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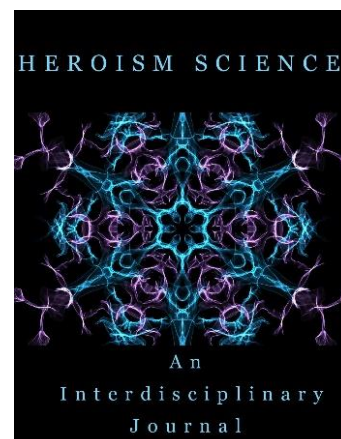
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Myth, Fiction and Politics in the Age of Antiheroes: A Case Study of Donald Trump



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ABSTRACT: In this article, we demonstrate that the antihero archetype informs our understanding of Trump in important ways, including his rise to and fall from power. We introduce an analytical framework for analyzing Trump's antiheroic traits based on his social positioning, individual motivation, and personal charisma. We argue that Trump is fascinating because he is powerful, amoral, and charismatic, and suggest that the American public was primed for Trumpism through a zeitgeist hospitable to antihero worship. That is, Trump's dogged popularity with nearly half of the American public was foretold by decades of pop-cultural obsession with, and adulation for, the antihero.

KEYWORDS: *Antihero, Trump, myth, politics, rebel, evil*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump proclaimed via tweet, “We must keep our country ‘beyond good & evil!’” While he used quotation marks, it is unlikely that he was consciously alluding to Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Morality Beyond Good and Evil*. Nonetheless, there is a poetic harmony in the marriage of the two. Resembling the Nietzschean Overman, Trump rails against the “fake” world that is offered him, and propelled by the Nietzschean ideal of remorseless strength, he uses violence to establish his brand new ideal – a new set of “supreme values.” And similar to the Overman, Trump devaluates established values, deconstructs the dichotomy of good and evil, and rejoices in active nihilism (cf. Nietzsche 1883).

Trump is fascinating *because* he is powerful, amoral, and charismatic – just like the Overman who is “stronger, more evil, and more beautiful” (Nietzsche 1966: 236). Being untouched by the notions of conventional morality, both Trump and Overman are neither heroes nor villains. They embody neither a model of perfection nor a symbol of pure evil. In myth and fiction, they can be directly linked to the Antihero archetype – a bewitching, unrepentant, amoral outsider who breaks old rules and creates new ones while leaving chaos in his wake.

Image 1. The “Nietzschean tweet”



Source: Twitter @realDonaldTrump

Today, we live in the Age of Antiheroes. Antiheroic characters have become the norm in both popular culture and in politics, while the zeitgeist's taste for the rebellious, anti-establishment message is omnipresent. Trump is as much a pop-cultural phenomenon as he is a political one. His persona was manufactured over a lifetime of media production to be neither an idealized hero nor villain. This does not mean that Trump himself has never sought or been awarded heroic status: he has (cf. Trump 1987; 2008). Nor does it mean that many people do not view him as the devil incarnate: they do (Gallant 2021). Rather, it is the combustion of these two opposing forces – what David Murrin refers to as “anti-entropy” – that results in a character worshiped because of his flaws, and flawed because of his worship: “the greatest of the American antiheroes” (Murrin 2020).

We argue in this article that Trump has engaged the popular imagination by embarking on the “antihero’s journey” – a dark quest for power and glory through *fire and fury* (Wolff 2018). To better understand Trump’s rise to power, we believe that it is useful to contemplate his embodiment of the antihero protagonist in American life. We develop a descriptive framework through a literature review and inductive cultural analysis in which we approach the Trump reality through the deep narratives of myth and fiction. This is important because the antihero genre, unlike the conventional hero genres, has rarely been considered outside the fictional context, yet offers a compelling theoretical lens and methodological toolkit for examining the reality of politics today.

Indeed, while there has been much scholarship on Trump in the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Kellner 2017; Butler 2017; Badiou 2019; Allison, Goethals and Spyrou 2020), there is a relative dearth of cultural studies that examine the relationship between myth and fiction on the one hand, and the former president on the other. And, those few yet valuable cultural analyses that have been done do not focus on the relationship between the real and reel, between Trump and the antihero. This lack of scholarship is problematic

because such cultural analysis can provide significant understanding of complex political phenomena (Kracauer 1947), while the antihero genre in particular has recently grown in descriptive and explanatory significance within media and cultural studies (e.g., Gurung 2010; Prusa 2016; Vaage 2016; Allison and Ho 2020). In order to fill this gap, we investigate how Trump's public image was portrayed while making use of different archetypes (i.e. forms of distinctive perception adopted by the general public about a person). The study of archetypes as a political strategy is important because archetypes are conceived as symbolic images which enable a political candidate to link their underlying beliefs and values, strengthen their desired identity, and empower evaluations of their personality (e.g. Brummer and Oren 2022; Machado, Pimentel and Garcia 2021).

In applying this approach, and in constructing a novel descriptive framework, we show that Trump's character traits dovetail with those of the antihero. This may in part explain his rise to power and dogged popularity with nearly half of the American population, which for decades has been primed with a pop-cultural obsession with, and adulation for, the antihero. Owing to the immense popularity of fictional antiheroes, the American audience grew increasingly comfortable with flawed protagonists, which in turn helped to create the cultural conditions hospitable for Trumpism (Poniewozik 2019). How then does understanding the antihero inform our understanding of Trump?

2 THE ANTIHERO MYTH

The concept of antiheroism is as old as literature itself, but the term antihero (*antigeroy*) was first used in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* in 1864. The "anti"-ness lies in the fact that the character cannot be read against the backdrop of the conventional monomyth, in which heroes embark on a journey, overcome their flaws, and fight villains to create a better world (Campbell 1949). The complexity of the monomyth is simplified by clearly erected

boundaries between good and evil: heroes fight for a good cause for the betterment of mankind, while villains inflict injury upon the world. Campbellian protagonists have a fixed emotional valence: we are either drawn to them or repelled by them.

Antiheroes, by contrast, both attract *and* repel us. They represent flawed characters who say what they think and do what they want. They ingratiate themselves with their audiences for their gritty realism, no matter how good or bad it may seem. Their moral flaws are an integral part of their political identities and personalities, which is effectively designed to give rise to moral responses that are erroneous from a rational point of view (Vaage 2016). The antihero's journey progresses along a path *away* from normality, rather than toward its discovery or restoration (cf. Ryan and Kellner 1988). On this path, which does not demand any moral resolution, the antihero breaks rules, disparages authority, and tramples on social norms. Audiences find these traits both alluring *and* loathsome: these features of the antihero can make a significant aesthetic contribution precisely in virtue of its immorality (Eaton 2012). Simply put, immorality becomes an aesthetical achievement.

