

From Villain to Agent of Asgard: A Not So Heroic Journey

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on a close study of the recent comic book and cinematic adaptations of the Marvel character Loki and how he is part of a redefining movement. The hero is going through a shift in definition and qualities. More and more stories feature protagonists who no longer fit the mold of the hero, and instead, antiheroes are taking the spotlight. This thesis brings forth the possibility that these antiheroes are in fact a new era of heroes in popular culture. In order to showcase this, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell is used alongside Loki's own journey during the cinematic Marvel Universe from his first appearance in *Thor* to *Avengers: End Game*, in addition to his comic book appearances in *Loki: Journey into Mystery* and *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. In short, this thesis draws parallels between Campbell's journey and Loki's journey, to demonstrate that despite their differences, they both end with the character becoming a hero. As a result, this puts into question the very definition of what it means to be a hero.

Resumen

Esta tesis se enfoca en analizar las adaptaciones recientes de las películas y “comics” de Marvel del personaje de Loki y cómo personajes como él, están cambiando lo que significa ser un héroe, ya que lo que significa ser uno está cambiando. Cada vez hay más historias donde el protagonista ya no encaja bajo los estereotipos que existen de los héroes, por ende, personajes anti-heroicos están tomando apogeo. Esta tesis discute la posibilidad de que estos anti-héroes en realidad son la nueva era de héroes. Para poder demostrar esto, en esta tesis usamos el libro de Joseph Campbell titulado *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* para estudiar los paralelos entre el camino que Campbell describe, con el que Loki toma a través de las películas de Marvel, desde Thor hasta Avengers: Endgame, en adición a los comics Loki: Journey into Mystery y Loki: Agent of Asgard. A pesar de las diferencias encontradas entre lo que la trayectoria que un héroe debe de tomar, según Campbell y la historia de Loki, ambas terminan con sus protagonistas convirtiéndose en héroes. Como resultado, esto pone en perspectiva la definición establecida de qué significa ser un héroe.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past few decades, especially the last two decades, audiences have seen the rise in popularity of superheroes, mainly as a result of the release of multimillion and billion-dollar profits of movies from both the DC and Marvel Universe. Marvel spent a little over a decade taking some of their most iconic superheroes from their comic books and adapting them into blockbuster movies, such as *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Captain America: The First Avenger*, and four *Avengers* movies, and others, which form part of a larger story. Part of what has made these superhero movies so memorable were their villains, who posed such a catastrophic threat, that it made each movie intense and game changing. Especially how they all were leading up to the biggest villain the superheroes had to face, Thanos, who threatened to wipe out of existence half of all living creatures. However, there have been some antagonists that do not necessarily end up fitting completely the mold of a villain, like Loki, Thor's adoptive brother, who is the main antagonist in the first *Thor* movie and the first *Avengers* movie. Loki, who is first introduced as a villain, goes through an interesting arc of redemption, where he jumps back and forth between helping his brother Thor and helping himself, making it unclear exactly which side he is exactly on. This is why I will explore his role as an antiheroic character, because despite all his mischief making, his motivations and actions do not align with those of the villain's audiences are used to. Although he is presented as the villain in his first cinematic debut, as it is to be expected of him because of his Marvel history, he goes through this transformation into a more antiheroic character. My analysis of this transformation also delves into recent story lines explored in comic books. Loki's story arc is unique because it is not linear; there is no one clear path for him to take. He is constantly faced with decisions, in which he often chooses the one that benefits him

personally or simply the method that suits him best. However, in the long run, in both the comic books and the movies, he does help out the heroes of the story, so it begs the question if his actions are antagonistic at all. Loki's actions are difficult to categorize, since they are unpredictable and confusing, and are not what has been commonly known as heroic.

With all the advancements in technology, now more than ever there is access to all these different stories, narratives and scenarios that question human decision making. In other words, these characters are not only more in tune with social injustice, they are aware of personal realities many audiences are facing today. Additionally, they show the multidimensional psyche of a person, how it is layered and motivated by multiple factors, and just because they might commit questionable actions, it does not mean they are evil. These antiheroic characters act in the grey area most people live in their everyday lives. In the end, they provide the audience with a more realistic hero, one they know is imperfect and might just still help to save the day through their cunning and deceitful methods. I want to argue that the clear division between a hero and antihero is slowly fading, and that instead the two are starting to merge into a single figure, that the new hero is anti-heroic.

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, a hero is defined as a “mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent endowed with great strength or ability” and “a person admired for achievements and noble qualities.” In other words, the hero often lives in these bigger than this world adventures where they are faced with great challenges, and when faced with decisions, they always take the path that shows how brave and how high their morality is. They do not cause harm, unless to the evil forces at hand which they always defeat at the end. This can lead to monotone characters, their actions tend to be predictable, because audiences will

always expect them to not only succeed but to do the morally correct action. In trying to understand who this classical hero is, a distinction has to be made between the pre-Christian and post-Christian periods. Stephen T. Asma described the shift between the hero as shift from valuing “heroic action” to now valuing “heroic faith” (4). These “pagan heroes” are valued over being “strong men of action who always seem necessary to save the family or tribe or village” and bring “justice into the world” through their strength. Even if the hero showed “hero-pride” it was considered to be a “favored impulse in the pre-Christian era, even if it came with flaws of excess and immoderation” (Asma 4). What gave value to the hero was their bravery and ability to defeat the villain of the narrative. The hero was often a skilled warrior, known for his strength, ferocity and persistence in doing everything he can in order to defeat the opposing forces. However, with Christian influence those qualities started to be devalued. Now heroes were valued for their “humility and submission” (Asma 4). Victory is only achieved “in the next life, after one has lived humbly and proven oneself by enduring great suffering” (Asma 4). As a result, heroes are now valued more over the character they show and not so much over their brute force and strength. Their actions become as equally important as their ability to be humble and hold the morally high ground. The example Asma highlights is Beowulf because he showcases the transition between pre-Christianity and post-Christianity era because of his sacrificial death at the end (4). These types of heroes, even with their flaws, would overcome or redeem themselves. However, with the antihero this is never the case, there is no redemption for them. Even if by the end of their narrative they help the hero save the day, for example with Loki in the movie *Avengers: Infinity War* where he sacrifices himself trying to stop Thanos, these characters personalities do not waver. In short, the antihero never really changes, they never outgrow their

negative traits. Furthermore, their actions are heavily based in their own personal interests and goals, and not on trying to save the world from injustice.

According to Margery Hourihan, hero narratives always contain the same formula, so to speak. Hourihan describes these stories as “exciting and suspenseful” keeping the reader engaged with the narrative, wanting to know “what happens next as one peril, predicament, terror, mystery and struggle follows another, but the hero’s ultimate triumph is always assured” (9). This formula or established norm for stories celebrating heroes makes their stories predictable, because triumph is always assured, despite the struggle. To further cement the justification of their triumph, these stories create a “set of binary oppositions” (15). Essentially, heroes are given a list of positive attributes, in her book Hourihan uses the example of Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* where the main character is described as a “gentleman,” “rational,” “neat,” “law-abiding” and “honest” while the antagonists, who in this case are pirates, are described as “irrational,” “dirty,” “criminal” and “deceitful” (15). By having these attributes given to the characters it only emphasizes their differences. They serve as linguistic cues as to which character is the hero and which one is the villain, as a result, readers or audiences know which one is supposed to be victorious at the end.

