

MY HERO ACADEMIA
Villains, Anti-Heroes and Audiences in Contemporary Television Animation

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Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfillment of the examination for the BA (Honours) (programme name). It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout my discussion of villain and antihero sympathy I would like to discuss topics that give an emotional response from the audience towards these characters. This includes Appearance and Villain Types, Backstory and Morality and finally Redemption and Sympathy. I will be studying the show MY Hero Academia that was originally a Manga and adapted into an anime in 2016. The show stays true to the original comic work and is catching up with the contents of the manga swiftly.

Through this study I would like to focus on how My Hero Academia can create sympathy with its storytelling and presentation of characters both villain and heroes. The fighting between good and evil creates a rift between society and the heroes of this world, due to this I will briefly mention the shift between the heroes becoming more like the villains they fear. The main goal is to highlight how the audience could feel sympathetic for characters that are morally ambiguous through the topics I mentioned previously.

I will be mentioning superheroes from the early era of comic books since many show a striking resemblance to characters in MHA as well as motivations and characteristics. My Hero Academia will be the spotlight of my discussion however, there will be a brief mention of the film ‘Hands’ by Sherwood Anderson to introduce an interesting audience study in terms of sympathy for the main character.

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INTRODUCTION

With the rise of Television animation and Anime sneaking its way into western media, newer more compelling characters are being presented through these forms, a strange phenomenon is occurring where many active watchers of these shows as well as less enthusiastic spectators will begin to sympathize and relate to villains and antiheroes. This is by no means comparing the popularity of heroes to villains however it is observed that more and more people are drawn to these morally gray characters than heroes in terms of sympathy. The show that I will be focusing on is My Hero Academia [MHA]. In this world more than 80% of the human population has a superpower also known as a "quirk". Japan set in the present day is far more different in terms of the average human life, the city looks modern and familiar but the rise of murders, burglary and overall immoral acts have increased due to most of the population having such powers at their disposal. This world is split between heroes and villains. I will specifically be talking about two heroes, Bakugo and Endeavor as well as their relationship to the main number one hero All Might. The main story follows the average hero's journey of a young teenage boy named Izuku Midoriya, he is a quirkless child, a very rare case however ever since he was young he always wanted to be like his favorite hero, All Might. Through events that lead him to save his childhood friend Bakugo from a villain attack All Might now weakened and old transfers his powers to Midoriya and he commences his journey into becoming the number one hero. After this incident MHA continues by having all future heroes go to a specific school known as U.A High to train and learn how to become pro heroes. We follow the main character Izuku Midoriya and his classmates as they fight through challenges and work hard. In terms of villainy I will be talking about the main group that refer to themselves as the "League of Villains" however within this group there are some strong contestants that the audience could sympathize with, this includes Twice, Dabi and Toga. The League of Villains is an important group that shows up frequently; they follow the main leader All for One, an arch nemesis of All Might. His successor is Shigaraki, a young man who has seen kindness in All for One when no one showed him help in his lifetime. The league also comprises followers from another group. Stain is considered to be an anti-villain, he does not agree with All for One's motivations to take over but he is more concerned with the societal views of quirks and the impact and divisions between good and bad, questioning whether there are really any heroes or villains.

The Tale of evil and good has been with the human race since before time ‘‘It is clearly the case that the heroes and villains have fought their eternal battle across all of human history and imagination. Myths and legends down the ages have told stories of those who fought for good and evil ‘¹. With the rise of superhero comics in the 1930’s the fight between good and evil became more prominent. Heroes such as Superman, Wonder Woman and Batman became every child’s dream, always fighting crime and defeating the evil doers. My Hero Academia takes a lot of its inspirations from comic books, the main hero All Might has a striking resemblance to the muscular Superman as well as the incredible power he possesses and with his catchy one liners, ‘‘I am here!’’. He says these words whenever he saves the day. All Might is considered the ‘‘Symbol of Peace’’ and he is the main reason why society has such faith in heroes, he is the pillar that keeps everything afloat. ‘‘His spot as the #1 Hero has elevated him to the position of ‘‘Symbol of Peace.’’ The basic idea behind this is that, as long as All Might is around, no major catastrophe or terrorist attack can’t be stopped or dealt with. His very presence in the country is said to have brought crime to an all-time low, because he is so powerful that no one dares to step out of line.’’²



Fig.1: Episode Still and Comic Book Panel

¹ Mike Alsford. *Heroes and Villains: Myth and Imagination*, Baylor University Press, 2007. Page 8

² Dimitri Adoniou. *My Hero Academia: The Hidden Depth of All Might vs All for One*, University of Canberra, 2018.



Fig.2: All Might's Official Character Design Sheet, 2016

It is important to distinguish between both sympathy and empathy since it is often confused. Empathy is the ability to understand and feel what the person is going through, sympathy however is the perception and understanding and feeling bad or sorry for someone else's troubles, pain, grief “many specifically associate the term with feeling sorry for someone whose situation is somehow difficult, unfortunate and unpleasant”³. It is important to distinguish that my points are not to empathize with the villains, most of the villains in MHA have committed some unspeakable actions which should not be related to however due to the topics I will be discussing the audience could feel pity for them. Through research the idea of feeling sympathetic for fictional characters could be taken from our own experiences in the real world with people we have met through our life that show similar characteristics and personality. Although the characters of MHA are not real, they feel real in how they react and engage with one another; this aids in the sympathetic reaction we feel for them, heroes and villains. Howard Sklar furthers this point “We intuitively fill in the picture using that which we know from the world of real persons, with the end result that the fiction world ultimately becomes populated by characters who seem real to us”⁴ Many spectators can find themselves relating to the themes of suppression, loneliness, wanting to belong found in MHA.

³ Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion*, John Benjamins Publishing, 2013. Page 26.

⁴ Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion*, John Benjamins Publishing, 2013. Page 12

CHAPTER ONE: VILLAIN APPEARANCE AND VILLIAN TYPES

My Hero Academia has a diverse cast of characters, all ranging from different genders, body types, creatures, non-human and much more. Most of the villains are presented with more bodily damage, broken limbs, terrible scars and such. Appearance and villain types can be a huge factor in first feeling sympathy towards them, scars and past injuries can cause the audience to wonder about their life. The villain type can present them as relatable, enjoyable to watch and easily likable. When we think of villains the immediate thought is the ugly features most might have, gruesome scars, disfiguration, mechanical parts. However some villains in MHA can be considered beautiful. ‘‘The aesthetics of villainy coincide to a certain extent with the aesthetics of ugliness, although there are villains who are not exactly ugly, and villains who are simply beautiful.’’⁵ Bakugo and Endeavor share similar powers, one uses anger and power of explosions and the other bursts into powerful flames and creates unbearable temperatures. Bakugo may not appear as a villain however his actions are far from heroic, his expressions and overall mannerisms could be seen as villainous. He is very similar to Endeavor with appearance, presentation, lack of emotions and compassion. It suits their powers of fire, an element that can injure and damage things around them easily, however as heroes they are both very frightening characters in terms of appearance.



Fig.3: Bakugo Official Design [Left] Fig.4 Endeavor Official Design [Right], 2016

⁵ Anna Fahraeus, *Villains and Villainy : Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media*, BRILL, 2011. Page 10

Villains have their own intriguing appearances and the types of villains are numerous. Firstly we will speak about Twice also known by his real name Jin Bubaigawara. He is a simplistic character, barely ever showing his face and always puts the mood high for his comrades. However beneath his mask it is clear that Twice was involved in some horrendous accident, a large scar can be seen going down his forehead above a pair of sunken dead eyes. [See Fig.6]

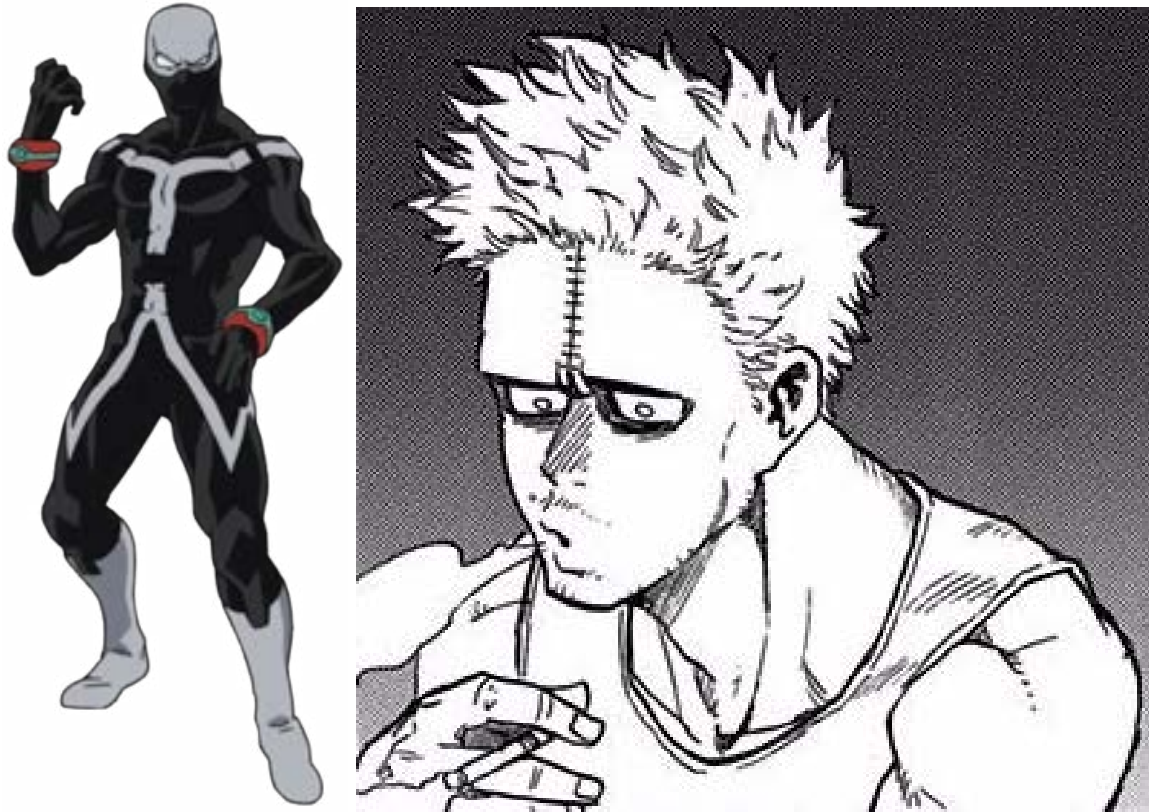


Fig.5 Jin Bubaigawara [Twice] Official Design, 2016, Fig.6: Face Design, 2014

He possesses a unique and powerful quirk, one of duplication: he is able to create multiple copies of someone as long as he knows their measurements. Although his appearance is considered ugly the audience can find him charming and easily likeable out of the cast of villains due to his comedic and idiotic nature. Twice is the type of villain that can be entertaining to the spectators. Jin would be considered a Comic Villain which “are funny for us to watch, but they nonetheless are a force to be reckoned with. They are dangerous, powerful villains whose single-minded determination to destroy the main character”⁶

