

The Narrative Construction and Charismatic Appeal of Antiheroes: A Case Study of JoJo's Bizarre Adventure

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Abstract. This study examines the anti-hero narrative in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure and its deconstruction of traditional hero myths. By comparing classic heroes like Captain America with anti-heroes such as Giorno Giovanna, the analysis reveals how the series breaks down moral binaries and constructs complex characters through moral ambiguity and personal flaws. Drawing on Grimes' Symbolic Matrix Theory and Jung's analytical psychology, the study argues that JoJo reconstructs character psychology through the "persona-shadow" dynamic, subverts traditional narratives via symbolic matrices, and replaces external conflict with internal struggle. Ethical dilemmas further dissolve absolute justice, while stylized violence reshapes heroism. The series also inspires subcultural phenomena (e.g., "Stands" and villain worship), reflecting postmodern value plurality. It not only expands contemporary definitions of heroism but also offers a narrative model that transforms human conflict into storytelling tension, moving beyond moral preaching. This approach endows the work with lasting artistic vitality and fuels strong character worship within its fan community.

Keywords: JoJo's Bizarre Adventure, anti-hero, subculture, character complexity, narrative deconstruction

1. Introduction

1.1. The rise of Anti-hero narrative and the research value of JOJO

Contemporary film and animation "Anti-hero" characters are increasingly attracting the attention of the audience, prompting the audience to have a deeper discussion of the work. Such works are expanding day by day, unique in the mainstream market, from the "Joker," full of the tragedy and destructiveness of Arthur Fleck, to the "Death Note," in the wandering between the genius and the devil of the Light Yagami. This type of character, by virtue of their own personal charisma, morally ambiguous personality, flawed complex action motives, and breaking of the traditional hero mythology, Defective complex motives for action, breaking the stereotypical image of "high and mighty" shown in the traditional hero narratives, and showing the charm of roles closer to the complexity of the reality of human nature, the popularity of "anti-hero" roles not only reflects the audience's aesthetic interest in the change of the role of the hero of the perfectionism of the demystification and the exploration of the moral grey areas, but also the deeper reflection of the

value of the postmodern society facing confusion and reflection on the mainstream thinking. It is also a deep reflection of the value confusion faced by postmodern society and a reflection on mainstream thinking.

The classic manga and animation series *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, created by Hikaru Araki, has spanned forty years since 1987, and its groundbreaking characterization and far-reaching impact on global subcultures have provided rich and unique samples for the study of anti-heroic roles, and the series has deeply deconstructed the traditional heroic narrative through the portrayal of a series of charismatic members of the "Jostar" family and their arch-enemies, who are not just simple heroes, but are not simple characters. These roles are not simple binary symbols of opposites, as their motives of behavior intertwine with personal desires, their means of dealing with problems often wander on the edge of morality, and their personal charisma stems precisely from these "imperfections" and "inherent contradictions."

At present, there are a lot of films based on the "hero theory," such as "Superman" and "Spider-Man," but there are fewer films based on the "anti-hero theory," and *Jojo* is one of the best films that fits the anti-hero theory, so this paper chooses this film as the object of study.

1.2. Application framework of Greimas' symbolic matrix theory

The perfect hero should include the following seven points which are family values, group loyalty, reciprocity, bravery, respect, fairness, and respect for property according to the Morality-As-Cooperation Theory (MACT) proposed by Curry et al. [1] Taking *Spider-Man* as an example, he has a loving aunt, is always loyal to the Avengers, and is brave, intelligent, and respectful of life and people, and each of these points is shown in MACT. His story follows the traditional path of "Danger - Power - Responsibility - Sublimation," using setbacks as stepping stones to his own upward growth, accumulating power and responsibility, and finally rising to become a member of the Avengers.

Unlike the Superman-type perfect heroes familiar to the general public, anti-heroes often stray into moral grey areas. Recent empirical studies have shown that the proportion of immoral behaviors of heroes in American action films has increased significantly over the past 50 years ($r_s=.662$, $p<.001$), a narrative transformation that echoes the complexity of the characters portrayed in the *JOJO* series.

2. Analysis of Anti-hero characters from the perspective of Jungian psychology

2.1. The dialectical relationship between personality mask and shadow

This kind of role, whether because of past trauma created by the psychological shadow or rooted in the character itself, arrogant paranoia, or greed, makes its extraordinary ability and low moral standards the formation of a kind of imbalance, but it is this kind of intense conflict, instead of weakening the power of the role, that has become the opportunity to tear down the hero's "sacred" veil to show the true nature of human nature.