The anchor of the antihero myth is a symbol of an individual: an independent and self-reliant character with a distinct presence and wholeness. Further, antiheroes do adhere to something akin to a code of conduct, but they typically have a chaotic, perverted, or aggressive personality which is not bound by the limits of conformity. Conventional heroism implies acting selflessly and altruistically, but many antiheroes engage in altruistic and heroic behavior only as a consequence of selfish drives (Allison and Ho 2020). Moreover, antiheroes are incomplete and imperfect, plagued by human frailties such as arrogance, cowardice, envy, and indolence. They fascinate and excite us precisely because of the obvious flaws and realness on display. Antiheroes may exhibit these shortcomings while acting according to poor judgment, but this is precisely what helps the audience better identify with them. Finally, antiheroes constantly blur the line between good and evil while

being largely amoral. This moral ambiguity offers a cognitive challenge for mainstream audiences: antiheroes reject moral constraints and expectations imposed upon us, and they give our grievances a voice (Bender 2013).

Here, the archetype of antihero can be related to that of an anti-villain. An anti-villain is an antagonist (often a criminal) who turns out to be the virtuous opposition to an evil protagonist (Allison and Smith 2015). Similar to traditional villains, the anti-villain stands in the way of the hero's goal, but does not need to be downright evil. While the antihero is a protagonist who usually fights on the side of "good", but with questionable or selfish motives, the anti-villain is an antagonist who usually plays the villain's game, albeit with some noble cause. As such, the antihero and anti-villain may be thought of as two sides of the same coin: similar in their distinct differences. In this article, we focus on the antihero, because Trump is nominally a protagonist who claims to side with the "good" cause (betterment of America), albeit with transgressive means and disastrous consequences. And, after all, he openly fawns over American villains such as Vladimir Putin, creating definitional inconsistencies with the concept of (anti-)villain.

The antihero has held a particularly powerful place in the American mind for decades. In many regards, Trump is a reflection of the 20th-century *malaise* – the growing sense of disillusionment with ideals, values, and institutions which contributed to a loss of faith in heroic ideals (cf. Lowenthal and Guterman 1949). This disillusionment was reflected in the 20th century American cinema, whose apolitical and escapist orientation can be linked to the rise of Trumpism in the 21st century (cf. Kracauer 1947).

Evolving over centuries, the antihero became a complex archetypal myth that contains multiple layers of meaning. Thus, the line between various antiheroes is difficult to draw, for there are many intermediary types. In order to grasp the fundamental elements of the antihero

genre before applying it to Donald J. Trump, we distinguish between three antihero types: *light*, *nihilistic*, and *dark*. The light antiheroes are usually good-hearted, strong, and in charge. They are represented by various folk legends and social bandits that break the law and rob the rich to give to the poor (e.g. *Robin Hood*). Other light antiheroes are not outlaws, but they act on a similar sentiment. They circumvent the law but still obey some rules (e.g. *Dirty Harry*) or they are depicted as incompetent, dirty, and unnecessarily violent (i.e. the “bad cop” archetype). Some light antiheroes simultaneously affirm and challenge the mainstream value system while having a license to kill (*James Bond*) or to heal (*Dr. House*).

The nihilistic antiheroes emphasize excessive individualism, deep introspection, and self-consciousness. They often suffer from a sense of existential meaninglessness. Originating in Dostoyevsky’s *antigeroy*, asocial nihilists are superfluous, cynical, and (self-)ironic (e.g. *Oblomov*). Antisocial nihilists oppose norms and traditions (i.e. the Byronic heroes) or they violate norms and devalue values (e.g. the narrator in *Fight Club*). Some antiheroes are not overtly nihilistic, but they completely lack charisma, and are haplessly pushed around by their environments (e.g. *The Man Without a Past*).

The dark antiheroes often appear as anti-villains: they do the wrong thing for the right reasons while protecting society from other villains (e.g. *Dexter* and other “venerable murderers”). Dark antiheroes can be sophisticated, successful, and charming, but they are manipulative, self-centered, extremely violent, and often tragic. They are partly antisocial while maintaining their own code of honor (e.g. *Godfather* and other “venerable gangsters”), or they are fully antisocial, parasitical upon society, and “poetically destructive” (e.g. *Hannibal* and other “venerable psychopaths”). Importantly, antiheroes in fiction and in life may display more than one intermediary type, either simultaneously or as they “evolve.”

This article will demonstrate that Trump's rise to power was enabled by the fact that his persona contains all three antihero types simultaneously. As a light antihero, Trump promised to give power to "forgotten Americans" while attacking the Washington "swamp." As a nihilistic antihero, Trump spewed authoritative statements that contradicted the evidence of ordinary people's experiences (e.g. during the COVID crisis). As a dark antihero, Trump came to represent a manipulative and self-centered tyrant who committed treasonous acts (e.g., the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol). In other words, Trump cannot be seen as intrinsically good or evil. Rather, he possesses elements of both light and dark, tinged with rebellious *ethos*, post-truth *logos*, and nihilistic *pathos*. And to many in America, and indeed people around the world, this was worthy of both devoted adulation and ardent contempt.

3 CONSTRUCTING AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The antihero is a mythological archetype that includes latent images of looks, traits, and behavior. As have been indicated elsewhere (Prusa 2016), these attributes become revealed against the backdrop of three factors:

- 1) social *positioning* (the character's relationship to self and others)
- 2) individual *motivation* (the motives and reasons behind acts and behaviors)
- 3) personal *charisma* (the specific aura which surrounds his or her persona)

Fictional antiheroes are predicated on a chemistry of ambiguous positioning, amoral motivation, and magnetic charisma. An effective combination of these factors allows for suspending our moral judgment. The process of assessing the antihero's attitudes, traits, and actions results in a "perverse allegiance" in which we find the antihero sympathetic *because* of his wrongdoing (Smith 2011; Carroll 2004). Owing to the chemistry, even unconditionally

evil heroes can induce a pleasurable reading. Let us now focus on these three factors and relate them to relevant mythological archetypes with antiheroic traits.

3.1 POSITIONING

The antihero does not function in a social vacuum – he needs enemies, friends, and situations in which to emerge. It is the full complexity of the context that determines if his actions are defined as a villainous crime or a heroic act. The narrative positioning is structured by the antihero's relationship toward the in-groups (the peers, the family, the party) and toward the out-groups (distant individuals, enemies, foreigners). Regarding the in-groups, the group loyalty is either identified as a moral right (i.e., the character is displayed as subordinated and attached to the venerated social body), or the morality stems from the antihero's self-sufficiency and disloyalty (i.e., the character is displayed as uprooted and detached from the social body). If we read the antihero's positioning against the backdrop of myth and fiction, we discover that it reflects some of the key mythological archetypes: Outsider, Rebel, and Trickster.

