

Example of notes from underground essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

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1. [What is an Anti-hero?](#) \n \t
2. [Is the Narrator an Anti-hero?](#) \n \t
3. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

What is an Anti-hero?

Heroes are often the subject of fictional fantasies that most children often look upon as a symbol of strength, power and good will. In real life heroes are regarded as the exceptional individual that makes a difference in everything they do. However, like any other fictional stories if there's a hero, there will always be a villain or otherwise the “ anti-heroes”, Most often than not, the anti-heroes are the ones that defines the hero because the villains pushes the heroes to the edge of their strength. In a more realistic world, anti-heroes are not the usual image of evil that spends his entire time plotting for world destruction. Anti-heroes are the quintessential element of existentialism, postmodernism and modernism. Anti-heroes entered the field of literature during the period of modernism due to the flawed image of heroes that are weak and possess insecurities instead of having more epic virtues.

Is the Narrator an Anti-hero?

“ Notes from Underground” is a short novel wrote by a Russian novelist and existentialist author named Fyodor Dostoevsky. The novel was considered by many as among the first existentialist novel in the field of literature because

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of the characteristics that the protagonist or the narrator himself is demonstrating. The author presented excerpts of the narrator's account of memoirs that depicts isolation and bitterness. Although out the novel he was only named the underground man, he is a retired civil servant from St. Petersburg living an impoverished life under the grounds. The narrator is a representation of the author's existential beliefs that defines the meaning of deviance and anti-socialism. Given that nature of belief, it is safe to assume that the author is indeed an anti-hero. This is because the defiant nature and anti-socialism are among the qualities that the typical societies of heroes normally generally despise.

The first part of the book entitled "The Mouse Hole" talks about the construction of the Underground man's character and the revelation of his inner thoughts. The narrator implies himself as the protagonist and somewhat the unlikely hero of the story, although his qualities and principles that depicts the characteristic of an anti-hero. The Underground man recalls his life as similar to a mouse living in a mouse hole. There is a feeling of being alienated by the outside world and by the society. In fact readers from different professional fields has the same perception about the narrator's characteristic given the part in the novel where the Underground man refuses to have his liver illness treated. For example, in a journal by Bezzubova (2001) she wrote "The hero's crucial problem is his lack of social skills. In fact, his personality is an insurmountable barrier to visiting a doctor. He feels negatively toward people in general and doctors in particular, not being able to share his experiences with anyone" (Bezzubova 2). Although in Bezzubova's journal she called the narrator as a hero, the given description

still implies the opposite, the assumption made by Bezzubova is in response to the narrator's statement " It's because I'm spiteful that I don't want to have any treatment". " I couldn't of course explain to you who it is that I will actually hurt by my spite; I know perfectly well that I would be quite unable to foul things up for the doctors by not being treated by them; I'm aware, no one more so, that all this will harm only myself and nobody else. All the same, if I'm not being treated, it's entirely out of spite. There's something wrong with my liver – well, let it get worse (Dostoevsky 7)!" This passage from the novel implies another characteristic that proves that the narrator is indeed an anti-hero, that pain became the very sensation that the narrator uses as a relief. Uhlmann, Groth, Sheehan and McLaren (2009) also mentioned the same observation in their book about the exploration of sensation; it reads " Dostoyevsky's Underground Man in Notes from Underground suffers from a surfeit of " consciousness" and seems to find relief in any sensation for sensation's sake, even if that consists only of avenging an imagined or real slight, reveling in toothache, or exercising cruelty upon an undeserving target" (Uhlmann et al. 10).

Going further into the novel, the second part of the book entitled " Brought to Mind by a Fall of Wet Snow," it becomes clear how the narrator came to his current state of mind. The factors that may contribute to his characteristics of an anti-hero manifested during childhood and further substantiated his stoic personality. At the age of forty, the narrator recalls his retirement from his civil service job settlement in a shabby apartment in St. Petersburg. At that point the Underground man already constructed a wall between him and the rest of the society due to his total contempt of it

and everyone that is part of the social norm. The narrator claims that he represents the marginal population of the society that takes consideration of the underlying circumstances created by the society.

