

Is the narrator from notes from underground an anti- hero essay example

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



Throughout history, different kinds of tales have been written revolving around different kinds of themes, and in every tale, there is always a main character, sometimes known as the protagonist. The main character is often also known as the hero or heroine of the story. However, when the main character is profoundly imperfect in some way, but lacks in the characteristics and qualities that are typically possessed by a hero, then such a main character is known as an anti-hero. The anti-hero is usually a reluctant main character who believes that he does not have the ability to accomplish a goal. The anti-hero might be depraved, discontented, egoistic or morose. Usually, over the course of a tale, the anti-hero transforms into a more complete or content person because enduring certain struggles. Most novels need a hero and many times the readers may feel sympathy for the narrator in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), but the fact remains that the narrator has many of the traits of an anti-hero and this paper will be concluding that he is indeed the anti-hero of the novel.

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* has been described as an improper or obscene exposure of awareness (Jones 175). It is improper to begin the book with such exposure because the feebleness of the narrator's awareness is revealed, apparent in the fact that all the assertions he makes in Part I lead to an antinomy or discrepancy. In Part II of the novel, the inapprehensible public behavior of the narrator is revealed and the narrative reaches the widest of the circles of discrepancy. Absurdly, what is most perturbing about the narrator's public life that has his public acts are contradictory to his own self-awareness. In fact, the very line between the "hero" and "anti-hero" categories is blurred by the contradiction between his

own self-awareness and his public acts. Nonetheless, the exposure of the narrator's feebleness in the face of contradiction and his tendency to act deceptively certainly outweighs his public acts, which more or less portrays him as an anti-hero.

The anonymous, intolerable narrator from *Notes from Underground*, the Underground Man is the first exceptional example Dostoyevsky's genius for crafting seemingly absurd witnesses to Christianity—distorted, honest unbelievers like the other anti-heroes from the novels he wrote after this one. In the very first chapter, the narrator of the novel, the Underground Man introduces himself. He immediately estranges and separates himself from those reading the novel without wasting any time. He says, "I am a sick man I am a spiteful man" (Dostoevsky 3). The narrator seems to be wise, but his wisdom is good-for-nothing because he is suffering from moral paralysis, he is tormented by his own relentless self-consciousness. This makes the narrator seem like a lonely, isolated fool who does not dare to love because he cannot get over his own preposterousness. Although Liza is one of Dostoyevsky's adorable cliché, but she still personifies the love knocking on the narrator's door. Yet, the novel's anti-hero just viciously insults and retreats back into his gloomy abode.

The form of thinking of the narrator is also established from confession that he makes in the opening of the novel. He first claims something, then starts doubting his own claim, quite often asserting the opposite of it, only making his thoughts appear seemingly absurd. Moreover, even his own realization of his inner states seems to be doubtful since he does not even understand what hurts. At one point he says that he is a spiteful man, but then at

another point he makes it seem that he is not (Dostoevsky 4, 5). Absurdly, he seems to be pleased by his aching tooth, he is even pleased by moaning. These absurdities and discrepancies are not only innate to the content, but also to the narrative that Dostoevsky makes in Notes from Underground, and this further depicts the narrator as an anti-hero.

The novel is clearly trying to convince those reading to identify with a narrator who is obviously deranged, who is proud of the fact that he is a sick man. By doing this, Notes from Underground serves as a debate of whether viewing the world via someone's eyes makes reasonable to sit behind the eyes of a maniac. Apparently, the author expects that the readers will gain something if they look at this society from a twisted perspective.

Unknowingly, the narrator seems to gather sympathy rather quickly, which tends to complicate this question. In fact, at some points it seems possible to consider the narrator as a likable human being in part because of his ironic and savage humor. Some of the mad statements that the narrator makes reveal the fact that he does not sympathize with his own craziness, which grants him humanity, and the irony signifies his awareness of society.

Another reason that the narrator in Notes from Underground is an anti-hero is because he chooses to live in a dark underground shelter. He is despondent, passive and somewhat unconcerned to all the foolishness that he is surrounded by. He is also aware of the fact that the people above him consider him to be the fool. However, he accepts, embraces and welcomes this external viewpoint. He does not apprehend and he does not say sorry. That is why the claim that he made in the opening of the novel about being a sick man remains maintained throughout. It is the narrator's own wish to

lock himself out of the world around him, choose to stay underground and welter himself in disgrace and suffering. Regardless of his psychological motives, he does it in order demonstrate his independent and free will. However, his belief that the underground is better is nothing but a lie since he admits that it is “ something quite different, for which [he is] thirsting, but which [he] cannot find! Damn Underground!” (Dostoevsky).

The narrator in Notes from Underground continues to refuse to return the world around him; he had already agreed that he has a diseased mind, but the author does not explain the nature of the disease. However, some that is apparent is the fact that his mind does not function as the minds of those above him, and surprisingly this a positive thing. Regardless the nature of his diseased mind, the questions that narrator asks have an underlying sensibility and with his status as an outsider he manipulates change in attitudes, something a hero would do. The narrator also lends the novel a political dimension because tenacious desire to postulate a distinct outlook and to question the cogency of the traditional wisdom and regular conventions. This makes it quite obvious that the narrator is not a madman. At one point the narrator asks “ What is to be done with the millions of facts that bear witness that men, consciously, that is fully understanding their real interests, have left them in the background and have rushed headlong on another path, to meet peril and danger?” (Dostoevsky). This percipient question that the narrator asks all of a sudden seems to pull him out of the ethical darkness he seems to have been stuck in from the start and transforms him into a completely sensible person. Again the narrator ends up drawing the sympathy of the readers. This sensibility is the line that

separates the sane from the insane and thus, there is an ethical battle going on in Notes from Underground, which seems to suggest that there is difference between deviance and insanity. This suggests that the narrator is not a crazy person, he has what it takes to be a hero, but he chooses not, by being deviant instead, becoming an anti-hero.

After exploring and analyzing the apparent possibility that the narrator in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Notes from Underground is an anti-hero, all that is left to do is reach an agreeable conclusion. Of course, this might not be as easy as it seems. An average reader could indeed mistake the narrator as an antagonist. His negative traits for he feels no resentment or sympathy seem to draw him away from what could be described as a hero. The narrator is certainly no hero, yet he is not an antagonist either, as discussed in this essay, he is no madman. It is discrepancies in his statements and thoughts that reveal the truth about him. While he is conflicted about his own perceptions, he brings the readers into a state of conflict as well, whether they should despise him or feel sympathetic about him. The fact that he manages to make the readers feel sympathy for him is what makes the narrator the anti-hero in this novel.

What gives the narrator, who does his best to make himself appear as an antagonist is the fact he honestly accepts what he is. This gives him a monumental heroic trait, and although he cannot be accepted as a hero, but he ends up becoming the anti-hero of the novel. What makes Notes from Underground an exceptional novel is that the author is able to honestly reveal “ the self-contradictory features of his anti-hero, to win us over to the side of a man who does not hesitate to see himself as a monster” (Begley).

Works Cited

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