However, when you insert antiheroes into the mix, it only complicates this because they are given both attributes from the hero and the villain, hence making it hard to then choose whether or not they should be liked. Since they do not fit the mold of the villain or the hero, their stories, actions and outcomes are unpredictable, which can add some level of excitement to readers or audiences. It has become popular now for audiences to appreciate characters who do not only break the bounds of what it means to be inherently good, but somehow manage to a

keep a foot on each side of the moral spectrum. This has led audiences to enjoy and demand to see more morally ambiguous characters because they challenge the idea of what is good and what is bad. There is actually a struggle and a realization that not everything is as black and white as some narratives show. For example, take S.H.I.E.L.D agents from the Marvel tv series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* who use guns known as “ICER.” which are non-lethal weapons. They essentially freeze someone for a period of time, not causing any actual harm (“I.C.E.R.”). These characters are never expected to kill anyone, even if they are the enemy, instead finding other ways to defeat their enemy. Arguably many of their missions would be resolved more easily if they resorted to just killing, but seeing as they are heroes, they do not. However then you have other tv series which hold great success, such as *Game of Thrones*, *The 100*, *Dexter* and movies like *Venom*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Deadpool*, *V for Vendetta* among others, which have protagonists who do not always abide by the moral code. Their characters live in a grey area, where on one hand their actions are highly questionable and on the other, they are at some level justified.

Some theorists argue through a combination of the Affective Disposition Theory (ADT), which attributes audiences the attraction to characters to “emotional affiliation” (Raney and Janicke 153) and the “story schemas” which contributes to the enjoyment of these characters as a result of what is in fashion or what audiences have been taught to expect (Shafer and Raney 1029). However, I argue that it goes beyond all of this, as I mentioned before, more and more audiences are questioning exactly what it means to be good, and realizing there is no singular or linear way of doing right by others.

Because of clearly defined qualities and schemas, a hero is easily identified within a story. They are always victorious and are the complete opposite of the villain, possessing all of these positive traits the villain lacks. Audiences were taught to root for the hero. However, the spectrum of the antihero is not clearly defined, because they hold qualities from both sides but there is still no distinct rendition of an antihero. The definition is inevitably linked to what a hero might mean in a certain time period or literary movement: whatever constitutes a hero in a particular context, an antihero should be the opposite. Murat Kadiroglu, in his study of the origin of antiheroes, points out that the first time the term was used was in Fyodor Dostoevsky's 1864 novel *Notes from Underground* (2). Since then, there was never a clear definition, even the current one found in Merriam Webster now is insufficient and vague, "a protagonist or notable figure who is conspicuously lacking in heroic qualities." Kadiroglu attributes this vagueness to "the perception of antihero ... alters in accordance with the transfiguration of hero or heroism and the term gains multiple meanings and connotations" (2). Essentially, the antihero is usually the opposite of whatever the hero represents at the time, however that can be confusing and unreliable way of seeing the antihero since the opposite of the hero is supposed to be the villain. Kadiroglu continues by defining the antihero as someone who "might not have high moral standards, and might be indecent unlike the traditional principal character of mythology, folklore or legends. Lacking valor, he is sometimes a coward. As a result, he is not honored as a savior or a leader" (3). However, this definition is becoming problematic because some antiheroes are even being seen as actual heroes. For example, I will argue in the upcoming chapters that Loki dies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe as a hero. However, the nature of his journey, not fitting the hero's narrative, makes him antiheroic.

Kadiroglu quotes Victor Brombert's essay "Unheroic Modes," where he proposes to explore the different "trends" of antiheroes instead of defining a single type. However, he does recognize that there are "underlying patterns and common tendencies" (1). This refusal to limit himself to a clearly defined category is something that Kadiroglu claims must be done out of necessity because of the long history and examples of different antiheroic figures which change depending on the country, time period and literary movement. These distinctions are something that Kadiroglu highlights from Percy G. Adams' essay "The Anti-hero in Eighteenth-Century Fiction": the more one reads literature, the fewer generalizations with terms can be made, because of the awareness of different histories and cultures. For example, the antihero was "buffoonish in picaresque literature while he became more sophisticated and introverted within the romantic writings. For modern readers, he is the 'angry young man' who has lost his cause of the 'absurd man' in futile search for an identity and meaning" (Kadiroglu 7). This shows how the term continues to change and be shaped. Interestingly enough, since definitions invariably depend on a definition of ideas of heroism, the understanding of antiheroism is subject to "indefinite meaning" (Kadiroglu 7). I do not think that an antihero depends on having a heroic counterpart in order to have a sense of purpose or significant role in a narrative. A wonderful example of a character who epitomizes the concept of the contemporary antihero is that of Loki. I propose that the recent adaptation of Loki in the Marvel Universe does not position the figure as a villain, but rather that of an antihero, by giving him a redemption story. His character is filled with moments where it is hard to tell in which side he is on, but at the end of his narrative, he ends up beside the hero.

Despite the ever-shifting definition of what an antihero is, throughout this thesis I use Joseph Campbell's theory on the hero's journey. This theory describes a universal structure which mythological heroes follow. However, this structure can also be found in more modern works of fiction. He divides this journey up into twelve stages which, in theory, if the character goes through them, he or she will achieve the status of a hero. Seeing as there is an agreement that an antihero falls somewhere between being a hero and a villain, I decided to use Campbell's theory to take a look at Loki's journey and how he fits or does not fit it. Throughout my chapters I display how Loki does both, and it is in doing so that he embodies what an antihero is, a hybrid of hero and a villain. I demonstrate that is in going through the hero's journey with some alterations that he gains the title of an antihero.

The fact still remains; antiheroes are not morally upright or correct. In most instances they are governed by their own personal interests and will hurt others if they so wish it. This begs the question of why exactly then are audiences enjoying these characters, who are displaying appalling traits. This is the exact questions Margrethe Bruun Vaage tries to answer in her book *The Antihero in American Television*. She looks into a variety of different psychology and entertainment theories, including the ADT theory. Morally speaking, audiences are never aligned with the actions of the antihero, yet they love their stories. Vaage defined the reason why audiences are able to go around these moral dilemmas as "fictional relief" and she defined it as: "the relief from fully considering the moral and political consequences of one's engagement with fiction, from considering whatever relevance the fiction film may have for the real world" (23). Essentially, the spectator recognizes that in the real world the character's actions would be

unacceptable, and yet for the sake of enjoying the narrative, they must look past their questionable actions. If the audience does not do that, they will fail to enjoy it.

However, a story with an antihero as a main character cannot solely rely on the “fictional relief” that audiences experience when engaging with these narratives. Vaage proposes an additional tactic used in these stories, and it involves familiarity with these characters. It is in creating partiality that the “spectator” grows “increasingly fond of the morally flawed antihero” (39). The narrative creates a bond between the character and the audience by creating “sympathy with its morally dubious main character; once she has sided with someone, the spectator is a stubborn sympathizer” (39). Essentially, if they are made to sympathize with the character by familiarizing themselves with them, then the audiences inevitably like or at least root for them. A common trope used for these characters to get sympathy is through the use of their family, because they are usually the force that drives them to do what they do. This is actually a prominent trope throughout Loki’s narrative, in both the comic books and the films. His feeling of being an outsider and at the same time his longing for acceptance are the main forces that push him throughout his journey. As a result, audiences are left wanting Loki to succeed in winning the acceptance, even if he tried to commit genocide and world domination in the process. Vaage explains that it all comes down to a very simple psychological fact, “Personal relations make us biased and partial. We tend to show favoritism toward the ones we know and love” (41). Taking Loki as the main example, audiences are given various instances throughout his journey where they see him in a vulnerable state and explaining his reasons behind his actions, this way familiarizing the audiences with him. On the contrary, if during the first *Thor* movie installment Loki was shown to be the power-hungry brother of Thor who wanted to destroy Jotunheim and take the throne,

instead of showing all the scenes where audiences got to see his more vulnerable emotions with the people he considered his family, then he would have been a completely different, and disliked character.