⁶ Amy M.Davis. *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains : Men in Disney's Feature Animation*, John Libbey & Company Limited, 2014, page 230

By putting his power aside the audience could find it easy to be attracted to this character due to his overwhelmingly positive and comedic approach during villainous missions. Amy M. Davis argues that “What makes the comic villain funny is his personality: he is larger-than-life, a little flamboyant, and has a great sense of humor (not necessarily about himself, but certainly about others). At least at first, before they exhibit the most despicable parts of themselves, these villains are even rather likable, for all their obnoxiousness: we never have to deal with them ourselves, but watching them in their interactions with others is pleasurable”⁷ The audience can view Twice as likable and the interactions he shares with his villain companions can be gathered as wholesome, it's clear he cares for those who gave him a chance even when interacting with heroes he is able to stay true to his comedic and goofy self and can be very entertaining to the audience. Dabi, a villain also a part of the League is a person who is portrayed with multiple burn scars, his skin is incredibly damaged and can often bleed [Fig.7]. He is one of the most dangerous villains in the show with his incredibly strong blue flame quirk. Although incredibly burnt he is also a huge threat and shouldn't be taken lightly, the audience may feel bad for him and his past scars however his villain type is rather scary. Cold hearted, no emotions and manic at times. Dabi would be considered a criminally dangerous villain who is on the very edge of insanity; it is seen multiple times throughout the show that Dabi cares very little for his surroundings and for those around him as he sets areas ablaze.

He is a villain with a large target over his head, many pro heroes of this society are on the hunt for him. “Their strength is derived from their twisted souls and unbalanced minds, the megalomania that convinces them that they are at the center of their worlds, that they deserve anything they desire, and that those around them are too far beneath them to be worthy of anything but benign contempt at best, loathing and destruction at worst. Their madness is their greatest strength and their undoing”⁸ It can be difficult for the audience to feel any sympathy for Dabi now, he has completely lost it and it can be difficult to watch him destroy multiple estates, buildings, cities and putting many lives in danger. He is the main damage dealer in the League of Villains. Dabi often hides behind a stoic persona however as his story progresses it is clear that he is hiding his manic side behind this cool, calm and collected persona until he can let loose.

⁷ Amy M. Davis. *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains : Men in Disney's Feature Animation*, John Libbey & Company Limited, 2014, page 231

⁸ Davis, Amy M.. *Handsome Heroes and Vile Villains : Men in Disney's Feature Animation*, John Libbey & Company, Limited, 2014. Page 224



Fig.7: Dabi Official Design, 2016

Lastly I will mention the Hero killer Stain, he is a muscular man who is always hunched and covers the top half of his triangular sharp face with bandages. Without any coverings he has a scarred face with the lack of a nose which he cut off himself. He is human however without a nose he can look non-human, he has a rather large tongue that is covered in bigger papillae to help with his quirk. When Stain has a taste of the opponent's blood they can paralyze them for a period of time, giving them the opportunity to strike with no fear of retaliation. When most think of villains the ugliness is the first thing that would be mentioned and Stain fits the bill in both an unappealing appearance and the frightening strength he has to his disposal.

There are multiple villains throughout the show much like Stain that can appear human but on closer inspection there are some things that appear to be off. Stain could be considered an uncanny valley type design. His appearance could deter the audience from feeling sympathy much like more inhuman villains seen in the show. The characters seen below are only a small handful of the non-human variations that you can expect to see in MHA. When it comes to characters such as them it can be difficult to relate or feel anything towards them since they do not possess human-like characteristics.



Fig.8: Portal Villain Episode 48, 2019. Fig.9: Stain's Face Episode 29, 2018

Anna Fahraeus discusses the inability to react to villains that are less human. “There are villains who do not actually inhabit anthropomorphic bodies, and there are some who do not inhabit a body at all. In fact, the lack of a material body tends to increase the effectiveness of villains and villainy.”⁹ With villains that have no body at all it can be hard to feel any sympathy for them and it can definitely enhance the fear and hatred for them even further. The portal villain is one example of a non body villain so it can be difficult to put yourself in their shoes and understand where they might be coming from, their actions in the show are seen as more dangerous and frightening.