3.1.1 Outsider

The Outsider is a recurrent mythological archetype which is popular due to his natural charm, unnatural luck, and unpredictable actions. Outsiders fall in the interstices of society; we feel like we know them from somewhere, and we often root for them. In American literature and film, successful outsiders and underdogs are respected and inspirational leaders. Many classic Westerns of the mid-20th century (e.g. *The Magnificent Seven*) are based on the Outsider Myth: the community doesn't have the skills and willpower to solve an existential problem (i.e., the looting bandits); an outsider appears and is "reluctantly" drawn into a conflict against some form of evil. The outsider may be uncouth and brash, but he "saves" the

community, whether it is to their ultimate benefit or not. After the Wild West receded into historical irrelevance in the 1960s, the cowboy outsiders were supplanted by more charismatic outlaws such as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and by the dystopian antiheroes from the vengeful policeman in *Mad Max* to the cyber-messiah Neo in *Matrix*.

3.1.2 Rebel

The Rebel is an icon in American pop culture and the ultimate American favorite archetype. This archetype usually becomes reflected in an outlaw who seems to specifically threaten to overthrow established authority. In fiction as well as in public life, law-breaking characters that impudently flout superior forces often acquire the status of a popular hero (Klapp 1962). They become so frustrated with the real or imagined rule-breaking of others that they decide the rules simply should not matter anymore. While challenging the existing moral landscape, the rebel bends one's energies to living for a great cause beyond oneself (cf. Nietzsche 1966). From Jesus Christ to Robin Hood, charismatic rebels and folk revolutionaries disturb status, ignite conflict, and emancipate the oppressed. Some rebels attack the inadequacies of the existing social structure, making it responsible for the social ills (Lowenthal and Guterman 1949). Others are motivated purely by vendetta – a “legitimate” activity of the noblest bandits worldwide (Hobsbawm 1969). The vengeful rebel is glorified in countless literary canons and films from Homer's *Iliad* to Tarantino's *Kill Bill*.

3.1.3 Trickster

The Trickster is a mythological figure that appears frequently in folkloric tradition around the world. Tricksters are archetypal boundary-crossers that violate established rules and the natural order of things (Kerényi 1956; Hynes 1993). They deceive others with unexpected tricks and hoaxes while becoming a great favorite with the people. Their social positioning is liminal and out of place: they are marginalized and yet part of the community,

despised and indispensable (Blok 2001). Thus positioned, they wield power to disturb the balance between good and evil. Tricksters are often represented by anthropomorphized animals or by fools, clowns, and jesters that subvert the social order through acts of parody. They poke vulgar fun at the mystique of political rulers and stir rebellion in their audiences (Bakhtin 1984). Political tricksters play upon the tendency among people who suffer from a sense of disillusionment with the status quo. They are careful not to confront their audience from the outside: they speak from within the audience to express their innermost thoughts (Lowenthal and Guterman 1949).

3.2 MOTIVATION

The most effective way to distinguish a hero from a villain is to consider his or her individual motivation. Simply put, motivation is a morality of will and action, while a character's motivation becomes a powerful indicator of how it thinks and feels. The antihero's inner motivations include acceptance, belonging, passion, and justice. However, dark desires usually take the antihero in the wrong direction, i.e. toward revenge, lust, greed, and desperation. In American Western as well as in Japanese yakuza/samurai film, the frequented antihero-motives include trauma, profit, and justice through revenge, while many legendary outlaws, solitaires, and hired swords were motivated by a combination of justice and profit (Prusa 2016; Brummer 2016). In all these cases, the hero's desire to better humanity retreats at the expense of the antihero's motivation to escape his destiny, gain power, and achieve a goal. The antihero's inner motivation becomes directly reflected in the Dark Triad of psychological traits that characterize antiheroes: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Jonason et al. 2012).

3.2.1 Narcissus

Narcissism is a form of excessive self-love and a sense of entitlement or superiority to others. Related to this, collective narcissism represents an unrealistic shared belief in the greatness of one's national group. Individual narcissism causes aggressiveness toward other individuals, while collective narcissism involves aggression toward "outsider" groups. There is a direct link between national collective narcissism and support for politicians with narcissistic personality disorder (Pettigrew 2017). People with narcissistic personality disorder feel that they are inherently better and more deserving of the respect and admiration of those around them. Narcissists are gifted stage performers who are highly persuasive and act decisively. Rampant narcissism is a key motive in literature and film from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to Coppola's *Godfather*. In the Age of Entitlement, which is typical for a sense of narcissistic grandiosity (Twenge and Campbell 2009), there is a strong correlation between being narcissistic and having financial and material success.

3.2.2 Psychopath

Psychopath describes a person who suffers from an asocial or antisocial personality disorder. Psychopaths are usually indifferent to the suffering of others and they can lie and deceive without feeling guilt or shame. They view life as a zero-sum game, and always strive to be on the winning side (Swart 2016). They may suffer from anxiety and emotional instability, but in reality they are manipulative, callous, and aggressive. Despite these traits, both the media and the public are fascinated with successful psychopaths. Similar to narcissism, psychopathic behavior can be associated with public persuasiveness and a high-level performance. While becoming ubiquitous in neoliberal capitalism, psychopaths are well suited to successful careers, albeit creating harm and mayhem in society (e.g. DiCaprio in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, or Bale in *American Psycho*). In fact, the most popular TV antiheroes today appear as charismatic gangsters that behave without empathy or remorse,

while others are represented by individuals struggling with some psychopathic personality disorder (e.g. *Breaking Bad*, *Dexter*, *Hannibal*, *Mad Men*, *The Sopranos*).

3.2.3 Machiavelli

Narcissism and psychopathy correlate with Machiavellianism (e.g. Honzak & Honzak 2018). Machiavellianism is a self-serving strategy to gain success based on manipulateness, slyness, and cynicism (cf. Machiavelli 2005). Machiavellians are amoral and ruthless, but their personal ethics and justified motivation can make for an impressive character. The Machiavellian Prince must behave immorally in order to secure and maintain his power. He can be terrible, violent, *and* awe-inspiring. An apt example of the Machiavellian antihero in popular fiction is Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) from *The House of Cards*. The charismatic Underwood callously manipulates others to achieve his selfish political goals, and we cannot help but root for him because he always “makes things done.” The audience wants to see Underwood eliminate his enemies and do whatever he wants, because we want to live vicariously through him. Owing to our “perverse allegiance,” we root for him despite the obvious fact that he is a shallow figure defined by his lust for power. The character of Underwood reflects the Machiavellian intelligence which is the key component driving the contemporary antihero boom. In social reality, this translates to “social intelligence,” in which success in the complex environment depends on the ability to manipulate others.

