A Foil to the Hero:

Antiheroic Characters in Language, Literature, and Translation

Graduate Forum - April 4, 2024

Call for Papers

Although antiheroes have long shared the stage with their counterparts clad in shining armors, contemporary fiction across media seems to be increasingly captivated by protagonists whose moral compass is at best skewed, if not downright broken. Entirely defined by negation, antiheroes find themselves in the position in which a traditional hero would be, but they lack some or all of the qualities that such a role demands. Para-heroic figures feature in some of the most ancient and popular extant narratives, but while hero stories are characterized by a clear (yet paradoxical) pedagogical subtext—they represent exceptional standards that are at the same time desirable *and* unattainable—stories that revolve around anti-heroic figures are all but exemplary tales of individuals whose flaws remind the reader of their own. Antiheroes are—in a way—more profoundly human than traditional heroes, and their current mainstream appeal speaks to larger questions of morality and justice.

Compared to heroes, antiheroes have received comparatively less critical attention throughout the history of literature. While antiheroes have always been a part of storytelling, their popularity has grown steadily from the end of the Age of Enlightenment, with scholars dedicating their attention to the Byronic hero type (Thorslev, 1965) and to the general rejection of traditional forms of heroism. Romantic-inspired counterproposals to the hero are the ancestors of some of the most well-known rebel protagonists of postwar American fiction (Simmons, 2008), which still serve as the blueprint for the antiheroes of the present age. In an age characterized by a prevalence of both heroes and their foils, today's antiheroes, far from being simple moral outcasts, personify the flawed nature of any individual, all the while exposing the hegemonic traits—white, heterosexual, cis-male, and able-bodied—of paradigmatic heroes (Hourihan, 1997).

Antiheroic characters have not only embodied a forceful element of rebellion against the status quo, but have also become one of the most prolific and ubiquitous character type in non-literary fiction, to the point of contributing to intertextual awareness (Bruun Vage 2016, p.184) as well

as subversively twisting gender-based expectations (Hagelin & Silverman 2022, p. 203). From a linguistic point of view, the figure of the antihero, especially in contemporary texts, raises numerous questions when it comes to its linguistic conformation and its translation. Antiheroes can be recognised as such because of the character's personality, actions, morality and life choices, but the construction of antiheroic identities also happens by linguistic means (Schubert 2017). Their duality can be made manifest with powerful lexical choices, statements, use of swearings or even the use of peculiar accents or dialects. In turn, these features require effort on the part of the translator, and as the translation process is "the most recognizable type of rewriting" (Lefevere 1992, p. 9), the transfer of antiheroic features can demand creative solutions.

The students of the 36th cycle of the PhD Programme in English Literatures, Language and Translation at Sapienza University of Rome invite to engage in a meaningful discussion that revolves around the idea of the antihero in its various forms.: Why are antiheroes so popular nowadays? How does our enjoyment of antiheroic narratives work? Do antiheroic stories carry the same (or at least a similar) prescriptive intent as hero stories? What linguistic features characterise antiheroes and how does it reflect in their translation? What are the cultural elements employed in their transposition from the source language to a target language? Do taboo language and turpiloquy have an importance in signalling the antiheroism of a character?

We welcome contributions from scholars in both literary studies and linguistics. Topics can include, but are not limited to:

- prototypical antiheroes through the history of Anglophone literatures and other media;
- current popularity of antihero stories in popular culture;
- "antiheroic" readings of characters that have traditionally been treated as either heroes or villains;
- the possible pedagogical function of antihero stories;
- culture clash between antiheroic narratives and their translation, such as translations or adaptations presenting a more defined hero or villain rather than an antihero;
- the reception of translated antiheroes;
- use of swearing and violence as antiheroic features in language and their translated rendition;
- use and impact of dialect, idiolect, sociolects in the depiction and stereotypization of antiheroes;

References:

Bruun Vage, Margrethe. *The Antihero in American Television*. Routledge, 2016.

Lefevere, André. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Routledge, 1992.

Hagelin, Sarah, and Silverman, Gillian. *The New Female Antihero: The Disruptive Women of Twenty-First-Century US Television*. University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Hourihan, Margery. *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2005.

Schubert, Christoph. "Constructing the antihero: Linguistic characterisation in current American television series " *Journal of Literary Semantics*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2017, pp. 25-46. https://doi.org/10.1515/jls-2017-0002

Simmons, David. *The Anti-Hero in the American Novel: From Joseph Heller to Kurt Vonnegut*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Thorslev, Peter L. Jr. *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes*. University of Minnesota Press, 1965.

The Graduate Forum will take place at the Edificio Marco Polo, Viale dello Scalo S. Lorenzo, 82, 00159 Rome, on **April 4, 2024**. The conference will be held in English.

Application Process:
Applicants must send their proposals to angelo.arminio@uniroma1.it and giovanni.raffa@uniroma1.it by January 31, 2024.

Proposals must include:
- Name(s), surname(s), affiliation(s) of the speaker(s);
- A brief biosketch of the author(s) (up to 150-200 words);
- Title of the paper;
- Abstract (up to 250-300 words, excluding references).

Accepted proponents will be notified by February 10, 2024 and will have 20 minutes each for their talk. The conference will be held in a hybrid format. Registration will be free of charge.

Important Dates:
Submission deadline: January 31, 2024
Notification of acceptance: February 10, 2024
Date of conference: April 4, 2024

Organising Committee: Angelo Arminio and Giovanni Raffa

Scientific Committee: The Faculty Board of the PhD Programme in English Literatures, Language and Translation