⁹ Anna Fahraeus, *Villains and Villainy : Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media*, BRILL, 2011. Page 7

CHAPTER TWO: MORALITY AND THE TRAGIC PAST

Although appearance is an important factor that could lead to hero sympathy, the main target that could twist feelings towards a character is their overall morality. This topic will mainly focus on the two anti-heroes Bakugo and Endeavor as well as the villain Twice. Bakugo's demeanor has always been aggressive, what MHA does very well is it captures the more unheroic individuals that want to become heroes for selfish gains it presents the hero side as corrupt and unjust. Bakugo is a great example of an upcoming hero student that does not fit the bill of a classic kind hearted and caring hero you would expect to see they are an antihero ‘‘Anti-heroes are dark characters, bad guys portrayed as good guys in film and television programmes, their badness is based on their violent, illegal or insensitive intervention and behaviors the good guy aspect of their persona is based on the noble causes they are trying to achieve.’’¹⁰ A good example would be a comparison to Batman, known for his actions towards evil and he is known to be a vigilante, mostly fighting crime without the law. Our first introduction of Bakugo was through a very intense scene where he bullies Midoriya relentlessly for being quirkless and ends up telling him to end his life due to this. ‘‘If you believe they are holding your quirk over in the next world...you should just dive off of the rooftop’’ even while saying this Bakugo has always referred to Midoriya as ‘‘Deku’’ this is a made up term that translates to ‘‘Worthless’’



Fig.10: Bakugo bullying Izuku Midoriya, Episode 1, 2016

¹⁰ Alan.C Heuth. *Scriptwriting for Film, Television and New Media*, Routledge, 2019. Page 40

It can be very hard to feel sympathy for someone as cruel as Bakugo even from the first interaction between him and the main protagonist, however although Midoriya is kind hearted and caring the complete opposite of Bakugo they both share the same aspiration, to become the number one hero. In terms of morality he doesn't seem to care all that much for people's lives, there were multiple times during training events where he refused to help injured citizens. Many of the other pro heroes training Bakugo have noticed his large ego. During internship one of the pro heroes commented "All i've had lately are little do-gooders, but you're the first in a long time who is a bit more ferocious, and my job as a hero is to reform people like you ". After realizing that Midoriya has obtained this special quirk with this we see him catching up at a fast pace to Bakugo and so a more cruel and brutal side emerges, his competitiveness can be classified as outright dangerous, almost killing Midoriya through one of the training classes.



Fig.11: Aftermath of Midoriyas and Bakugos first fight, Episode 7, 2016

Bakugo fits as an anti-hero very well, not quite a villain but also definitely not a hero, as a person trying to pursue heroism Bakugo does a poor job in conveying any heroic qualities, with such conflicting actions the audience themselves can find it hard to know how to feel about such a character especially when he is more aggressive than most villains. If we observe some defining features of heroes and villains Bakugo seems to share more traits with villains yet is pursuing the pro hero job! Lynnette Porter describes such traits "Classic Hero: Outer Directed (working for the greater good), willing to sacrifice self, has superior ability"¹¹ and for villains "Classic Villain: Inner Directed (working to gain personal power), does anything to save self, temporarily has superior power with a fatal flaw"¹². Bakugo shares possibly only

¹¹ Lynnette Porter. *Tarnished Heroes, Charming Villains and Modern Monsters: Science Fiction in Shades of Gray* on 21st Century Television, McFarland, 2014. Page 36

¹² Lynnette Porter. *Tarnished Heroes, Charming Villains and Modern Monsters: Science Fiction in Shades of Gray* on 21st Century Television, McFarland, 2014. Page 36

one of the hero traits mentioned, he carries immense superior power, more so than his own peers however he shows more characteristics of a villain, he only wants to be the strongest in the world and he shows little to no care for other people's lives except his own, clearly defining his role as an anti-hero.

After Bakugo was captured he remains adamant on not joining the League of Villains however he does plan on killing them if he gets the chance, he admits this outright. It should be known that in the pro hero workline they try to avoid killing anyone however this does not concern Bakugo. "I am gonna kill two or three and bust my way out of here". Bakugo's rescue was soon after this declaration before any harm was done to the villains. Bakugo shares many similarities with the popular Batman, although he fights crime he uses very immoral and outright illegal actions to protect Gotham City, many times Batman is seen killing and threatening human life much like the aspiring hero Bakugo. Batman is seen doing this multiple times in the comics and in Issue #1 of Batman released in Spring 1940 he outright admits that killing would be necessary and he is eerily similar to how Bakugo perceives fighting crime [see fig.12]. Bakugo was later rescued from the League of Villains but in doing so All Might can no longer turn back into his original form and is now the old, frail man he was in the shadows. With the villains defeated and broadcasted on television, Midoriya and Bakugo as well as the population now see All Might's true form, with this he can no longer be the Symbol of Peace and society begins to crumble.



Fig.12: Batman Issue #1, 1940

Bakugo has a serious inferiority complex, he makes everyone feel worse and pathetic so he can feel much better. The audience is aware of this since he constantly is over confident and cocky as well as the show presenting many scenes from his childhood as being overly praised and complimented. The audience may begin to understand how he came to be, however a character such as Bakugo can cause confusion since he is meant to be a parallel and rival to Midoriya. “The intended effect with engaging with the anti-hero is to both like and dislike the anti-hero, the dual processes model of morality can explain both of these responses and why we find ourselves feeling conflicted about the antihero”¹³ As Margrethe Bruun comments, It can be difficult to put yourself in his shoes since he is so belligerent but Bakugo creates a form of engagement that is more curiosity than likeability, the audience although conflicted might want to see where he progresses further in the show and how he might challenge the audience in terms of morality.