In Arthur A. Raney's and Sophie H. Janicke's essay "How We Enjoy and Why We Seek out Morally Complex Characters in Media Entertainment," they define the Affective Disposition theory (ADT) as an explanation of why audiences experience amusement from particular characters in the media. According to this theory, this enjoyment is a result of the "viewer's emotional affiliations," with the characters (152). In other words, when the viewer makes a personal connection with the character, their sympathies tend to favor that character. In the end, pleasure and entertainment is a result of one's involvement with the character, the anticipation of that individual's fate and the satisfaction of an ending that fulfills one's hopes for the character (153). Where this theory seems to fall short, as Raney and Janicke point out, is in explaining why "morally complex" characters are liked because according to this theory, the reactions audiences have towards the characters are governed by their "moral judgment" (153). As the story unfolds, audiences usually choose their favorite character, and according to the ADT, the liking of a character is linked to whether they are "morally upright" or not (153). The ADT proposes that the audience will serve as judges and will evaluate characters through "moral judgment of the behaviors and motivations they display" (153). In short, whichever character viewers connect with, will be dependent upon judgments about their decisions and motivations. As a result, "once we like characters, we are able to empathize and identify with them" (153).

With this in mind, the ADT theory falls a bit short in explaining why audiences enjoy antiheroes. This type of character usually adopts questionable and often, negative methods to

accomplish their goal. Even if their actions serve the greater good, many audiences would disagree with their actions. Thus, if their audiences' judgments of a character's actions are negative, how is it that their feelings towards these characters are positive? Raney and Janicke then attempt to explain then why audiences are attracted to "morally complex" characters, or as they phrase it: what are the "compensations" derived from narratives that have this kind of character by offering three possible explanations. The first one stems from audiences' desire to see justice in their own social environment, and unfortunately, this is not always the reality (162). Moreover, they suggest people act in a certain controlled and regulated way "in order to display socially acceptable behavior" (162). Hence, people perhaps suppress their "retaliatory selfishness" in order to satisfy the societal norms surrounding them (162). As a result, it creates a sense of dissatisfaction with the injustice in the world. Therefore, "complex characters" offer a reality "where unfettered moral license can be vicariously experienced, where wrongs are right even if the rules must be bent to do so" (162). In a sense the antihero acts more freely in a way, doing whatever they believe is best without allowing social conventions and expectations to hold them back.

Secondly, Raney and Janicke state that "morally complex" characters are usually placed in a narrative where one character represents goodness and another one evil (163). The antihero usually lands somewhere in the middle of these two, since they are not completely good or completely bad, serving more as a sort of grey area for viewers. As a result, this allows audiences to "define finely" their "moral positions" (163). In other words, it gives them a more relatable character, since in reality no one is completely good or completely bad. They get to be a part of both sides of the spectrum, deciding which parts they like and which they do not. Raney and

Janicke justify this reasoning by explaining that when people are discussing “moral issues” fraught with complexities and many perspectives are legitimate (163). With “morally complex” characters, there is room to explore and question “our own moral standards to those guiding the character” (164). With simple heroes there is no questioning, because what is “right is right, wrong is wrong, period,” therefore alienating such figures from the viewer, and establishing a goal many, if not all, cannot achieve (164). In short, “morally complex” characters provide a more relatable character.

Thirdly, Raney and Janicke assert that judgments may serve some people’s ego and sense of moral superiority (164). When comparing oneself to a character who might be “morally complex,” it may serve as a sort of confirmation that there is someone worse than oneself. Raney and Janicke use the Social Comparison theory by Festinger to justify this reason because according to it, people “defend” themselves and “validate” their thoughts about how their life is going by comparing themselves with other who are “less fortunate” (164). Therefore, “morally complex” characters allow viewers an opportunity to show “moral sympathy for those even less perfect” than themselves (164). It is as if viewers assume a kind of charitable attitude towards these characters, as if the sympathies of the audience were providing a service or favor.

I posit that the antihero is the new hero audiences want to see, because they are not only generally more entertaining, but they break away from the unrealistic and unreachable ideals. I argue that, similarly to the second reason discussed above, viewers do find themselves identified with these characters for various reasons. Considering Loki’s antagonistic past, with this new version writers had to use various tactics to not only to give him a redemption story and antihero persona, but audiences had to in a way “forgive and forget” what he had done. I argue that three

main tactics were used. First, he was made flawed, not only because of his failed attempts to gain the throne of Asgard, but also because of his self-hatred for his Jotun heritage in the movies, which made audiences realize that he was not that proud witty individual he initially seemed to be. Additionally, Loki seeks approval from his adoptive father, older brother and others (explored more in the comics books). This builds him up to be someone who is struggling with his past and is trying to overcome it. As a result, he comes off more as a jealous younger brother than an evil mastermind seeking power out of greed. Secondly, Loki is portrayed as emotional and easily governed by his own emotions rooted from experiences that caused a level of trauma in him, which as a result shapes him into who he becomes. This specific tactic almost serves as a reason as to why he does what he does, and makes his transformation even more memorable his transformation because it marks how much Loki has to change to get over his troubled past. Finally, I argue that the last strategy used to make Loki more likeable were his emotions. Behind his cold and harsh facade audiences are given glimpses of his feelings, be it pain, love, vulnerability or joy. In doing so audiences get to see beyond his contradictory actions and choices, serving as a sort of reminder that beneath it all, there is an inner struggle with trying to do what is right. In short, through more of an emotional connection and identification that audiences end up enjoying Loki despite his “morally complex” character. To clearly demonstrate my earlier discussion points more clearly, I will go over some famous examples of notable antiheroes in famous movies of the 21st century.

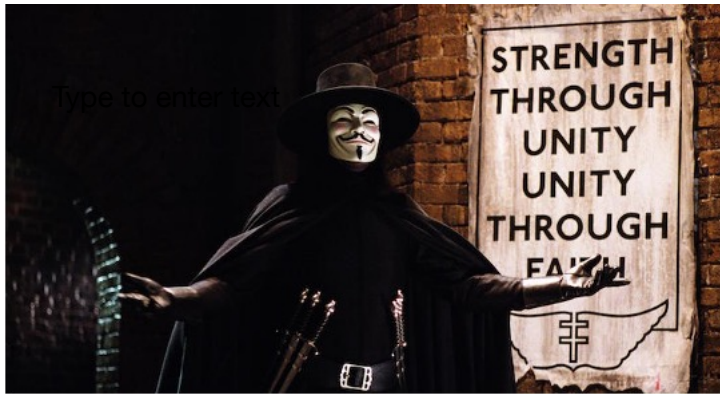


Figure 1.1

Antiheroes appear in popular culture more often than not. However, as I will demonstrate with the upcoming examples, despite their differences, antiheroes have some basic qualities that set them apart from the common hero. With the following examples, starting with *V*, I want to give a brief introduction of some key character and narrative traits antiheroes share. One of my earliest exposures to an antihero was *V* (Figure 1.1) from the 2005 movie adaptation of the DC comic books *V for Vendetta* directed by James McTeigue, starring Hugo Weaving as *V* and Natalie Portman as Evey —although, I did not identify him as an antihero at the time. In my eyes, he was doing what every hero I had seen before him do, stand up against the bad guys. It was not until later on in life when I revisited the movie and had been exposed to other characters like him that I was able to see and understand the differences between *V* and a traditional hero. The movie is set in a “future British tyranny,” (*V for Vendetta*) where Adam Sutler, played by John Hurt, is a dictator, but goes by the title of High Chancellor, who rules by using fear and violence over the citizens. In this dystopic version of England, the media is heavily controlled by the government, people are under constant surveillance of their private conversations, there is a curfew and there is an extensive list of artifacts that are prohibited, including but not limited to:

an extensive selection of music, movies, arts and even other objects belonging to other religions that are not approved by the government. Breaking any of these rules could result in going to jail and even death: for example, Gordon, who was Evey's friend, was sent to jail for making satiric remarks on national television about the High Chancellor, but later killed when they found a copy of the Quran in his house (1:21:58). The main protagonist is a man wearing a Guy Fawkes Mask (Figure 1.1) who goes by the name of V. He is wanted by the government because of his rebellious actions, or as they describe them, terrorist attacks. He meets Evey early in the film when he saves her from these men patrolling the streets and enforcing the curfew, but who then try to sexually assault her. When Evey asks who he is, interestingly enough, he presents himself in the following way, "In view, a humble vaudevillian veteran, cast vicariously as both victim and villain by the vicissitudes of Fate"(00:07:17- 00:07:22). Here he recognizes or lets it be known, that his status as both "victim and villain" is the direct result of "Fate" or in other words, of events that happened to him in his past, which the audience learns about further on. He was used as a human test subject to create a biological weapon along with many other humans who died as a result. So even he, like many superheroes, has an origin story of sorts, where this responsibility and great power falls upon him by fate, but instead of his goal being to save people, he uses his powers to take vengeance on those who were involved in the experiments. It is important to note that he does not patrol the streets and save those who are in danger from the government, rather he focuses on organizing and moving forward his plan of vengeance above anything. It was only by chance that he stumbled upon Evey on his way to the next part of his plan.

He then invites her to a “performance” where the entire orchestra will be present, and takes her to the rooftop of a building. He tells Evey, “It is to Madame Justice that I dedicate this concerto, in honor of the holiday that she seems to have taken from these parts, and in the recognition of the impostor that stands in her stead,”(00:09:23-00:09:34). The “imposter” who has taken over “Madame Justice’s” position, is the High Chancellor who now rules over the laws and justice of the country, but really, there is no real justice present. This can also be taken as a reference to the myth of the Greek goddess Astrea, who was associated with justice, innocence and purity. She abandoned the earth once humans became too wicked and greedy and it will not be until she returns that the world will go back to an utopian state (“Astrea (mythology)”). And so, at the stroke of midnight classical music starts playing through the speakers of the street and shortly thereafter London’s main criminal court, which holds on its roof the statue of Lady Liberty explodes sending fireworks up into the sky, resulting in V’s delight and Evey’s shocked reaction. As a result, the government obliges newscasts to inform the people that it was a demolition and add the song that was heard to the list of prohibited songs. This marks a crucial juncture in Evey’s journey: she begins questioning her beliefs and letting go of her fears, which dominate the lives civilians living under the rule of this government.

Although he is the mastermind behind explosion of important buildings, violence and the murder of prominent figures, V also encourages civilians to stand up against their government and to not fear it. This can be seen through the character of Evey. She fears the authorities and tries her best to live by the rules of the dictatorship, so she never stands up against the injustices that she witnesses. However, after she meets V that she gains courage. One can argue that V’s methods are questionable, he tortures her in order to take away the fear she felt, much he was

tortured in the past. At first her first instinct is to hate him, but as she begins assisting him audiences realize that this hatred will be short lived.

In the end, although V's methods were questionable, the film supports the notion that terrorists are made not born, and that V's revenge is at least partially justified by the torture he suffered. After almost dying, he lost all fear of the government, and found that if he did not fight against them, he was letting them get away with an inhumane act. Additionally, he found something worth more than his life, and although violent, his actions were rooted in love for his fellow civilians. With a government that only understands violence, V was forced to respond to them the same way.

Another antihero is Deadpool, who made his first appearance in a 1991 comic book called *New Mutants*, but finally adapted for film in *Deadpool*, (2016) followed up by a sequel in 2018. This movie came to be released after the "widespread enthusiasm" the public had for the antihero sparked by leaked footage of the actor Ryan Reynolds dressed as Deadpool, which supports the inference that antiheroes are in high demand (Agar). The first movie stars Ryan Reynolds as the masked antihero, who wants to kill the man who gave him his mutant powers. The movie begins with giving audiences a taste of Wade's life before he got his superpowers. He met Vanessa, a prostitute, who quickly becomes his love interest. Right from the get go, one learns that Wade has a dark sense of humor, making fun of taboo subjects usually considered in bad taste, which is a relief to many viewers, since thanks to social media and different entertainment outlets, much of the humor circulating the internet resonates with Wade's jokes.

In both *Deadpool* movies, Colossus is a mutant who is constantly trying to help Wade and convince him to join his team of X-men. However, Wade repeatedly rejects him. For

example, in one scene Wade tells him, that he does not have time for Colossus' "goody two shoes" attitude (00:37:01-00:37:07). This comment separates him from the idea of the classical superhero who uses his or her powers to fight off evil and protect humans, avoiding killing as much as possible and trying their best to pick the best morally correct choice. Colossus later in the same scene insists on Wade joining them saying, "Wade, you are better than this, join us, use your powers for good, be a superhero," (00:38:26-00:38:32). In the meantime, Wade is throwing a metal piece of a fallen car wheel towards an unconscious man whom he is interrogating. Wade responds angrily, that he will never join the side of the heroes because they play too much by the rules (00:38:34-00:38:48) and then gets interrupted because the unconscious man managed to get away.

Wade makes inappropriate gestures and comments throughout the entirety of the movie, because he is unapologetic himself. Even though he has gained these powers, he refuses to change who he is, as a result making him more relatable. Additionally, here he makes it clear that he does not get along with the other superheroes because he does not identify as one of them, even though he has gained supernatural powers he has no intention of playing the role of a hero. His purpose is to take vengeance not to save the world or protect other people. Deadpool is crass and vulgar in both words and his actions, as demonstrated by the use of over-the-top violence and how he cracks jokes and puns every chance he gets, making it hard to take him as an exemplary hero. In a way, he is rejecting the idea of the superhero, in other words, the idea of the classical hero.

Both of these characters are modern representations of what antiheroes in the superhero world are. While V does take on a more serious and righteous persona than Deadpool, who is

more cynical and comical, they both fight off characters who can be considered dangerous and antagonists by following their own rules, which mostly involves violence. Characters like V may resonate with someone who wants to stand up for what they believe in, just like the character did. In fact, the Guy Fawkes mask has been used for different groups of protest, for example in Figure 1.2, taken from an article from *The Guardian* wherein a man chooses to wear the mask during a Wall Street protest (Jones).



Figure 1.2

V was a character who questioned authority, it is part of who he has, and it is what, I believe, makes him resonate with audiences. Following the ADT theory explained earlier, V satisfies audiences' desire for justice. In our world where many feel the need to act in a controlled and regulated manner, as a result suppressing their "retaliatory selfishness" to satisfy the acceptable norms around them (Raney and Janicke 162). This may lead to a fear of transgressing norms, even if some part of them knows they should, but for fear of standing out, nothing is done.