3.3 CHARISMA

Along with positioning and motivation, personal charisma is a defining characteristic of fictional and real-life antiheroes. In Weberian understanding, charisma is a collective belief that a person is embodying the sacred and the extraordinary (Weber 1968). Charismatic leadership is a form of domination that is rooted in the belief that a strong leader is

summoned by the history to solve a society's problem. Strong charisma excites attention, interest, and imagination (Klapp 1948). In fiction as well in public life, charisma is the most effective site of moral manipulation and justification. Charisma is exploited by public figures through actions, roles, and personal traits. Charismatic leaders either "outflank" traditional leaders on their own moral territory (make them look comparatively weak), or they "bedevil" traditional leaders while subverting traditional mores (Joosse 2018). Charismatic seducers are inherently exciting, coming across as self-sufficient and self-driven (Green 2001). If their rule-breaking is interpreted as an enactment of "radical freedom" it only reinforces their charisma (cf. Sartre 1956). In politics, the antihero's charisma can be analyzed against the backdrop of three archetypes: Strongman, Everyman and Funnyman.

3.3.1 Strongman

The strongman charisma is often reflected in authoritarian leaders who embody superiority, self-comfort and confidence. Strongmen craft an image of a person of action rather than of only words and are not afraid to take quick decisions. They use simple and vulgar language, do not worry about hurting feelings and are rough around the edges. They exploit the emotions inherent in the polarity of "them and us" while seeking approval for their actions directly from the people. In politics, strongmanship is often a form of authoritarian rule, and strongmen are more likely to engage in human rights violations, while their rule is likely to end through an insurgency or popular uprising (e.g. Lai and Slater 2006). Charismatic strongmen typically require no proof or evidence for credence, since their followers are usually not interested in validating the power of the charismatic leader in terms of concrete achievements.

3.3.2 Everyman

The Everyman archetype is a motif that occurs throughout literature and film. Everyman is a representative of the audience who is motivated by working hard and living a simple life (e.g. Hamilton and Jones 2010). Everymen are usually democratic but not in the traditional sense and are not necessarily political. They are easily accepting of the people, but they do not trust authority figures and social elites. Unlike the hero character, the everyman does not necessarily need to be brave and strong physically, in that he or she is a person that the audience can truly relate with. Everymen usually have a mass appeal and often portray a family culture, if not a highly manufactured one. Charismatic everymen can be found from the Greek gods (Hephaestus) to fictional antiheroes (the Narrator in *Fight Club*).

3.3.3 Funnyman

Some antiheroes are funny, intentionally or not. They like to laugh – either at themselves or at others, or the system at large. In case of the latter, funny characters can rise to become a symbol of social protest (e.g. *Joker*). They usually exist in the margins, wear no social mask and never take themselves seriously. Here, they resemble the medieval Clown – a Rabelaisian character who deploys bawdy humor and provides carnivalesque moments of excitement as he ridicules his opponents (e.g. Ouellette 2019). Popular funnymen (comedians, jokers, jesters, clowns) are playful and humorous, while also being lewd, lazy and greedy. The Funnyman crosses boundaries and exposes inconvenient truths while blurring the distinction between hero and villain, and employs pranks and gags to subdue his foes (Gordon and Andrae 2010). Funnymen do not strive to be proper heroes, but they perform hero-like stunts for the sake of publicity.

4 THE CASE OF DONALD TRUMP

In the following section, we apply our review of the antihero's characteristics, summarized in Figure 1, to Donald Trump, the 45th president of the United States.

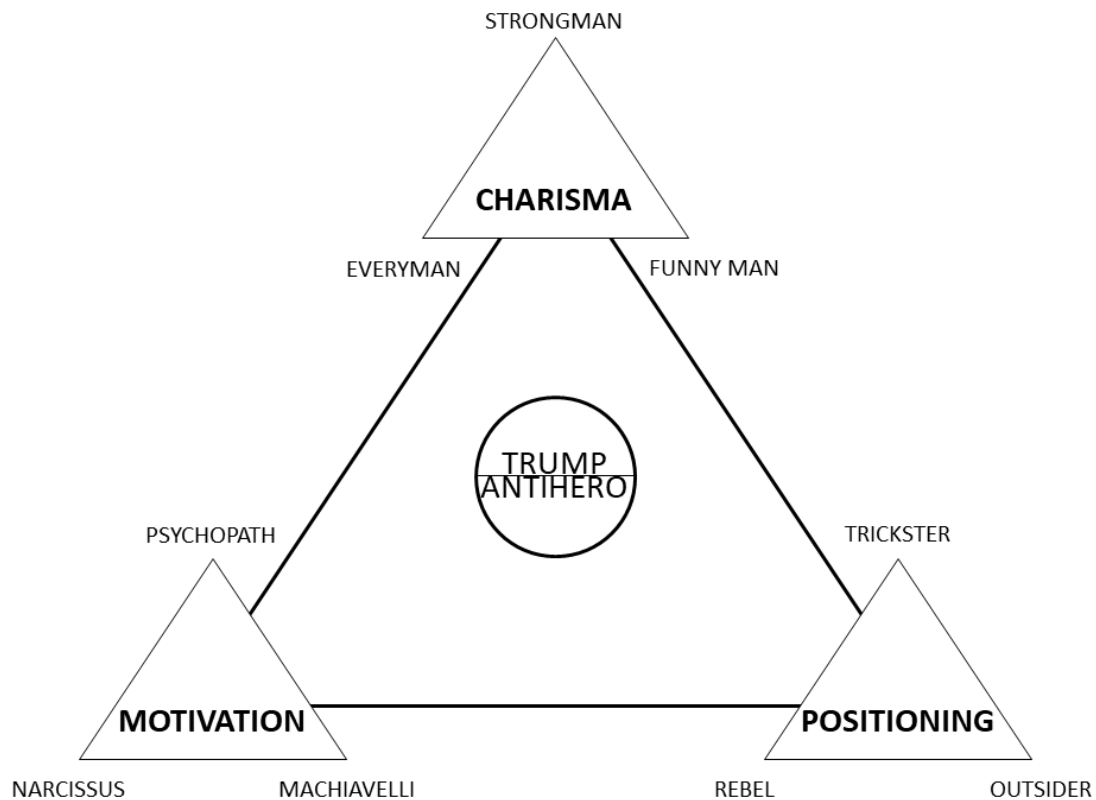


Figure 1. The Antihero and Trump: Positioning, Motivation, and Charisma

4.1 POSITIONING

Trump's in-group positioning resembles the gangster-mindset of Michael Corleone (*Godfather*) or Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*). Trump sees himself as the "boss" of his clan; he is the only one who can lead his clan and always positions the Trump family as superior to other families. Trump's performance is conditioned by commitment and loyalty, which is expected to be demonstrated in turn. Same as in *Godfather*, the loyalty in Trump's regime means deference and subordination to whatever the boss says, no matter how unethical or illegal it is. As a reward, Trump makes his in-groups feel that they are something special, that they belong to the Family. If we read Trump's social positioning against the backdrop of

myth and fiction, we discover that he reflects the key mythological archetypes. In the following section, we demonstrate that Trump's positioning can be highlighted against the backdrop of the Outsider, Rebel, and Trickster.