Endeavor, much like Bakugo, is an incredibly hostile and stern hero. Being just below All Might in the hero popularity chart he is a strong and frightening man. When we think of a hero we naturally are supposed to trust, like and support them since they represent the good and justice of the world. “The central fantasy of the adventure story is that of the hero— individual or group— overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission.”¹⁴ Endeavor does not fit the usual hero qualities not in the slightest, even as a qualified Pro Hero. He is the father to Shoto, a child also in the hero school course alongside Midoriya and Bakugo. He has a very prominent scar on his right eye and striking hair that is split in the middle; the left side is snow white and the right is a deep red. To him, Shoto is but a pawn he trained from a young age to surpass All Might “I’ll mold him into a hero who surpasses him, that’s the only reason I created that kid” Endeavor, goes further to belittle and scold Shoto after the tournament battle and then proceeds to remind him of his reason of existence. “You’re my greatest creation, remember your duty to surpass All Might”, we begin to discover his true motivations for having a child, Endeavor was set on creating children for the sake of competing and surpassing his rival. It is a selfish and cruel motivation for a hero and it can put the perspective into motion that heroes can be just as villainous and vice versa.

¹³ Margrethe Bruun Vaage. *The Antihero in American Television*, Routledge, 2015. Page 91

¹⁴ Charles Hatfield, John G.Cawelti. *The Superhero Reader*, University Press of Mississippi, 2013. Page 78



Fig.13: Endeavors first appearance, Episode 19, 2018

Through Shoto we discover that Endeavor used his fame and wealth to successfully marry Shoto's mother Rei, for her quirk alone this was called a quirk marriage, they had no love nor prior connection before much like arranged marriages. Endeavor made Rei give birth to a total of four children, one is presumed dead, before stopping at Shoto since he had the perfect quirk, ice and fire. Due to this Rei developed severe mental health issues and resulted in her injuring Shoto and being sent to a Mental Health Center. This was all done by the actions of Endeavor's selfish desire to create the 'perfect child' in his eyes.

The audience can find it incredibly difficult to sympathize with him due to his cruelty towards his family and outlook on heroism. He is a great example of an anti-hero who is engaging yet oftentimes the audience is left questioning what is really considered good and evil in the context of this society and it in turn can cause the spectators to view justice much differently.

Clearly Endeavor is not fit to be a father nor a hero yet he is both. Christopher Comerford mentions 'In addition to providing entertainment, these figures trigger audiences' questioning of the process and formation of justice and its relationship to law, situating both as elements related to heroism. Anti-heroes who disrupt the neat binaries of 'good' and 'evil,' or 'hero' and 'villain,' are able to traverse liminal

thresholds of law and legality in the pursuit of justice”¹⁵ Anti heroes have an important role within the story, Endeavor and Bakugo act as immoral entities within the story that can act as a parallel to the good and heroic personalities of All Might and Midoriya. It can strengthen the views the audience can have for their society while also questioning the world they live in.

Endeavor's carelessness and cruel parenting has a knock off effect. Out of his four children, one was presumed dead, the child, Touya was only thirteen and desperately wanted to show his father that he could be the person to surpass All Might, however Touya was born with a side effect to his quirk, although his hot blue flames were extremely powerful his body could not withstand the heat like most fire based quirks so he was easily burned. In an attempt to impress Endeavor he was trapped in a flaming forest and presumed dead when not found, later we discover that Dabi is Touya and he is out to seek revenge for what his father has done to him. [see fig.14] “I’ve already decided I want to surpass him, dad has already ignited that feeling in me.” It can become easier to sympathize with Dabi after this revelation, he had a tough upbringing with negligent parents and surrounded by siblings who felt just as bad. Endeavor's choices throughout his life has caused a butterfly effect to commence, leading to Dabi ten years later to seek revenge for what has occurred in the past. MHA has switched the roles of heroes and villains for a brief moment with Dabi and his father, suddenly Endeavor was the one who appeared more villainous than his son.

¹⁵ Christopher Comerford. *Ambiguous Heroism: Anti-Heroes and the Pharmakon of Justice*, University of Technology Sydney, 2015. Page 2



Fig.14: Manga Page Chapter 297, 2021

Lastly we will focus on a villain, Twice. He was born with a cloning quirk which allowed him to make multiple copies of people. His story tends to be one of loneliness and the want to belong. During his younger years he made multiple copies of himself, however his clones became jealous and decided to overthrow the "king". Due to this he has a large scar placed vertically on his forehead after near death. Ever since he has had trouble comprehending that he is in fact the real Jin Bubaigawara, he is quick to panic and he is often seen talking to himself and fighting with his inner thoughts. Twice easily expresses

his feelings towards the hero society claiming that for those who do not fit in within certain standards it is hard to live, since he suffered from severe trauma Jin could not live a normal life. ‘‘I AM HERE!; for those who lived normal lives, they were heartwarming words but for those who didn’t they were a curse’’. There have been many instances of people that have been rejected by society for not fitting in with the norm, or having quirks that are deemed to be too dangerous or useless.