Antiheroes, in this case V, show a sense of fearlessness, doing what they believe it is right, going against the rules.

On the other hand, when it comes to Deadpool, he was not fighting for any movement or ideal, he had a more selfish goal, when it comes to the first movie. He shows how just because one has power it does not mean they automatically feel a need to go help others, just as they do not automatically lose control and become evil. Wade had his own agenda, needs and wants, and he intends to follow them. He is still Wade, he is still just a guy, he did not acquire a high sense of justice and morality. This sort of attitude of his was refreshing to audiences. It is clear he has not had an easy life, evident by simply looking at his living conditions early in the movie and his job description and the jokes he makes about his childhood, in addition to how he handles his situations, which is with comedy. Also, V is not exempt from using humor, his is just more ironic and sarcastic, instead of dark and cynical.

Although these characters do seem to be extremely different, they actually do feature some underlining similarities. In Christopher Orr's review of *V for Vendetta* he describes V as a "showman" and "astonishingly silly," and that although the movie does have an overall more serious tone than *Deadpool's*, both figures both draw attention to themselves with their entertaining and humorous personalities. This is a common quality present in contemporary antiheroes, most are entertaining because of the way they talk or express themselves; they might not all be funny, but they are attention grabbers. Another quality both share, which Christopher Orr and Peter Bradshaw may agree with according to their respective reviews, V and Deadpool also share many qualities with the villain: while V "mirrors" the image of the Chancellor's use of torture and creating disorder for his own gain (Orr), Deadpool has the "bad guy's prerogative of

making acidly witty remarks” (Bradshaw). Essentially, no matter how much goodness they exhibit, what most sets them apart from a conventional hero are the sharing of many qualities with their respective villains.

The last antiheroic character I will briefly discuss is Floki from the TV series *Vikings*. He is one of the main companions of the series’ protagonist and main hero Ragnar, a farmer turned into the king of the Vikings; however, along with his name, he shares some similarities with the Marvel God of Mischief, Loki. Within the community in which Floki lives there is high respect for those who are warriors, willing to die in battle and with honor. Although Floki is a great warrior, he is still portrayed differently from the rest. Firstly, Floki lives separately from the rest of the people of his city, he keeps to himself and his female companion and slave, and when Björn, Ragnar’s son, asks about why this is the case, Ragnar simply calls Floki “different” and “shy” (“Rites of Passage”, 00:32:13- 00:32:24). It is as Ragnar’s companion and loyal friend that he seems to make his way back into society after Ragnar’s request for Floki to build ships. After this Floki is seen more involved with the rest of the townspeople. Much like Loki from the Marvel universe, he is a comedic and a mischievous character, giggling and making jokes in the most inappropriate moments. For example, when they throw overboard the dead body of a monk (“Dispossessed”, 00:07:59), and when in the midst of battle while they are invading the enemy’s camp, instead of going into the enemies’ tent to kill them, he decides to cut down the supporting ropes supporting it, letting the tents fall down and then laughing as if they were kids in a park playing a game, (“A King’s Ransom”, 00:11:23-00:11:34). Overall, he does not take himself too seriously, but is incredibly bright, showing knowledge in wood constructions, religion and medicine. And this is exactly why he stands out, warriors are shown to be skilled fighters,

navigators and strategists, but these are all qualities a warrior should have, and although Floki shares these qualities to a certain point, the fact that he has knowledge in other fields, makes him resonate with the Marvel Loki. In the Marvel Universe, Loki is shown to be skilled in the arts of magic, and uses them quite often during a battle, and although in comparison with his brother Thor's massive, muscular body, he is slim and feeble.

Vikings resort to fighting and war to resolve their problems, for example: King Horik prepared a rebellion in order to kill Ragnar and his family because he wanted the throne. However, Floki decided to act like he was on Horik's side and agreed to kill someone important to Ragnar in order to prove his loyalty to Horik ("The Lord's Prayer" 00:13:25-00:13:44). However, it is revealed towards the end of the episode that it was all a lie and Floki was really spying for Ragnar by saying "I was always true to the gods, and Ragnar" and he had faked the deaths of Ragnar's friends. ("The Lord's Prayer" 00:37:58-00:38:27). In short, he took a more passive route when it came to taking care of an enemy, leaving the killing to Ragnar. This habit is something that can be seen with Loki in Marvel, he always has some lavish plan to get to his goal instead of just fighting his way through.

His journey is quite different from Loki's in the Marvel universe; however, their personalities remain similar. I do not think that Floki is an exact representation of the Loki from Norse Mythology; however, he does share his trickery and sly ways, and, at times, Floki like Loki comes off as more childish and psychotic than intentionally evil. In short, Floki is a prime example of a model representation of the god of Mischief, one of many. Nevertheless, he is not the version of Loki I will be studying.

With all the previous information in mind, I had a series of questions which I will answer throughout my presentation through a close reading of Loki's stories, as it pertains to the Marvel version, using the "Hero's Journey" of Joseph Campbell as a critical lenses to better understand the dynamic and notions of the hero and antihero. In order to delve into this analysis I first had to define how exactly is a contemporary antihero. In my analysis I use Loki as the epitome of a contemporary antihero. However, through my research I found that there was no one single way of being one, so how exactly does Loki embody this character? The first question is, are antiheroes redefining the definition of hero, if so, who are they? With the ever growing and mass production of contemporary storytelling through an array of medias, antiheroes are in high demand. As a result, they are taking the roles of the hero, but with their own personal antiheroic twist. However, if they are successfully replacing the role the hero, where exactly does that leave the hero audiences were taught to expect? There is also another possibility, are antiheroes the opposite of the hero? This way, although they are taking on protagonists roles, they are not replacing and redefining the hero. Finally, if there really is a change happening and contemporary storytelling is moving further away from the classical tales of heroes conquering monsters, is it time to reevaluate and redefine Joseph Campbell's Monomyth as the highest model of heroic storytelling or is there a need for a completely new journey for antiheroes?

In my first chapter I delve into the Marvel movies where Loki appears, starting with the first *Thor* movie and ending with *Avengers: Infinity War*. I will compare his journey to that of a hero's using Joseph Campbell's theory of *The Hero's Journey*, not so much to showcase how they are both the same, but rather how Loki violates the itinerary of the hero's journey and still ends up having a hero's ending. His narrative begins as Thor's younger brother, who feels

wronged by their father, Odin. This is where his path as a villain begins and yet, it seems to go nowhere. This is possibly due to the fact that he was never one at heart. However, he is too different from his brother Thor, the embodiment of heroism, to be considered a hero by Campbell's definition.

This rewriting of the *Hero's Journey* extends to the comic books, which is what I will showcase during the second chapter of my thesis. Similar, to the movies, Loki's beginnings are far from heroic. From early on since his comic book debut Loki has been presented as an antagonist. However, with more recent comic book adaptations of his characters, he goes through a *literal*, rebirth. He dies and comes back in a younger body. This time, however, he wants to do things differently, not wanting to be like his past version. Thus, he embarks on his own journey; however, this one is quite different. He is purposely and actively seeking out redemption for his past actions and trying to redeem himself, as a result, hopefully gaining the favor of the Asgardians. In other words, instead of going on a hero's journey, his is more of a redemption story. Despite this, his ending is quite heroic. However, since he goes against the established canon of what a hero is to do on his journey, he is still classified as an antihero.