4.1.1 Outsider

Trump was aided by the American (un)consciousness of the Outsider Myth. He appears on the chaotic scene, steps in from the outside, and promises to solve the problems that the conventional heroes (Washington) cannot. While doing so, he deconstructs the accepted hero myth (the presidency) to form his own. He presents himself as an outsider and as competent and strong – two standards of traditional heroic leadership. As a political outsider, Trump wished to gain a role as an “anticelebrity” who functions outside of the institutional political system and embodies the opposite characteristics of celebrity politicians (cf. van Waarden 2021). He claimed having enough independence to exist outside of the system, but in reality, he was far from an outsider in the ordinary sense, since he had been an elite member of the highly capitalist real estate industry for decades. Nonetheless, Trump was fundamentally different in outlook, speech, and behavior from the elites in Washington and Manhattan. Many disillusioned voters were emboldened by Trump's outsider positioning. He gained some admiration precisely because he has embarked on a difficult task for which he was not qualified. For many voters, the sight of an outsider who defies convention and destroys the old order must have indeed been impressive. Besides, Trump constantly reminds his audience that being an outsider is a strength, not a weakness. In 2016, he successfully mobilized voters by framing himself as anti-insider and anti-establishment, and this sentiment was echoed in his 2020 re-election campaign. These campaigns aimed to do what American television did: sell the figure of the antihero to a mass audience (Poniewozik 2019).

4.1.2 Rebel

The degree of Trump's law-breaking offers to mythological imagination. The Rebel Myth alike, Trump's journey started with awakening and protest. Trump quickly became a folk rebel for frustrated Americans – the “forgotten men and women of our country” (Trump 2016). While promising to “take the power back from Washington and give it back to the people”, Trump emerged as “chief administrator of justice” (Ivie 2017). He tapped into and articulated the anti-intellectualist resentment of uneducated people against the educated, and announced to rebel for those who have been sold out by, lied to, and abandoned by the establishment. Trump's inaugural address (Trump 2017) was essentially an antihero's monologue (Poniewozik 2019) in which Trump openly declared his anti-establishment rebellion. He had been a part of the establishment, but became a renegade and turned his back on the elites in order to take the system apart. He descended from the higher echelons of society to become an insurgent force that foments domestic rebellion (cf. “We should have a revolution in this country”). While allowing for identification with someone who breaks the rules and does what he wants, Trump represents a “human Molotov cocktail” (Datoc 2016) that enraged Americans can legally throw into the system. He lives above the law, which is where his supporters also want to live.

Trump claimed to run on the (Nixonian) law-and-order platform, but he soon switched to a rebelling outsider who trashes the Rule of Law to hold onto the power. Trump turned up a “serial lawbreaker” who counsels others to transgress the law (Giroux 2018). In this regard, Trump's actions are quite predictable because he always does the opposite of what the rules call for.

Trump's rule-breaking relies heavily on the dynamic of antihero fiction where convention can be broken and immorality can be rewarded. As the Transgressor-in-Chief, Trump strongly resonates with the most popular TV antiheroes of our time – from Don Draper (*Mad Men*) to Walter White (*Breaking Bad*) and Frank Underwood (*The House of*

Cards). These characters alike, Trump believes that rebellion is good politics and rule-breaking is a sign of intelligence (cf. Trump's response "It makes me smart" after being accused of avoiding taxes). Further, Trump's effort to redefine reality by violating norms resonates with the postmodern rebels who assault corporations, banks, the police, the media, or the legal system (e.g. the Narrator in *The Fight Club*; the Terrorist V in *V for Vendetta*; or The Joker in *The Dark Knight*). All these antiheroes do not play by the rules and get results without caring about the methods. Just like Trump, they feel that they are special, entitled, and confident that the rules do not apply to them.

The Rebel's disregard for the truth became a hallmark of Trump's approach to business and politics. Trump desecrates the idea of truth as such and refuses to interpret the world as though it had an underlying truth – except for perhaps the Survival of the Fittest. He rejects the frustrating, overly complicated view of the world presented by standard politicians ("I'm not playing by the usual status-quo rules"), and he strips political institutions of conventional niceties, laying them bare for us to see. Trump stands in opposition to the rules of political decorum: he types himself as politically incorrect, and the American public is conditioned to love it (Decker 2016; Fitzduff 2017). His rebellious refusal to submit to evidence and logic makes him all the more popular with large segments of the audience.

4.1.3 Trickster

In his efforts to normalize the abnormal, defy the convention, and leave chaos in his path, Trump has much in common with the Trickster archetype. His seductive force lies in the contradictions within his multiple personalities. As a contradictory trickster, he cannot be located in a single characterization, while combining cruelty with kindness and power with vulnerability. He says and does what should not be said and done, while there is never a guarantee that he controls what he sets loose.

Surrounded by Wall Street billionaires and rightwing cronies, Trump the Trickster “playfully” disrupts normative political life to re-establish the world according to his new basis (cf. Hynes 1993). By shaking up the system, Trump provides a comedy of opposites for the split American psyche. He is the “Disrupter-in-Chief” (Ivie 2017) who operates outside the fixed bounds of custom and law.

As a demagogic trickster, Trump has a double position in relation to truth and value, being proud of the deceptions that enriched him in the past (see Trump 1987). Related to this, McGranahan (2017) labeled Trump as *demagogus trumpensis* – an accomplished liar who uses demagoguery to design his version of reality. This moral positioning enables him to invert the rules of ideology by denying its very premises (Giroux 2018).

As a rhetorical trickster, Trump brilliantly tapped into the economic *malaise* that has afflicted the country after decades of economic stagnation. Trump, however, does not offer real answers; he offers immediate excitement which provokes the (Nietzschean) resentment of the enraged masses. He exploits the sentiment of national crisis (“Our country is going to hell”) while evoking wartime imagery (“I’m doing great, but it’s a war every day”). He proclaims himself as the only one who can fix the dysfunctional system (“I know the system, I alone can fix it”), yet he backtracks when he fails (“I’ve never said I was a perfect person”). There is always someone out to get him (“Something’s going on”), which is why Trump cannot trust anyone (“Be paranoid”). Trump’s statements are not utterly arbitrary, but they are bound only to the occasion, his impulse, and his efficacy (Butler 2017). The statements may seem morally shocking, but they are always facile, simple, and final, like daydreams (Lowenthal and Guterman 1949, 9).