Twice relates a lot with a fellow villain, Toga. A girl who has spent all her life trying to fit in with an interest people found creepy, unsettling and disgusting. Toga’s quirk allows her to turn herself into anyone that she ingests blood from. Due to this fascination with blood at a young age she was never seen as normal and so she felt more distant as she grew up. In this society many quirks like this are subjected to counseling to help adjust and live in their modern society however many end up feeling more distant. One person who empathized with Toga said ‘‘You drink blood to transform, you were born with this special ability and as such you have always been drawn to blood, but that’s not the real tragedy, that admiration is a normal thing everyone experiences.... But blood and admiration, it’s an unfortunate pairing that will never be accepted in our society... you put on a mask to suppress yourself’’ For many like her and Twice they contained themselves due to their quirks, no one gave them a true helping hand nor were they nurtured in a safe and loving environment but one of suppression and living a fake life with a power they don’t fully understand. This theme is prevalent throughout the whole show, outcasts who do not fit into society’s standards. ‘‘Evil acts are seen as social aberrations and evil people must be cast out of society so that society will remain safe’’¹⁶ Although the outcast of villains is to be expected the audience can feel that the reasoning of having been born with overpowered, useless quirks was never up to the person. They were given the short end of the stick from day one. This is where the line between heroes and villains is obscured in MHA and through these villains the audience can begin to sympathize with their tragic backstories like that of Dabi, Twice and Toga. The heroes of this world are viewed as unhelpful and uncaring towards people like them and this is seen countless times with many of the characters. What does it mean to be a hero who rejects someone due to their quirk?

Stain furthers this view by pushing his beliefs onto this society, many villains working with the league are initially followers of Stain. He believes that not all people who are heroes are deserving of the title. ‘‘Hero is a title reserved for those who perform truly great feats, too many are undeserving just money worshippers playing hero!’’ Stain at the end of the day is a hero killer, his actions are not justified his opinion however are indeed correct, many heroes are there for selfish or personal gain like Endeavor and

¹⁶ Rachel Franks and Susan E. Meindl. *The Real and the Reflected: Heroes and Villains in Existent and Imagined Worlds*, Oxford United Kingdom, 2012. Page 111

Bakugo who strive only to be the best and make it big in the hero charts, others do it for money adding monetary value onto the lives of the innocent. Stain is a unique character, we as the audience are shown his brutal ways as well as his scary approach to exact his beliefs onto the world yet the audience can become curious on his past, as well as even agreeing with his statements after witnessing ‘‘The fact is that our gaze is still fixed on the monster long after we have recognized it as the bad one; we derive from its contemplation a sense of dark fascination which is not always easy to understand, nor explain.’’ This is the main theme that continues throughout the show and the villains always make it clear that they want some change in the way they are perceived due to their quirks.

CHAPTER THREE: REDEMPTION AND SYMPATHY

Lastly, Redemption plays an important role in the sympathy towards characters, we will talk about the redemption arcs following Endeavor and Bakugo as well as Twice from the League who has had a positive change in comparison to his villain companions. Arguably the most compelling reason for having any sort of sympathy towards an unlikable character or villain is through the change in motives. The reason as to why we find anti-heroes so appealing is that they are different, they are purposely made so that the audience is somewhat confused by their feelings towards them. Margrethe Bruune Vaage furthers this point “The spectator appreciates stories that are engaging, and adding immoral elements to a story makes it even more so, furthermore villainy can be aesthetically pleasing and the anti-hero borrows some character traits from proper villains. At the end of the day the anti-hero story is also emotionally and morally disturbing, The intended effect with engaging with the anti-hero is to both like and dislike the anti-hero, the dual processes model of morality can explain both of these responses and why we find ourselves feeling conflicted about the antihero.”¹⁷

Bakugo has a gradual change of heart towards Midoriya, from an aggressive, hatred fueled person to a more compassionate and encouraging friend. After Bakugo was captured by villains and later rescued by All Might and his classmates, he internally blamed himself for the destruction of All Might. Through most of the show Bakugo has not once shown any emotion. Since he has never shown any sign of weakness the only way Bakugo can process these feelings is by fighting Midoriya, he of course is still incredibly hostile towards him at this point. “How do I end up chasing the back of a shithead who has been trailing behind me, a shitty small fry like you getting stronger and being recognised by All Might, even though I was getting stronger too , so why, why did I become the reason for All Might's end??”. After a tiring fight between them Bakugo explains to Midoriya his feelings while breaking down in tears, and with that he wins the fight. All Might witnessed this secretly and comes to the realization that if they both work together they can both become great heroes “If you two can recognize each other and honestly raise each other up you can become both heroes who win and rescue” Bakugo has shown miraculous improvements in his attitude towards Midoriya since that night. His redemption arc started once that battle was over and I will go into further detail as to why the audience of the show can now have a change of heart towards Bakugo.

¹⁷ Margrethe Bruun Vaage. *The Antihero in American Television*, Routledge, 2015. Page 91



Fig.15: Bakugo's crisis, Episode 61, 2018

Sympathy can be much easier to comprehend with television series that last for a while, it is the reason why Bakugo works so well. We were able to follow him from day one and as spectators we observe him through multiple episodes and we are able to view his progress. Stephen McWilliams states that shows ‘especially where they are part of a series that allows for gradual development of a character over time, this gives us plenty of backstory, television shows that run for several seasons do likewise as they often incorporate flashbacks or other techniques that provide background information on the anti-hero’¹⁸ Throughout his history he has always been a bully so it can be rather easy for the general audience to dislike him but since the fight he began to give genuine criticism on Midoriya's fighting style and giving him tips to improve, not only that but he has toned down the aggressive attitude towards him from then on. The striking difference however is Bakugo's need to help Midoriya as a way to atone for what he has done to him, although he shows no shred of kindness to the other classmates he is towards Midoriya. The huge shift in his beliefs and personality quite honestly catches the audience off guard. After spending multiple episodes witnessing his relentless bullying to suddenly become an encouraging friend. A great example of Bakugo putting Midoriya first was during a serious fight he stopped Midoriya from sustaining an immense injury, he took the blow so that All Might's successor could keep going. At that moment not even he was sure why he would risk his life to save someone he used to hate. ‘At that moment, my body simply moved on its own.’