From the perspective of narrative function, the popularity of the antihero is no accident; it marks a profound shift in narrative paradigm, subverts the symbolic myth of traditional heroes, and accurately reflects the value of modern people's deepest confusion and moral anxiety. Walter White in *Desperado* is a typical case. His dramatic transformation from a disillusioned high school teacher to a central figure in a criminal empire, and his inner struggle for choice, vividly demonstrate the dramatic tension of the antihero bursting out through moral ambiguity. The narrative approach of the

anti-hero often breaks the traditional moral framework and presents a kind of moral grey area. This approach is particularly prominent in modern films and animation works. For example, characters in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure, such as Jotaro, are typical antihero characters who constantly wander in moral ambiguity [2]. Ziyue Zhu mentioned in his study that noir is characterized precisely by the creator's emphasis on moral ambiguity, which makes the audience reflect deeply on the character's behavior .

2.2. Inner conflict and archetypal imagery

Unlike the spiral growth of the hero, the growth of the anti-hero is more like a tense tug-of-war between the self, like Jotaro Kujo in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure, who is marked with the label of "invincibility," but this power does not point to the direction of justice and morality as in the traditional narratives; on the contrary, he often oscillates between the impulse of violence and love and justice, and the essence of portraying this kind of character lies in the uncertainty of whether the character chooses the right way to act or not. The essence of creating this kind of character lies in the uncertainty of whether the character chooses to sink into lust or to redeem himself with firm conviction. This kind of suspense gives the anti-hero character human charisma and completely breaks the audience's traditional expectation that the protagonist will inevitably turn to the good.

The world of anti-heroes is more complex and profound, and their fiercest battles often take place inside rather than outside, with inner conflicts (moral contradictions, temptations of desire, and self-worth doubts) being the real source of conflict. This inner struggle is projected into the plot and evolves into psychological games and ethical dilemmas that put the characters in a dilemma and even into the impulse of self-destruction, mainly because even if these characters "overcome" on the surface, they will not be able to achieve their own goals. The main reason for this is that even if the characters "win" against a certain target or opponent on the surface, the internal price they have to pay is often too heavy to bear, which may be psychological trauma or a complete collapse of their basic moral values, and the so-called "victory" of the anti-hero fundamentally shakes the sense of satisfaction that comes from triumph in the traditional narratives. This psychological contradiction is embodied in Jungian psychology as the eternal game of "Persona" and "Shadow." As Marasigan's analysis of Death Note's Light Yagami shows, "Setiawan, Sastrawan, Khumaedi, and Hernisawati theorize that the fullness of a character's persona is not directly defined by his or her outward behavior alone, but rather is constructed through relational presentations in social interactions [3]. Creators tend to present the core of a character's personality in three dimensions by designing his or her differentiated responses in different interpersonal situations, including dialogue styles, conflict responses, and emotional projections. The essence of this narrative strategy is to place the character in the mirror network of social relations so that his/her image is gradually clarified in the refraction of others' feedback (e.g., misunderstanding, admiration, confrontation).

3. Narrative deconstruction under the symbolic matrix theory

3.1. Semiotic reconstruction of role relationships

Anti-heroes often cover their shadow selves (violent tendencies and moral transgressions) through carefully constructed social personality masks (e.g. Jotaro Kujo's image of a "cold and superior student"), and this duality constitutes the very core of their role tensions. While the traditional hero completes the integration of his personality through the "single myth," the anti-hero of the JOJO series is constantly in a cycle of collapsing his mask and exposing his shadow.

In the classic hero narrative system, the traditional hero usually exists as a concrete embodiment of the social order, and this narrative pattern, as embodied in Joseph Campbell's theory of the "Single Myth," is that the hero's growth process often follows a classic narrative pattern, which is essentially a symbolic reenactment of the rite of passage: firstly, he or she is separated from the familiar environment, and then undergoes a test and transformation, and finally returns in a new form. and ultimately returning as a new person [4]. This three-part structure of "separation-enlightenment-return" constitutes the most basic narrative unit of the mythological story.

