hero and the villain are linear in terms of morality and conception of good and evil, the anti-hero is characterized by constant change due to internal conflict and inherent contradiction. This causes their actions to be ambivalent (Wanda, Geralt of Rivia) or to be considered the lesser of evils (Harley Quinn), while their methods are unorthodox (Punisher), or their reactions unpredictable (Deadpool). In essence, they are characters who do not position themselves in the Manichean struggle between good and evil, oscillating between the side closer to the hero and, at other times, to the villain (Venom, Harley Quinn, or Kratos).

9. Aesthetics and visual identity based on darkness. In the field of art direction, symbolism, and aesthetics, the personal brand of antiheroes usually presents a great complexity, oriented towards darkness, less saturated tones, and shadows. The pale complexion of Kratos, Harley Quinn, or Geralt of Rivia contrasts with their tattoos and scars. On the other hand, Punisher, Deadpool, or Venom, while following certain nuances of the Marvel universe, are represented by an omnipresent darkness and a symbolism more typical of villains than heroes.

10. Ideological and social skepticism. Another of the most common traits is the disbelief and the high degree of skepticism they show towards social classes, ideologies and, in general, society. It is not possible to speak of nihilism –except in certain aspects of Kratos, who does not despise or deny the meaning of life– but there is a certain repudiation of any dogma and a rejection of institutions. Anti-heroes, like many villains and, unlike heroes, show, in part, a state of individual anomie, either because they have suffered the repulsion of society (Geralt of Rivia), because institutions do not support their methods and objectives (Punisher, Wanda), because they feel they are not part of it (Harley Quinn, Venom) or, in the most extreme case, because they feel betrayed and want to overthrow the established regime (Kratos).

11. Brutality and unconventional methods. The anti-hero does not hesitate to kill: for him or her, the end justifies the means, and to achieve his or her goal he or she will not hesitate to kill as many adversaries and enemies as necessary. The antihero does not surrender the villain to justice, but applies his/her own (Punisher, Deadpool, Venom, Geralt of Rivia) or even shields him/herself under the cover of serving a laudable cause to use his/her brutality (Kratos,

Harley Quinn, Deadpool); he/she can also use his/her powers to make others serve his/her cause against their will (Geralt of Rivia, Wanda).

12. Satirical elements and irony. As mentioned above, the anti-hero is born of satire and the picaresque novel. In a large part of the narratives starring anti-heroes there are such elements, as can be seen in the social criticism of the estates and ideologies (Geralt of Rivia, Deadpool); it is also usual to find elements of picaresque in Deadpool and Harley Quinn. Although humor is not a common trait of anti-heroes, irony is one of the resources most used by these characters when expressing their disenchantment or discomfort with society.

13. Loneliness. In the same way that happens with the hero's journey, the anti-hero's path is not always solitary and, sometimes, this character can form a team or have certain relationships of friendship, love, or meet masters that, like the hero, allow him/her to evolve and face adversity. However, either by the very nature of the antihero (Geralt of Rivia, Venom, Deadpool) or by a terrible event that leads him to undertake his/her path alone (Kratos, Wanda, Punisher), loneliness is a recurring theme in this narrative. It is necessary to remember that revenge for the death of loved ones is often the first episode and, therefore, the antihero is forced into solitude on a recurring basis.

14. Fortitude. This is the only heroic trait of the four proposed by Sánchez Escalonilla that anti-heroes totally fulfill and, therefore, in which they coincide with the hero. Anti-heroes are capable of showing sufficient strength and resilience to overcome any adversity, even suffering the loss of their loved ones. However, unlike the heroes, that suffering will translate into anger and revenge, and will make their methods more brutal and taxing.

15. Arcs of redemption and sacrifice. The aforementioned inner conflict and contradiction lead the anti-hero to wander between the dialectic of good and evil, causing them to be considered, at times, on the side of the heroes and, at others, close to the villain. These elements are the reason why the redemption arcs of the anti-heroes represent the neuralgic point of the narrative; in the hero-anti-hero or villain-anti-hero binomial, the narrative arcs of the heroic character or the villain are more linear. In contrast, the anti-hero shows a complex redemption arc, either because of crimes he/she has committed in the past (Kratos), because there is an emotional element or a character that pushes him/her to do the right thing (Geralt of Rivia), because there is a disenchantment towards darkness or the villain is unmasked (Wanda), or because his/her personal motivation is intertwined with the common good (Punisher, Harley Quinn, Venom). In all of them, even

if at first they deny the cause or are reluctant to help, the arc of redemption can even lead them to sacrifice themselves to save the innocent.

CONCLUSIONS: DEFINITION OF CONTEMPORARY ANTI-HEROES AND ANTI-HEROINES

Thanks to the literature review on the concept of anti-hero and the analyses derived from the study of the cases chosen through the virtual ethnography search, it is concluded that the contemporary anti-hero, without gender discrimination, is a character not aligned in his origins with heroic or villainous purposes, of a mortal nature, and eminently uncertain origin, repudiated by society and called to start his path for revenge or for the search of his identity. He is characterized by showing a constant internal conflict, his human imperfections and contradictory behavior, he does not hide his identity, his vices or his sexuality, and his aesthetics and symbolism are complex and mostly characterized by darkness and unresolved traumas. He is marked by loneliness, dogmatic skepticism, and social detachment, his methods are brutal and taxing, and he always puts the end before the means. His arc of redemption, as well as dysfunctional disorders or behaviors, is the central core of the character. In his journey, individual purposes will merge with the common good, for which he may ultimately sacrifice himself, aligning himself on his path with the romantic hero or, conversely, embracing the darkness to become, ultimately, a villain. The common trait with the traditional hero is strength and resilience, while with the villain it is brutality and methods to achieve his goals. Therefore, the following definition of the contemporary anti-hero and anti-heroine is proposed:

A character with his/her own purposes, whose leitmotiv is revenge or the search for his/her identity, and who is characterized by contradiction, loneliness, inner conflict, and an uninhibited and skeptical behavior. In his/her redemption arc, he/she will align his/her purposes with the common good and, thanks to his/her strength and resilience, he/she will achieve his/her goals regardless of the means, and regardless of the established law.

Based on this new definition and the categorization of these characters, this methodology can help to analyze characters from other literary works or from the fields of advertising, sociology, or history, and could also be useful for investigating the parasocial attachment that viewers and readers of these narratives have with this type of characters. Likewise, this method could be adapted to analyze the concept of the anti-hero since its appearance in cinematography or in video games, where it has an increasing presence.

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