¹⁸ Stephen McWilliams. *Psychopath?: Why We Are Charmed By The Anti-Hero*, Mercier Print LTD, 2020. Page 2



Fig.16: Manga Panel Chapter 285, 2020

Witnessing Bakugo's near death experience after risking his life for Midoriya paired with his explanation as to why he felt insecure due to his rivals' quick growth is a great example of a redemption arc working. The Audience can now put themselves in Bakugo's shoes to some extent, having a rough childhood but also through the realization and positive change, he is taking accountability for what he has done and trying to be a better person to Midoriya. The real ending to his redemption arc along with his improving personality is actually apologizing for what he has done. Not once has Bakugo ever apologized in the show nor shown any regret for his past, even when he was clearly wrong this was a huge step in seeing Midoriya as an equal. Bakugo's respect for his rival changes how he refers to him, no longer calling him "Deku", when apologizing it is the first time the audience hears Bakugo call him Izuku. "I'm sorry for everything I have done up until now" The audience can have a strong reaction to this scene which showcases a successful example of an anti-hero with a redemption arc.

Endeavor much like Bakugo has a very slow redemption arc, one that many people in his life cannot forgive him for to this day and it's understandable as to why. Previously mentioned throughout the show it is made clear that Endeavor used marriage to try and create the perfect quirk, in turn creating a perfect child, after four attempts the last child was a success in his eyes however these actions did indeed have consequences, two of the siblings are viewed as lesser than Shoto, one presumed dead yet we discover

Touya is Dabi seeking revenge for the pain he endured and Shoto of course, the prodigy of the family forever scarred by his fathers actions and despises him for it. Endeavor single handedly ruined a possible caring and gentle family with a normal upbringing. Endeavor's redemption is another great example of a sympathetic reaction that can arise for Endeavor and in turn feeling sympathy for his son Dabi after learning his tragic backstory. Surprisingly his redemption begins with the fall of the "symbol of peace" All Might, also a parallel to Bakugo's shift in personality. Endeavor slowly realizes that he is not cut out to take the role of what All Might had, no one finds him kind or approachable as a hero even though he was ranked just under All Might. Through observing Shoto during class training, and witnessing how much of a caring soul he has despite his upbringing he is motivated to try and make amends. "I am proud of you son, so I will become a hero you can be proud of" the shift in his attitude towards Shoto is quite striking compared to the belittling and aggressive demeanor that was shown previously. The unique aspect about Endeavor's sympathetic reaction from the audience does not use the conventional reasoning for examples a tragic backstory, he was born in a rich family with a powerful quirk and married someone that possessed the quirk he desired, he had a very normal life of a rich man however the sympathy could come from his sheer willingness to correct what he has done while taking the full front of the consequences. One being most of his family will not forgive him, Shoto is wary, his sister is on board but Natsuo the eldest child is unwilling to forgive Endeavor since Touya always confided his feelings with him. He cannot accept this act from his father and exclaims "The world doesn't know about what he did, to you and the rest of us kids, how he treated his family, I can't forgive him, for how he treated you and Shoto as though you didn't exist, even after 10 years you've never received an apology".

A devastating scene that truly changes the tone of Endeavor's character as well as his own motives is the realization that Dabi is his son. Through the same battle Bakugo risked his life this is where Dabi reveals that he is Touya and through the heat and intensity of this brawl between hero and villain Endeavor simply freezes. He is left utterly motionless and speechless. The audience can see clearly that this news hurts him deeply, Endeavor has been seen visiting a shrine in the past and this was a memorial dedicated to their once thought deceased child. Not only that but Dabi broadcasts the truth about Endeavor and his motivations live on television. Society's opinions on heroes have changed drastically after this battle. Endeavor for the first time breaks down into tears in the aftermath in his hospital room, he apologized profusely to what he has done to Touya and his family and this is where his motivations change for the better. "The regret and guilt for my crimes are weighing down on me now, now my heart is...."



Fig.17: Manga Panel Chapter 290, 2020

The aftermath of the battle and the reveal of Dabi has shaken the foundation of this hero society, many of the civilians have no trust for heroes anymore after understanding what has happened with Endeavor and his past. The statue of All Might, once a symbol of peace and hope, now has a sign hanging from his neck that reads "We don't need fake heroes". The average people now have taken defending and protecting themselves in their own hands rather than relying on superheroes. Many start to riot and aggressively push away any aid from heroes. Witnessing the current number one hero Endeavor go from a stern, powerful and frightening man to a frail, broken mess is hard to watch but it is well deserved.