The part that makes the narrator even more of a anti-hero is the feeling of being more conscious and intelligent than anyone else he met, but he is also aware that his consciousness creates an impression of skepticism that hinders him to gain confidence in his actions. The existence of such a feeling of skepticism cripples the narrator from being integrated into the society that he despises and participate in more meaningful endeavors like other people do. The author writes “ But how can I help it if it is the inescapable fate of every intelligent man to chatter, like filling an empty glass from an empty bottle (Dostoyevsky 98)”. This passage explains the reason for choosing isolation over socialization because he feels that his wisdom would be enough to fill another’s cup. Therefore he only kept his intelligence to himself and he remained unconfident in front of the society. According to the narrator, is he the “ man of nature and truth (Dostoyevsky 98),” therefore, his self portrayal of truth and nature made him the unconscious man.

The narrator’s description of himself as the Underground man suggests other reasons that the protagonist chose the way he wants to live like a mouse in a hole. This is because as an anti-hero, the usual feeling is being inferior to the hero, being out-smarted and defeated is typical. Therefore, when the Underground man realized the truth about his existence, he faces the fact that his life is full of self-loathing and shame. It is the same feeling that most villains and anti-heroes in comic books often feel about themselves.

However, they continue to uphold their inner thoughts and leverage on their qualities of being indifferent. Anti-heroes does not admit defeat, they usually expresses it differently with a sense of strong self-upheaval. This is the same nature of reasoning that the Underground man expresses in his regrets. He wrote “ And so I might be frothing in the mouth, but if you had brought me a doll to play with or had offered me a nice cup of tea with sugar, chances are I would have calmed down. I’d even have been deeply touched, although angry at myself, I would be certain to gnash my teeth later and be unable to sleep for several months. But that’s the way it was (Dostoyevsky 85)”.

However, the Underground man’s anti-heroic nature also offers a positive and convincing argument about the socialists and rational egoist of his time. He strongly believes that the use of reason would make a better world for everybody and that destructive behavior is a result of capitalism and terrorists who think that if everyone would believe what was behind their best interest they would not be behaving destructively and irrationally (Uwasomba). The Underground man mocks reasoning of the socialists and rational egoist through one of his passage that reads “ I exercise my power of reasoning, and in my case, every time I think I have found a primary cause I see another cause that seems to be truly primary And what happens in the end? The same thing over again.” (Dostoyevsky 97).

Another remarkable remarks found in the novel that defines a reasonable anti-hero is the Underground man’s opposition of underestimating human desire for free will. It shows in a passage from the novel stating “ Ah ladies and gentlemen, don’t talk to me of free will when it comes to timetables and arithmetic, when everything will be deducible from twice two makes four!

There's no need for free will to find that twice two is four. That's not what I call free will! (Dostoyevsky 109)". Free will when discussed in arithmetic approach means multiplying whole numbers will give a product of another number, the principle of free will in this explanation is to let the numbers multiply and allow them to increase by themselves, that no limitations should be set to prevent the numbers from growing through multiplication. However, the anti-hero has a different view of free will, which should only apply on human conditions and not to be combined with another product of human intelligence. It is a prominent quality of an antihero to oppose what the society sees as normal and acceptable. For an anti-hero such as the narrator, which happens to be the Underground man as well the world should be understood as it is and not how the mass of society thinks about it. He added that instead of submitting ourselves to the laws of reasoning, which tells that only the doctors and dentists can cure his liver illness and toothache. The Underground man would rather suffer the pain of his illnesses in silence in order to uphold his belief in free will even if it means his decision to refuse treatment would cause him to endure the pain. In context, the narrator demonstrates a masochistic behavior due to the irresolvable dilemma that man is not a man without his freedom of will.

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