3.2. Matrix subversion of narrative structure

The anti-hero image portrayed in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure contrasts sharply with that of traditional heroes. When the social rule system collapses, the anti-hero rebuilds the standard of justice by breaking through the established order. Dio Brando's declaration of "rejecting human identity" is essentially a complete deconstruction of the essentialism of human nature, a narrative technique that deliberately creates a conflict of value perceptions among the audience [5]. As Robert McKee emphasizes in *Tales*, when the protagonist practices justice by more extreme means than the villain, this kind of out-of-the-ordinary moral transgression often inspires the audience to reflect deeply on the nature of justice. The justice of violence becomes a prism in such narratives, reflecting the complex dialectic between law and morality, ends and means. This difference maps out the deeper changes in social psychology, and the moral ambiguity of the anti-hero (e.g., the violent defense of Seitaro Kondo) creates space for value judgment. This narrative strategy echoes the ethical dilemmas of postmodern society and is more characteristic of the anime medium than *Desperado*.

From the perspective of characterization, JoJo's Bizarre Adventure constructs a complete anti-hero narrative system through the artistic presentation of moral ambiguity, personality flaws, and a unique aesthetic of violence. This artistic presentation can be deconstructed as a "multidimensional signature matrix", as Bohnert's analysis of Morgan's research transformation shows: "Morgan's two signatures reflect a shift in his thought from early reductionism to late monism [6]. This evolution is revealed by scientific psychoanalysis," and there is also a significant methodological shift in Hikaru Araki's works: his early works (1987-2000) focus on the "alienation of individual abilities" (e.g., Seitaro's Time Stop), while his later works (2004-2021) shift to "group ethical experiments" (e.g., Giorno Giovanna's Gang Reform). This shift is not only reflected in the level of "conceptual decision" (from superpower duel to sociology of double) but also linked to the evolution of "spatial setting" (from closed scene to urban ecology), as the study points out, "material conditions, spatial field, and conceptual frameworks are interrelated, and together they shape the choice of research methodology." Through this multi-dimensional creative signature, Araki has accomplished the sublimation from a narrative of physical violence to a social and ethical narrative, so that the portrayal of the anti-heroic character not only retains dramatic tension but also possesses the depth of reality projection.

4. Anti-hero narratives in contemporary cultural contexts

4.1. Social metaphors of moral ambiguity

The gangster identity of the protagonist of the fifth film, Gioluno Jobana, breaks the traditional narrative convention that heroes must be dependent on legitimate social institutions. This moral ambiguity echoes the Japanese anime tradition of deconstructing "evil [7]." Minea's study reveals the essential nature of anime narratives: the art of animation naturally rejects moral absolutism, and

all value judgements are placed within a fluid, perspectival framework [7]. This relativist aesthetic is reflected in JoJo's Bizarre Adventure by the dialectical use of the genius motif—when the creator sets up a character as a "genius" (e.g., Dio's ability to push the boundaries of the human condition or Giorno's unwavering beliefs), that character is in fact given the central authority to manipulate the story's development. They have the power to dictate the course of events, but also to break the existing rules and regulations. This setting breaks down the simple dichotomy between good and evil, and a character's importance is no longer determined by their moral attributes but by their ability to alter the structure of the narrative.

The setting of Giorno Giovanna as a gangster who seeks justice exemplifies the typical paradigm of evil as environmental pollution, in which the system of violence itself gives rise to a non-institutionalized redeemer. This is a mirror image of Death Note's Light Yagami's "fighting evil with evil," both of which challenge the traditional dichotomy of good and evil through the genius motif.

4.2. Symbolic expression of violent aesthetics

In terms of expression, the work elevates violence to an aesthetic level through elaborate fighting poses and ritualistic lines. This stylized treatment not only weakens the cruelty of violence but also gives the battle scenes a unique dramatic tension.

From the perspective of narratological theory, the innovation of the JOJO series on the traditional hero narrative is mainly reflected in two key aspects. Firstly, it systematically deconstructs the "hero-villain" dichotomy in Propp's theory of character function. In this series, the antihero character often possesses the qualities of both the traditional hero and the villain, and the fluidity of this characterization breaks the fixed division of roles in the folktale. Grayer's series has been a success in this regard [7].

Greimas's symbolic matrix theory provides an effective framework for analyzing the complex character relationships in the work. The theory analyzes the function of characters through the binary division of "action element/actor," but there is a limitation in this structuralist approach—it pays more attention to the functional positioning of the characters in the narrative and fails to adequately explain the mechanism of the characters as the overall meaning output [8]. In fact, characterization is essentially a joint result of intertextual relationships and socio-cultural construction. This means that the complete meaning of a character comes not only from its position in the narrative structure but also from its dialogue relationship with other texts and socio-cultural symbols. For example, the villainous characters in JOJO follow the functional setting of the antagonistic action element while at the same time developing a semiotic value that transcends the narrative function by incorporating cross-textual elements such as religious imagery and philosophical propositions. This duality suggests that character analyses need to consider the interaction of structuralist models and socio-cultural decoding simultaneously.