Vulgarity and aggression occur frequently and therefore become normalized and legitimized. In the end, the voters readily pardon Trump’s diatribes just as they forgive

Soprano's sexist and racist remarks (Bodell 2019). Trump's trickster rhetoric oscillates between harmless bragging and outrage rhetoric. It is in constant flux: from serious, to funny, to grotesque. To trick the enemies, Trump uses parody, mockery, or funny nicknames. To some observers, Trump may be the Deplorable-in-Chief (Kellner 2017), but more importantly, he is the Trickster-in-Chief who confounds the limits of vice and virtue. His outbursts of machismo, xenophobia, and misogyny become interpreted by many as virtues rather than vices. There is a "terrifying fun" in watching Trump deconstructing traditionally heroic virtues of presidential character.

Trump the Trickster has no problem with defending two polarizing positions. First, Trump is one of the common folk who favors the "forgotten millions", but his tax reform favors the ultra-rich and major corporations, while his capitalist dream of luxury and wealth undercuts the American ethic of hard work and frugality. In other words, Trump opposes neoliberalist tendencies while bolstering them. Second, Trump calls the media "scum" and "enemy of the American people", but it was precisely the media exposure (*The Apprentice* in particular) that facilitated Trump's election. Besides, Trump likes to attack the "vicious press" and its "fake news", but he cannot help producing countless fake news himself. Third, Trump can position himself both as the bully who would "just bomb the shit" out of the enemy, and as the victim who was subjected to a political "witch hunt". He worships the traditional Christian values ("No one reads the Bible more than I do"), but his philosophy is revenge and violence against others – decidedly anti-Christian attitudes. Finally, Trump is emblematic of a profound desire to take revenge and "get even" (Trump 2008), but on the other hand, he boasts that "we must reject the politics of revenge, resistance, and retribution." Trump claims to unify America on the law-and-order-platform, but he simultaneously divides the nation by committing vengeful acts, fomenting civil disobedience, and setting ordinary folks against the administrative state.

4.2 MOTIVATION

Trump's outer motivation is clear: to make America great again. Thus, America's Greatness is the finish line the antihero wants to accomplish by the end of the journey, which is defined in terms of a simple plot: America is crippled and Trump will fix her. As a conventional hero, Trump proclaims to be motivated to better American society. Trump's inner motivation, however, becomes directly reflected in the Dark Triad of psychological traits that characterize antiheroes: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism.

4.2.1 Narcissus

Trump indeed resonates with the Greek hunter Narcissus – the mythical source for the modern concept of narcissism. Trump is profoundly and proudly in love with his persona. He is a *grandiose* narcissist who declares that he is an exceptionally gifted man who openly admires his own perceived talent. He wants to make people believe that something is “the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular” (Trump 1987) while constantly putting on display his superiority (“I’m the king of Palm Beach”) and entitlement (“I alone can bring change”).

Trump has a profound yearning for acceptance, compliments, and recognition. While appearing on the reality show *The Apprentice*, Trump was effectively seducing the audiences to be impressed by his persona. The audiences were conditioned to admire his accomplishments, his riches, his status, and his expensive clothing (Krasner 2019). These tactics extend to politics, where Trump likes to show off and draw attention to his superiority (“There is nobody like me”), his looks (“I’m so good looking”), skills (“I’m a great builder”), wealth (“I’m very rich”), intelligence (“I’m like a smart person”), and temperament (“I’m a very stable genius”). He is always ready to demonstrate his superiority, albeit half-jokingly (“I love losers because they make me feel so good about myself”). It was precisely Trump's

erratic narcissist nature that corroded the fabric of American power by breaking organizational bonds within the government and between America's allies (Murrin 2020).

Trump's narcissistic traits can be explained by his immaturity. According to Allison, Goethals and Spyrou (2020), Trump's behavior as a leader represents a striking example of "eternal boy" (*puer aeternus*) – a Jungian archetype of an adult man who is stuck at early stages of social, psychological and spiritual development. The authors explain that there are two basic criteria for mature leadership: unitive consciousness (the hero unifies the world while seeing no boundary between him and others) and nondual consciousness (the hero resists to interpret the world based on simple binaries). Trump failed to undergo heroic transformation toward both of these types of consciousness. Instead, he kept behaving as an immature, impulsive and narcissistic adolescent who is stuck at lower stage of moral development and incapable of adopting the more socially conscious mindset of a mature adult (ibid.). Trump's narcissistic and immature behavior can be perceived as "all strategic" in nature (e.g. Lakoff 2016), but equally so in terms of his arrested development (Allison, Goethals and Spyrou 2020).

4.2.2 Psychopath

Trump likes to proclaim himself a "very stable genius," but in reality he represents a fully functioning psychopath. He can be charming, friendly, and convincing, but also maniacal, and can turn on friend or foe in an instant. Trump appears like a child who interprets the world in purely narcissistic ways (i.e., whatever happens it is because of me). Emotionally, he is a cauldron of resentment (Kellner 2017b) and remains the thirteen-year-old troublemaker his father sent off to a military academy where brutality was common (Johnston 2018). Suffering a childhood trauma, Trump appears devoid of empathy and is

easily irritated. He has difficulties with prolonged focus, scarcely sleeps, and wrestles with his all-consuming ego on Twitter in the early morning hours (see Wolff 2018).

Trump's callousness – a key facet of subclinical psychopathy – was constantly on display in *The Apprentice* where he takes pleasure in firing his employees (Jonason et al. 2012). Unsurprisingly, Trump makes appearances in many academic texts that concern abnormal behavior, personality disorder, and pathological narcissism. According to these sources, Trump has created unprecedented mental health consequences across the nation and beyond (e.g. Lee 2017).

In Swart's classification of psychopaths (Swart 2016), Trump fits neatly the category of *abrasive psychopath* – a “rebellious teenager” who is in principle oppositional and surly by nature. He exhibits no remorse for his cruel insults while magnifying incessant discord with others, in need of immediate gratification while insulting the elders in an antagonistic manner. Just like the abrasive psychopath, Trump wastes no time on social decorum and feels entitled to do and say anything he pleases. While relishing his contemptuous stance, Trump permits his psychopathic rage to flow in torrents.

Anger lies at the heart of Trump's charisma. It is the main operative emotion behind Trump's psychopathic extroversion, stoking a desire to win the adoration of others (McAdams 2016). Trump represents an Angry (Old) Man who has a unique ability to tap into the anger of others. His angry outbursts permit the audience to enjoy resentment, grievance, and hate (“Knock the crap out of them!”) while his anger management issues become perceived as authentic and “cool” (e.g. Trump's habit of ripping up papers before throwing them in the trash).

While leaving chaos in his path, Trump resembles one of the most venerable psychopaths in fiction – Batman's Joker (“Upset the established order, and everything

becomes chaos”). Like Joker, Trump emerges as a destructive spirit of anarchy and chaos (“I think controversy is a good thing”). Both Joker and Trump call for disobedience during most unstable times (“Liberate Michigan!”) while promoting aggression and violence (“I’d like to punch him in the face”).