I would like to showcase a small study I came across during my research that plays a huge role in showing the effects of redemption and backstory as well as the audience reactions towards characters that go through similar arcs. Firstly I would like to briefly go over why the audience might sympathize with anti-heroes and villains despite their skewed morality. Affective Theory Disposition [ATD] “which nicely explains enjoyment of traditional hero narratives, appears somewhat limited in its ability to explain antihero narratives, primarily because of the moral complexity of the protagonists. Recent work proposes that viewers over time begin to develop story schema that permit antihero enjoyment, despite character immorality.”¹⁹ Due to the rise of said immoral storylines appearing even more in the media ATD is clearly apparent in MHA. The audience can become aware of these plotline patterns and can allow for the full enjoyment of morally ambiguous characters especially since it is one so simple as hero vs villain, most have seen these stories play out before. The study below shows the sympathy results for the main character Wing Biddlebaum from the film “Hands” by Sherwood Anderson. We follow Wing who was a school teacher however he had to flee his home due to allegations of inappropriately touching his students, a very heavy topic to conduct research on however the results are surprising and is a great indicator as to why villain and anti-hero sympathy can work. There are 3 plot studies, one at the beginning, middle and end of Wings character developments. The sympathy levels roughly go from 65% to 53% and by the end 73% of the audience found sympathy towards Wing even after such horrendous allegations. Throughout the plotline the spectators have witnessed Wing being chased from his livelihood, beaten and accused of molestation however the audience finds a lot of sympathy with him, many of which have said “I feel compassion towards him, he seems lonely and is getting mocked” some felt “sorry” for him, it is to note that the majority of the audience felt that he was innocent of the charges stating that “he did not in anyway harm the children”. Even for a difficult character like Wing, the majority showed some level of sympathy for him. Howard Sklar points out the sympathy levels throughout the research of this film “I believe that the statements that I have cited suggest several prominent features, firstly subjects clearly tend to feel sorry for the character, whether or not they felt that they understood his behavior. While they condemned his actions, they voiced sympathy for him on account of his treatment by the townspeople. An example of a story that elicits reader sympathy for a character who, in many respects, is difficult to understand and even more difficult to identify with.”²⁰

¹⁹ Daniel Shafer and Arthur A. Raney. *Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives*, Baylor University, 2012.

²⁰ Howard Sklar, *The Art of Sympathy in Fiction: Forms of Ethical and Emotional Persuasion*, John Benjamins Publishing, 2013. Page 143

Table 13. Sympathy/no sympathy responses at Point 1
Test A

Response	# of subject responses	Percent of respondents
sympathy	63	65.6
no sympathy	32	33.3
inconclusive	1	1.0
Total	96	100.0

Table 14. Sympathy/no sympathy responses at Point 2
Test A

Response	# of subject responses	Percent of respondents
sympathy	51	53.1
no sympathy	42	43.8
inconclusive	3	3.1
Total	96	100.0

Table 15. Sympathy/no sympathy responses at Point 3
Test A

Response	# of subject responses	Percent of respondents
sympathy	70	72.9
no sympathy	21	21.9
inconclusive	5	5.2
Total	96	100.0

Fig.18: - Daniel Shafers' Research of Audience Sympathy. 2012

The sudden change of likeness and sympathy presented in this study of someone villainous is the same as we have seen through Bakugo, Endeavor and Twice throughout the show. Twice is a unique case, his overloving and cheerful attitude to his friends is admirable and his comedic sense of speech and timing makes Jin an enjoyable villain and one that had another huge impact at the sudden shift between good and evil. During the major battle we see Twice frantically overcoming his trauma of duplicating himself to save his friends in a few touching minutes of the show. While fighting a hero Twice is compelled to save the people that gave him a chance and saw him as normal one final farewell, while desperately trying to escape the hero he triumphantly uses it to aid his friends in battle while being killed by said hero, the one rule heroes live by is to never kill. This act is another major role in the collapse of hero society in MHA. Although Twice has always been kind and friendly to his companions I feel that his redemption is more of an inward one, he believes that he has redeemed his useless life in the eyes of his friends and so he leaves this world in peace during his final moments.

CONCLUSION

In summary the research carried out about backstory, morality and design all point to villain sympathy being a normal and more abundant form of storytelling in more recent television shows both animated and live action. MHA has a wide range of villains yet from only a handful it was clear that sympathy could have been reached with the following topics: their backstories were tragic and understandable as well as their charming personalities. Bakugo and Endeavour, both anti-heroes, could pull the heart strings of the audience by using a redemption arc. With the rise of television shows the increase of more complex villains began to arise and MHA is no exception with a large range of villains where backstory is an essential key point in presenting characters in a sympathetic light, the audience might relate or begin to understand the upbringing as well as how they came to be in the present. The designs and personalities can increase sympathy further by making them relatable, as shown villains that are less humanoid may have trouble finding an audience that care for them as well as villains that don't have interesting nor engaging characteristics. Furthermore MHA skews the lines between good and evil, it is hard to justify the actions of said heroes when they commit acts as bad as the villains, I find that this form of storytelling is effective in making everyone seem more human, the world is rarely or even ever black and white so it makes sense that many of the characters categorized by good and evil are actually found to be morally gray. The war between the good and the evil has been prevalent since the dawn of time and became more popular during the rise of superhero comics with Superman and Batman, with All Might being a clear reference to these muscular heroic men in tight suits MHA makes him the reason for the amount of distrust and hate from those who feel like they cannot belong, putting the blame on the heroes can set up the villains to be sympathetic when the audience learns more about the society in which All Might has created. During the past decade the rise of more morally ambiguous characters catches the attention of the audience far better than characters who are good or bad all the time, it leaves room for growth for both the characters and the audience by always questioning the flaws of society and the injustice surrounding the show they are watching.

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