In the upcoming chapters, I perform an in-depth character study of Loki and his adaptations in recent Marvel comic books and movies, how they frame him as an antihero. I want to test out how much of his character fits into the mold of the ADT and if his journey is any different from that of a hero's by using Joseph Campbell's theory of *The Hero's Journey*. Ultimately, beyond being an antihero, Loki is the representation of a new era of heroes who are flawed, shallow and selfish, but are shown to be hiding a deeper and darker self, which is not

fully antiheroic, but rather human and heroic in a new and peculiar way.

Chapter 2: A Cinematic Trajectory: Following Loki's Character Progression in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

In 2011, the movie *Thor* was released. It was directed by Kenneth Branagh and it was the Marvel Cinematic Universe's introduction of the eponymous hero, played by the Australian actor Chris Hemsworth. It also introduced other prominent characters, such as the Warriors Three and Sif (Thor's closest friends), Odin and Frigga (Thor's parents), and most importantly, Loki, Thor's adopted brother. At first Loki does stay on the sidelines, and was presented as an outsider, not only because of his heritage, but also due to his magical abilities, despite his constant presence amongst the other characters. In the long run, he is built up to be the main antagonist of the movie, and although the narrative mostly follows Thor's journey on Earth, Loki is given some powerful moments. As a consequence, this left the audiences with a memorable impression of him, so much so that he came back for four more movies and is now having his own individual tv series. This is a result of how this character was built throughout the movies, specifically because of his journey and personality. One of the main themes of *Thor* movies beyond the titular protagonists' heroic challenges is the exploration of Loki's relationship with his adoptive family and how he struggles to feel accepted amongst them. Audiences got to see him slowly coming to terms with who he was and finally achieving the acceptance he craved from Thor and Odin. In fact, on more than one occasion audiences got to see Loki put aside his differences with Thor and helped him out, in a way acting out as a hero in the narrative. However, he never lets go of his selfishness and his trickery; therefore he is not a hero by definition, instead he fits better within antihero mold. This is one main focus of this chapter as I analyze why Loki is an example of an antihero in detail by looking at all the movies he appears in as part of one bigger



Figure 2.1

narrative. Although he is presented to be mainly the antagonist, Loki goes through some key moments and subtle changes that not only lead up to him becoming a hero, but also defy what Joseph Campbell's theory "A Hero's Journey" establishes. This is because his journey breaks away from the traditional canon of a hero's journey and instead embarks on his own, and this same defiance is the first reason why I posit him to be antiheroic.

In 2018 to celebrate their 10th year anniversary, Marvel Studios brought together a significant number of actors and cast members who played a part in the cinematic universe to take a picture (Figure 2.1). At the center of it we find Robert Downey Jr. who plays Iron Man, the titular hero of the first movie to be a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In addition, and most interestingly for the sake of this study, they released a series of posters. The last poster (Figure 2.3) includes all the heroes that have been a part of this cinematic universe and in the far-



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

left corner Loki appears in a fighting stance (seen more evidently in Figure 2.2). The center of the poster contains the tagline: “More than a Hero.” Other than this poster, there are individual posters for each character featured in figure 2.3. One of them features Loki with the tagline: “More than a Trickster.” When Loki is presented for the first time in the Marvel cinematic universe not only is he expected to stay as a secondary character, destined to be eclipsed by his older super hero brother, but he is also presented as a trickster by nature. It is a common characteristic attributed to antiheroes to take the role of a secondary character or as Lulu Marzan Salma describes it, the “fatal role” (2), drawing negative attention from the audiences towards them, since they represent negative attributes. Salma describes the antihero as one who lacks “courage, honesty, or grace, his weaknesses and confusions, often reflect modern man’s ambivalence toward traditional moral and social virtues” (2). This is something that is seen played out with Loki’s character, his “otherness” within the Asgardian community enforces his “failure” to adapt or be raised as a true Asgardian; a warrior who does not find glory in combat.

He instead turns to his magic and trickery, making him different than the warrior hero. In short, the fact that Loki is “More than a Trickster” alludes to the fact that he became more than just a secondary character causing havoc or more than just an antagonist, I would even say he became a protagonist given there is a series named after him being developed that will center around his adventures. So, by including this tagline in Loki’s poster, it suggests that there is much more than his trickster way, that there is much more to him than just tricks and scheming, that in fact he actually might be a hero and not just some foil to Thor.

Furthermore, placing him alongside the other Marvel heroes not only makes him part of the superhero canon, it problematizes the entire definition of antihero. In fact, according to Murat Kadiroglu the term antihero is constantly changing, which makes it difficult for it to be a universally accepted term (2-7). He even quotes Percy Adams’ work where he states that the more, we “read what we think is good literature the more cautious we become with generalizations about that literature or with the tags, the labels, that are supposed to separate one era or one type of literature from another era or type” (29). Murat goes on to claim that such caution can turn into “complete rejection” of certain terms since different histories of countries give certain terms different definitions that exist in all of them since they are constantly being “exposed, or attacked, or altered in meaning” (29). For example, Kadiroglu delineates particular historical definitions of antiheroes, and how they range from the “buffoonish” in the picaresque literature, “sophisticated” and “introverted” according to the romantics and for the modern writers, “angry young man who has lost his cause or the absurd man in futile search of an identity and meaning” (7). Later on, the notion of the antihero changed after World War II with the advent of modern literature and how the works being written showed how “invaluable the

human life was, and that there was neither a victory nor a defeat or a hero nor a villain/giant. It is man who kills and is killed” (Kadiroglu 14). There were no clear or evident “bad guys” a reader could easily identify and instantly hate. The world was not living anymore in “mythological or heroic times of universal moral laws” (14). There are no clearly defined morals frameworks anymore, no universal way of thinking. During this period, Kadiroglu writes, surfaced many “accounts of the antiheroic type” but it was never as “evident” as the “heroic model” hence the “antiheroic model” remained “vaguely” shaped in literature (14). However, Kadiroglu states that despite all of this, the antihero lacking the “courage, will or the wit to bring order or to be a savior of his own or a community . . . is still virtuously responsive to injustices in the society” (14). In other words, he might not be a character who takes actions and fights the evil “bad guy,” but there is still a sense of justice within him, even if it is justice for himself.

Kadiroglu continues,

Considering this relation between duty and individual ethics, the hero in legends and epics which can be considered as a medium that set some role models in the society has gradually given way to antihero who stresses the futility of heroism, and fits better to the uncertainty and futility of the war time . . . Antihero is a new model for a new unheroic age. (15)

The modern antihero was a response to the lack of optimism found in many individuals after the two wars as a result of all the death and destruction they had to witness. There was a disillusion in those classical tales, of the hero conquering evil, when many had felt defeated. This gave way to a period where the antihero became the most written about during a time where the hero was being questioned, since during the war there were no victorious heroes, often those war heroes

suffered severe injuries and in some cases, died for their heroic action; to be brave and heroic came with a cost not many were ready to pay. Kadiroglu then concludes that there is no one type of antihero, it changes depending on the time and age, leaving open the possibility that even today's antiheroes, like Loki, are quite different from that of previous generations. I think, similar to modern antihero, antiheroes are rebelling against the definition of contemporary heroes, not so much by questioning their existence or truth, but by acting out as a hero themselves but not sharing their values and, specially, their methods. During this chapter I will be focusing on the Marvel cinematic films that feature Loki, while using Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey to conduct a close reading the films. In short, I will outline the hero's journey and how Loki's differs while discussing major plot incidents as examples of this.