4.2.3 Machiavelli

Knowingly or not, Trump is a keen practitioner of Machiavellian intelligence. While resonating with his favorite thinker, the objectivist philosopher Ayn Rand, Trump understands selfishness as the highest moral purpose. Following the ethos of Wall Street (Greed is Good), Trump believes that one must be tough, smart, and mean. Destructive vengefulness is one of his main personality traits: one shall always take revenge (“You need to get even with people who screw you”). Although selfishness and vengefulness are usually the tragic flaws of human nature, they helped Trump to become “the evangelist for the American gospel of success” (Krasner 2019). Winning is all for Trump, and retribution is an essential element of his success. Resembling Frank Underwood, Trump exemplifies the Machiavellian zeitgeist: no more nice guys – we want winners, even if they have to fight dirty.

As a real estate tycoon, Trump may reflect the Myth of Robinson Crusoe – a paradigmatic hero in American consciousness whose life was based on the single-minded pursuit of economic gain and business achievement (Watt 1951). As a politician, however, Trump represents Machiavelli’s Prince who suffers from *pleonexia* (insatiable greed and desire for more). He rejoices in total authority (“The president calls the shots”), makes no compromises (“We have to go out and get the job done”), and extends his overconfidence on women (“grab them by the pussy”).

The Prince alike, Trump's typical response to a problem is to slay it. He attacks the Washington elites, slanders those judges who have disagreed with him, and punches political correctness in the face. Trump sees apology and compromise as a sign of weakness – a perspective he has developed as a cowboy capitalist. Trump the Prince ruthlessly violates traditional norms of political and civic discourse, but he justifies his behavior as necessary to redeem the American people. If he is selfish and greedy, then it is on-behalf of the country; if he breaks the rules of governance, then it is in the name of the people. To quote Poniewozik (2019), Trump cheats and lies to feed his kids and achieve his dreams. It does not bother him that his actions contradict some universal ideals such as equality and justice. Instead, he promotes a view that the cement of our social structure is the drive to survive, masked under the drive to prevail. In this setting, Trump never gets fooled (“You just can’t let people make a sucker out of you”); he always strikes first, fights back, and “has fun” (Trump 1987).

History is abundant with authoritarian Machiavellists – both heroic (Churchill, Roosevelt, Kennedy) and villainous (Hitler, Mussolini, Franco). In the case of Trump, the high levels of authoritarianism emerged as the single strongest predictor of expressing political support for him (McAdams 2016). Trump resonates with authoritarian figures such as Putin or Erdogan, while he resembles Nixon in his zeal for pursuing enemies. Due to Trump's alignment with Putin and Kim Jon Un (villains to America's interests) and his distancing from EU and NATO (traditional allies), Trump may well have come to resemble more of a villain than an antihero yet for his dogged confrontation with many crony domestic politicians (including within his own party) and with Chinese President Xi, undoubtedly an emerging villain in American life. As a Machiavellian politician, Trump is most comparable with Andrew Jackson, his own favorite US president. Jackson was a political outsider who in the 1830s rode the wave of public resentment of government, and was reviled by the

Washington insiders who saw him as an untrustworthy, stupid, narcissist and unfit to become a president.

4.3 CHARISMA

Trump's charisma both fits and extends the antihero mold. Nonetheless, Trump is not charismatic in any traditional sense, not to mention his uniform image: the same tie, the same suit, the same cap. Trump's magnetic charisma is based on affect. Trump is an *affective antihero* emblematic of a kind of affective authenticity that extends beyond a simple charisma (cf. Richardson 2017; Anderson 2017). He may lack the Aristotelian *logos* (erudition and factuality) and *ethos* (credibility and trustworthiness), but he compensates them with *pathos* (appealing to the audience through affect and emotion). The use of emotional and persuasive arguments created a unique bond between Trump and an audience that was raised on a diet of change-oriented antihero images (cf. Machado, Pimentel and Garcia 2021). The personal touch, the similarity between Trump and the audience, and his intimate revelations provide for emotional compensation, while the spontaneity, unpredictability, and the directness of Trump's self-expression make for a charismatic performer. Trump may be dishonest, but his "genuine" words, gestures, and physique become like a magnet. The audience *feels* with Trump, vibrating with its own affective resonance (Richardson 2017). The affective identification allows his audiences to crave for Trump and forgive his immoral behavior just as they would pardon Tony Soprano or Frank Underwood. Next, we demonstrate that Trump's charisma can be highlighted against the backdrop of the Strongman, Everyman, and Funnyman.

4.3.1 Strongman

As a strongman, Trump embodies superiority, self-comfort, and extreme outward confidence that is inseparable from arrogance. Strongmen do not worry about hurting sensitive feelings. Trump is rough around the edges, likes to get his hands dirty, and “kicks ass” when necessary. His main argument is “maybe I’m not a nice guy but I’ll deliver for you” (Poniewozik 2019). Trump exemplifies strongmanship and self-sufficiency, and those deprived of such a “blessing” can at least enjoy it as a trait in their leader.

Trump was building his strongman charisma from childhood. He worked hard with his father in the Bronx (“I wanted to be the toughest kid in the neighborhood”) and he developed his strongmanship as a real estate capitalist (“I am the king of Palm Beach”). Trump exhibited his self-assuredness in *The Apprentice*, where he played a supremely competent boss who dispenses his authority and gets immediate results. Additionally, the strongman charisma lies in Trump’s physicality: he radiates vitality and stamina, and is imposing in stature (despite reportedly having small hands). Trump is the “golden icon” of global consumer capitalism: a playboy celebrity, a real estate tycoon, and self-branding billionaire are brought together in a strongman charisma.

The crucial source of Trump’s strongmanship is his “dark side”. Many American presidents from Jackson to Nixon fascinated people precisely because of their dark charisma, and darkness is the main affective force of contemporary TV antiheroes. Echoing Steve Bannon’s “darkness is good”, Trump’s charisma lies in provoking, energizing, and even upsetting the audience. Trump decries all politicians as stupid, weak, and “idiots”, while the audience delights in his angry outbursts and macho vulgarity.

Arguably, many people’s perverse allegiance to Trump is less about sympathy and more about fascination. Seen from the perspective of religious mysticism, Trump is simultaneously

the mystery that repels (*mysterium tremendum*) and the mystery that attracts (*mysterium fascinosum*). He incorporates and inspires the dread, wrath, and awe of the *tremendum*, as well as the gracious, lovable charisma of the *fascinosum*. The synthesis of these extremes in the form of a single individual is remarkable. Just like Underwood in *The House of Cards* or Tony in *The Sopranos*, Trump is ruthless and aggressive, and many are both fascinated and repelled by him. The audience gives into the “sublime terror” – a feeling of awe in the face of something or someone profoundly amoral (Smith 2011).