The arch-enemy relationship between DIO and the Joestar family demonstrates the unique narrative tension of the JOJO series. In this intergenerational confrontation, Seitaro's goal of "defeating DIO" and DIO's obsession with "destroying the Joestar bloodline" form a two-way conflict. Joseph Joestar, as the driving force, both organizes the crusade directly and influences Seitaro's mission through his bloodline. The most dramatic twist occurs after DIO obtains the ability of "the world"; he controls time and space to become the master, and Seitaro is forced into a desperate situation until the "Platinum Star" breaks through the time stasis and completes the amazing reversal.

4.3. Dissemination mechanism of subcultural phenomena

From the perspective of subculture, the work constructs a symbolic resistance to mainstream values and echoes the mechanism of marginal identity through Giorno Giovanna's "underground justice" of fighting drugs as a gangster and Dio's existentialist declaration of "rejecting humanity." This subcultural phenomenon resonates with the global trend of antiheroic popularity. Wang's study suggests that contemporary audiences have become aesthetically fatigued with certain stereotypical hero narratives [9]. The researcher points out that traditional representations of heroism have been reduced to clichés through repetitive use and that this phenomenon of narrative routinization has led audiences to expect more groundbreaking approaches to characterization. This view explains why the JOJO series has gained widespread resonance through its antiheroic characters and morally ambiguous narratives. It breaks the traditional black-or-white paradigm of hero portrayal and injects new possibilities into the hero narrative.

Dio's declaration of "not being a human being" in JOJO and the extreme justice of Light Yagami in Death Note form a typical contrast between the anti-heroes of the East and the West. The former embodies the "alienation of the individual under the collectivism" in Japanese culture, while the latter reflects the "individualism's rebellion against the system" in the West.

In terms of aesthetics, the ritualized death of Cesar Kipling's blood foam is sublimated into a sublime experience through slow-motion and crucifixion compositions, whereas Bugatti's "soul walk" deconstructs death in a surrealistic way, forming a unique aesthetic of sadness. This design allows the antihero character to maintain moral complexity while successfully building audience empathy.

4.4. Cultural transformation of commercial value

The JOJO antihero image has spawned a unique subcultural phenomenon. In fan culture, "JOJO standing" becomes a cross-media performance symbol, and research has shown that viewers' sensitivity to justice undermines the positive emotional experiences they have with villainous characters [10]. This means that when viewers have a strong sense of justice, even if the villainous character is portrayed as highly charismatic, his or her moral transgressions will still inhibit the viewers' favorable feelings towards the character.

Cosplayers around the globe have been able to visualize the charisma of their characters by recreating their fighting stances in manga. Internet fandoms such as "I'm not a human being anymore" have evolved out of their original contexts to become commonplace expressions of rebellion on the Internet.

In the commercial field, antihero images show the IP premium effect. The market premium of Dior and other villains' artifacts is essentially the symbolic value of "the aesthetics of evil," while GUCCI's association with Araki directly reproduces Giorgio Armani's pink and blue suits, which transform gangster associations into a symbol of luxury aesthetics. Araki's dual role as a manga artist and fashion designer forms a closed creative loop, with the character's clothing serving the narrative and inspiring the brand's design.

5. Conclusion

The anti-hero narrative of *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* has far-reaching significance for the deconstruction of the traditional hero myth. When Captain America guards the order of the system, Giorno Giovanna uses gangster tactics to achieve social purification; when the super British film

emphasizes "the greater the ability, the greater the responsibility," Joni Josta completes self-redemption in a moral dilemma. The popularity of these "imperfect heroes" reflects the contemporary audience's revolt against moral absolutism and their preference for character narratives that show the complexity of human nature.

JoJo's Bizarre Adventure provides a double breakthrough path for theater and film creation, showing the symbiotic relationship between personality flaws and the hero's core. The rise of the antihero is not a negation of traditional values but a sign of the evolution of creative paradigms. In the postmodern context of value pluralism, JOJO makes us rethink the definition of heroism. The real narrative innovation does not lie in whether the characters abide by the moral code or not, but in whether it allows the audience to see the courage to change in Joruno's gangster ideals, to feel the determination to guard in Seung-tae-ro's punching style, and to experience the warmth of human nature in Jonny's struggle-filled redemption. This creative wisdom of turning human conflicts into narrative energy is the art of contemporary film and television most worthy of study.

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