According to Lulu Marzan Salma, antiheroes were presented to be the secondary character, someone with "some of the qualities of a villain" such as "brutality, cynicism, and ruthlessness, but with the soul or motivations of a more conventional Hero" (1), but they were never someone who promoted full audience identifications. However, with the growth in popularity with depictions of antiheroes it begs to ask if is a personality and attitude viewers are wanting to imitate, admire or simply just like. Although antiheroes would eventually make their way into the protagonist role, it was to reflect the "modern man's ambivalence toward traditional moral and social virtues," (Salma 2) in other words, as a sort of critique to the time they were representing. There are contemporary antiheroes who do challenge what is established as the norm by wanting to bring awareness to the viewer on certain topics like oppression, though these descriptions do not necessarily coincide with the portrayal of such characters in modern texts (e.g. *V for Vendetta*, *The Punisher*, and others). A character does not have to challenge society or

be a high source of great powers in order to be considered an antihero. They can also simply demonstrate human flaws or inspire wit, charm and self-confidence in viewers. Loki does not go on a quest to demonstrate how Odin is a corrupt king or Asgard an unhealthy society; his journey is much more personal. Loki is a stubborn character who feels neglected by his father and lets those emotions govern his decisions, from trying to destroy Jotunheim to denying Thor as his brother, but it is those same feelings that make him not only more believable and sympathetic, but it finally makes him into a hero of sorts. In the first movie, Loki is presented mainly as a villain; however, key scenes set the course for audiences to get to know him in a more vulnerable way, as a consequence separating him from a traditional antagonistic role. And although he does not do anything heroic, this movie can be considered the start of his own version of redemption or the start of his hero's journey.

Ultimately, I argue what makes Loki antiheroic and not just simply a villain is his constant struggle, he seems to walk with one foot on the spectrum of goodness and the other on the evil side. He struggles to do the right thing, a few times he does, but he always has a backup plan just in case he needs to leave or feels unwanted. Interestingly enough, many, if not all, of the times he does the right thing out of self-preservation. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that if one looks at his story with each movie independent from the others then his story would not make sense. It is important to see them as a continuation of the previous one in order to understand what pushes him, which in essence is the feeling of lacking a place to where he fully belongs. It is when he finds that place that audiences finally see Loki shift into becoming the antihero, even hero that the Marvel poster from Figures 2.2 and 2.3 postulate him to be.

Affective Disposition Theory or ADT theory (explained in depth in the previous section) supplemental theory to Joseph Campbell's theory to further deepen the critical lens of my argument on Loki as the epitome of an antihero. According to this theory, audiences form an emotional affiliation with characters, and as a result by creating this bond, they find pleasure in witnessing this character's story unfold and hope for their success. However, ADT falls short on explaining how is it then that audiences create these emotional connections with "morally complex" characters, when this bond is based off of their morally upright personalities. This is where Arthur A. Raney's and Sophie H. Janicke's input come into play. They point out the lack of explanation for the phenomena that is occurring where audiences are actually paying more attention to characters who are "morally complex." They give out a few reasons behind this growing love towards them, explained in more detail in the introduction of this thesis, but I think their second reason fits Loki the most. To summarize, antiheroes belong to a gray area, having both qualities of the villain and the hero. This type of character allows audiences to question their own morality since they themselves show that not everything is good or bad in its entirety. Alongside additional criteria, I argue that antiheroes are more relatable because they are more realistic, they are a result of their environment, as all humans are, and serve as a source of hope for our redemption as well.

In 2011, the Marvel Cinematic Universe introduced its new superhero Thor, who is played by Australian actor Chris Hemsworth, with the movie *Thor*. However, although the movie's main protagonist is Thor, there is another character who shares the spotlight, received a considerable amount of screen time, and managed to capture audience's attention: Thor's adoptive brother Loki, played by British actor, Tom Hiddleston. Quickly after its release, I took

notice of Loki's character as both companion and enemy of Thor, but what stuck out the most was his charisma, wittiness, and love for scheming, all while showing insecurity and vulnerability. The first installment of *Thor* ends with what seems to be Loki's demise, but quickly fixes it with the after credits scene which show that Loki is in fact very much alive. Following *Thor*, Loki shows up again in *The Avengers* in 2012, then *Thor: The Dark World* in 2013, followed up by *Thor: Ragnarok* in 2017, and finally *Avengers: Infinity War* in 2018. In all five movies, Loki's role varies from antagonist to ally. It is important to see the movies where he is featured in not as separate stories, but as a continuity of his journey and transformation into an antihero. It is in these movies, beginning with *Thor* that he embarks on a journey, in which I think he is battling two sides of who he is. On one side, he lives up to be all that he was raised to believe he was, an Asgardian hero worthy of the crown or he succumbs to his Jotun blood, and embraces the fact that he is an outsider, an enemy of Asgard. And it is in this struggle between being the hero or villain that he falls in the antihero category. However, one he finds the balance between the two he reaches the possibility of being considered a hero. Despite this, his journey to this point is unlike any other Hero's Journey, a theory created by Joseph Campbell where he divides this journey into different stages which a character has to go through in order to be considered a hero. However, although Loki's story does have some similarities, he goes through the stages in his own way, and can still arguably be considered a hero at the end.

According to Joseph Campbell's theory, the hero's journey is divided into stages, the first one being the "Call to Adventure," this is where the possibility of an adventure is presented to the hero. This summoning is usually done by a herald, who is an official messenger, and the one that makes the calls:

. . .whether small or great, and no matter what the stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration- a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. (51)

There is a change in the hero's life, the life he or she knew is no longer enough and something that pushes them into a path of discovery and trials. However, it does not go quite like this for Loki, which is a common occurrence in the stages to come. A single path is not presented to him exactly. Firstly, Loki was born as an outsider, he is originally from Jotun, but once he is adopted by Odin, he is taken out of where he originally comes from and put on a path of heroism and becoming worthy for the throne, which from a young age he accepts, as seen in the early moments of the first *Thor* movie when Odin tells a young Loki and Thor, "Only one of you can ascend to the throne, both of you were born to be kings"(00:07:27-00:07:32). Hence, from an early age Loki has been working on becoming ready to be the next ruler of Asgard. When it is later revealed that the throne will be given to Thor, this declaration leads to Loki's dissatisfaction with his father's decision and thus he prepares a master plan to gain the throne, as he had intended from a young age. In a twisted way, he was trying to fulfill the destiny he had accepted since his earliest memories. In essence, it seemed the hero's journey was meant more for brother Thor, but he still wanted to be a part of it.