Trump’s dark charisma resonates with the venerable psychopaths of contemporary TV production. Just like *Hannibal*, *Dexter* or *Joker*, Trump has a complete sense of entitlement and an overriding devotion to his cause. In “his” America beyond good and evil, Trump is positive that he could “shoot somebody and not lose any voters.” He feels entitled to a destructive act born out of frustration, disgust, and anger – the primary affective drivers of Trump’s political success.

4.3.2 Everyman

Resembling the Overman, Trump seems to aspire to be what is beyond man. However, the allure of his persona is nothing but all too human. Trump’s affective charisma is based on a hero who is not too heroic to be akin to the average folk. He is the “great little man” who conjoins the attraction of the regular with the allure of the transgressive (Lowenthal and Guterman 1949).

While playing on the mythical symbolism of American middle class, Trump types himself as socially indistinguishable from the great mass of American citizens. Despite his opulent lifestyle, his penthouses and luxury resorts, his followers see him as the man of the people. They readily interpret Trump’s anti-elite sentiments as a show of solidarity with ordinary folk, and as a confirmation of their membership in Tribe Trump.

The image of Trump as “desanctified saint” is close to the followers’ level of feeling and perception (cf. Lowenthal and Guterman 1949). Trump appears unrehearsed to his followers, and as a straight talker who tells it how he sees it. As an “ordinary American,” Trump is not inhibited by considerations of good taste. He enjoys junk food with knife and fork; drinks a dozen Diet Cokes per day; and consumes Vienna Fingers in large quantities. He is a “superhero anti-politician celebrity” (Schneiker 2019) who presents himself as an “average” person while signaling his contempt for politicians, while also being one.

The fact that Trump was unfit to be president (both mentally and politically) only increased his internal charisma. The blue-collar billionaire made it from the corner office to the Oval Office, but he never lost the common touch. His folksy rhetoric is typical of an impoverished vocabulary, elementary syntax, and reductively simple platitudes. However, the illiteracy is what rescues his tweets from the formality and coercion of writing. In Trump’s world, illiteracy signifies good sense while unprofessionalism connotes authenticity. Consequently, Trump’s charisma makes it easy for his followers to imagine him as a neighbor dropping by to shoot the sh*t. His redneck charisma is appealing to ordinary American citizens who ascribe positive personality traits to Trump on that basis.

The charisma of everyman includes the image of a family man. While reflecting the “familial antiheroes” from Walter White (*Breaking Bad*) to Tony (*The Sopranos*), anything Trump does, he does is for the Family. Trump is both the head of his tribe in the political sphere and in the domestic sphere. To resurrect the American Dream, Trump exposes himself as a family man who, side-by-side with his model family, built a successful career that led him to presidency. By multiplying references to his family, his health, and his finances, Trump creates an atmosphere of homey intimacy. His commitment to family extends to the whole nation (“Defense of country is a family affair”) while the followers readily embrace his

imagined paternal position. Mixing feigned understanding and authority, Trump emerges as a Strict Father who knows best and hence is to be obeyed (Lakoff 2016).

4.3.3 Funnyman

Being funny is an important part of Trump's charismatics: Trump *is* funny, intentionally or not. To be funny is to say what shouldn't be said and do what shouldn't be done – from discussing the size of one's penis to praising the French first lady's body or staring into the eclipsed sun without sunglasses.

Trump makes little difference between entertaining the country and leading it. His performances resemble a stand-up comedy: they are compelling, spectacular, and highly entertaining. Importantly, comedy and laughter enabled Trump's rise amid a pathologically entertaining mediascape. As the Entertainer-in-Chief, Trump forged a new hybrid of politics and comedy with enormous entertainment value, which becomes expressed in forms of cynicism, apathy, and aggressive humor. Being inseparable from symbolic violence, it is a terrifying pleasure when Trump bypasses the norms of decency and ridicules those who disagree with him.

As a politician, Trump permitted people to "have fun" again – a concept alien to American politics. As noted above, he resembles the mythological trickster (clown, jester, joker) who is skilled at entertaining and breaks the rules to enjoy a good joke. As a "grotesque operator" who builds on the subversive humor of the medieval marketplace (cf. Bakhtin 1984), Trump is aware that in suffering is comedy and that life is an inherently funny business (Reilly 2018). In the popular imagination, he resonates with the Rabelaisian clown who brings down the old guard by exposing the grotesque body beneath. On the one side, Trump is an innocent joker ("I'm the president! Can you believe it??"). On the other, he is

diabolical double-talker. As put by Hall, Goldstein & Ingram (2016), it is hard to critique Trump the Clown because we are too busy laughing.

5 CONCLUSION

In this article, we demonstrated that the persona of Trump fits neatly the antihero mold of transgressive fiction. Trump embraced the antihero as the most dominant TV character, and we the audience were conditioned to embrace him for it. His success was hardly possible without the shifting moral standards that the popular antiheroes helped to reinforce. We introduced analytical criteria of the antihero, and applied it to Trump's antiheroic traits based on his social positioning, individual motivation and personal charisma. In terms of motivation, Trump is a larger-than-life, over-the-top avatar of narcissism, psychopathy and Machiavellianism. Regarding his social positioning, Trump emerges as a rebellious outsider and contradictory trickster who distinguishes himself by typing others as villains. Finally, Trump has multiple charismas: depending on the context, he switches between Strongman and Everyman while being perversely entertaining and wickedly funny. The macro image of Trump's persona is a culmination of these qualities, all contributing to the spectacle of a "great little man." Just like his fictional counterparts, Trump the Antihero is a bizarre amalgam of the ordinary and the exotic, the grotesque and the tragic, the powerful bully and the weakest among us.

While we have begun this discussion of Trump as antihero, much more must be considered in future research, including precisely how the American zeitgeist over the past decades has primed us, the audience, to be receptive to the antiheroic political leaders among us. To be sure, Trump did not rise in a cultural vacuum. He is a symptom of the times, as well as the product of multiple transgressive forces underlying American culture and society for at least half a century. These forces became directly reflected in film, revealing the basic

(psychological) attitude of the nation. Trump's role was dependent on the zeitgeist he was "thrown into" (to borrow from Heidegger). He is a manifestation of political forces that have been in motion long before his political ambitions, including the disillusionment with government and institutions. Simultaneously, Trump was shaped and enabled by the postmodern legacy where all truth is relative, morality subjective, and values devaluated (Kakutani 2018). In myth and fiction, this is an ideal setting for the antihero to emerge, and future study should explicate the mechanisms by which this transpired.

Trump will not simply fade away. His personality cult may be damaged, but his ideas and legacy will not disappear – especially when there still exists great frustration with the establishment. In other words, Trumpism with its many overlapping, subversive contradictions will live on. And so will the antihero, both real and reel.

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7 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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