However, a second path was shown to him upon realizing he was half Jotun, which automatically makes him an outsider of Asgard and classifies him as the enemy of the heroes. Jotuns are considered to be the principle enemies of the Asgardians, and from a young age a

culture of hate towards them was taught, as seen in an early scene with Thor and Loki, where Thor promises to “hunt the monsters down and slay them all, just as you did father” (00:06:50-00:06:57). But it is not until the iconic scene where Loki confronts Odin about his heritage that audiences see the embedded self-hatred that Loki developed throughout the years be quickly applied to himself. Upon learning he is one of those creatures their father had taught them to hate, Loki calls himself the “monster parents tell their children about at night” (00:41:28-00:41:32). His continuous reference to Jotuns as “monsters”, according to Alice Nuttal “impl[ies] that he recognizes this monstrosity within himself” (64). Although this realization is what drives him to commit his first act as a villain, it also reflects the internal struggle he has with himself. He tries to destroy Jotunheim, killing those same creatures who are like him, as a result eliminating that side of him (Nuttal 64). Regardless of his heritage, he had always felt himself an outsider because of how different he was, because although now he found out his “otherness” is due to him being half Jotun, “however unintentionally, Loki’s family has reinforced this perception of distance and difference” (Nuttal 64). This is why because however much Loki wanted to be considered Thor’s equal, he would never be seen as one while living in a society where the norm are these “hypermasculine” figures: “Odin and Thor’s masculinity despite its association with aggression and warfare, is represented as desirable and normative” (Nuttal 65). Loki is indeed powerful; however, his power comes from magic, not brute force. While his brother Thor prefers combat, Loki uses his “evasive action and trickery,” valuing his “intellect over skill at arms” (*ibid*). This difference, Nuttal describes, is the reason why Loki from a young age, despite how powerful he became with magic, he will never be able to “compete in this male-coded arena” (*ibid*). As a result, living all his life as an outsider, despite

believing he was an Asgardian by birth, gives him a sense of longing to be accepted by Thor and Odin, which is shown multiple times throughout the movies and a part of him believes that by showing his loyalty to Odin by killing the Jotuns, he will have achieved such acceptance.

Loki was still technically an (adopted) Asgardian, but now he finds out that he is quite literally an outsider and was never meant to be on this hero's path. And yet he tries to manipulate and change his fate by luring in Laufey, King of the Jotun, under the pretense of allowing him to kill Odin. However, Loki tricks Laufey, and kills him defending Odin, and says "And your death came by the son of Odin" (01:33:44-01:33:46). This could be taken as him trying to remain on the path he had been on his entire life. To his dismay, his plan fails, and he is stopped by Thor. In the midst of battle the Rainbow bridge is destroyed and Loki is hanging on to Thor, who is being held by Odin so they do not fall into the abyss. There Loki tells Odin that he did everything for him but he is denied by him, and because of this decides to let go and fall into the abyss, thus beginning his journey through a catabasis of sorts. It may seem he chooses the second path offered to him in trying to find his purpose somewhere else.

Soon after his fall Loki, enters Campbell's next stage, "Supernatural Aid." In this stage the hero meets a "protective figure . . . who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (69). This is someone or something that will help the hero as he embarks on the journey he just accepted and usually provides an object or talisman. This is only half true with Loki's case. Following the idea that Loki has two paths, this figure can be considered to be Odin, who took him under his protection and raised him since his childhood. However, on his new path, he is on now, this "supernatural aid" is far from what Joseph Campbell had envisioned especially considering the dual/duel path Loki walks down. At some

point between the *Thor* and *Avengers* films, he meets the mysterious Thanos (a being fascinated with death and power) who gives him a scepter powered by the mind infinity stone under the pretense that will aid him to conquer Earth and retrieve another infinity stone that is hidden there, the Tesseract.¹ But Thanos is actually doing the opposite of what the “supernatural aid” should be doing. Firstly, there is nothing supernatural about him, although he is treated as a god by his followers. Secondly, he does provide Loki with a talisman of sorts, but in truth it was later revealed in the official Marvel website that it was actually a tool to control Loki, not aid him: “Gifted with a Scepter that acted as a mind control device, Loki would be able to influence others. Unbeknownst to him, the Scepter was also influencing him, fueling his hatred over his brother Thor and the inhabitants of Earth” (“Your Savior’s Chronicles”). In short, Thanos does not set him on the path of a hero, but instead of the villain, and Loki follows it because he had already failed at trying to be the hero, he thought he was raised to be. The events of *The Avengers* break the trust there was between Loki and Thor, and as a consequence make his return to Asgard unpopular by many, for he is now the outsider he was born to be.

Upon Loki receiving his version of the “Supernatural Aid” it is now expected that the hero to go through “The Crossing of the First Threshold,” according to Campbell. This stage of the journey is when the adventure officially begins, “the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance of the zone of the magnified power. Such

¹ The Infinity Stones (or Infinity Gems as they are known in the comics) are six primordial artifacts that are incredibly powerful on their own but can confer near deity like powers if someone were to control all six. The quest to obtain all the Infinity Gems is an overarching theme for many of the MCU films as of this writing.

custodians bind the world in the four directions—also up and down—standing for the limits of the hero’s present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger . . .” (77). At this point the hero, with his talisman and guide ready to aid him, he sets forth on the adventure that is placed in front of him. Unfortunately, such description fails to depict Loki’s journey since he finds himself back in Asgard, locked up as punishment for his actions in *The Avengers*. It almost seems as if Loki is right where he was at the beginning of his journey; however, he has changed. The path he is on is not the same as the one he had been on in the beginning, since he was fulfilling his journey as an Asgardian hero, but now he has forsaken it all for the path of a villain, or so he tries to prove to those around him. The main reason why this foray into villainhood fails for him is because of his vulnerability towards his family, which is shown in the first movie, *Thor*, and then emphasized in later movies, like *Thor: The Dark World*, especially when Loki is imprisoned and is visited by Frigga. In fact, she can be even considered to be a second version of the “Supernatural Aid” for Loki since she is the one who showed Loki his magic, as Thor points out “. . .you had her tricks. . .” (*Thor: The Dark World*, 1:09:36). In addition to speaking to him right before he embarks on “The Crossing of the First Threshold,” Frigga plays a key role in this movie, and the ones to come, since she is one of the main forces that push Loki into helping Thor and as a result, pushes audiences to sympathize with him.

Frigga is Odin’s wife, Thor’s mother and Loki’s adoptive mother. They seemed to have a close bond, not only shown through his reaction when he was told he would never see her again, but by her also going against Odin’s orders and visiting him regardless, even if it is just the illusion of her. She has made sure to make him as comfortable as possible by bringing a bed,

chair and some books for him read (00:35:09-00:36:34). This scene of Frigga and Loki is important because once again the audience gets a chance to see him away from Thor and Odin, in addition to seeing him in a more vulnerable scene. I think this is one of those scenes where, as like ADT would suggest, audiences create an emotional connection with the character of Loki. As a result, audiences want him to succeed, despite all the crimes he has committed in the previous movies. Additionally, I believe that scenes like this one help add a different perspective or angle to Loki's character, as someone beyond just a power-hungry trickster.

The scene begins with Frigga asking if Loki is comfortable, to which he replies by asking in a sarcastic tone if Odin and Thor share her concern (00:35:29 - 00:35:37). And although Frigga points out his punishment is a direct consequence to his decisions. I do think this comment shows his awareness of how differently he is treated by them in comparison with Frigga. It also highlights the difference in type of relationship, while with Frigga there is a more forgiving and sentimental relationship, it seems as if he has completely ruined his relationship with Odin and Thor. Loki proceeds to justify his actions as "giving truth" to the "lie" that had been "fed" to him all his life, which was that he was born to be king (00:35:40-00:35:46). Here he is alluding to the path he has given up for the one he is on now, which is supposed to be that of a villain; however, for what this scene will show and later on his motivations for helping Thor, it seems almost contradictory and confusing and very un-villain-like of him. The moment he loses his cold demeanor, as if trying to convince everyone he does not care, is when Frigga refers to Odin as Loki's father, to which he responds screaming "He is not my father!" (00:35:57). After losing his calm and collected demeanor while talking to her, she replies, "And am I not your mother?" (00:36:02-00:36:03). This time he is not so quick to respond to her, instead

looking at her with a pained look, in a way, realizing the full weight of denying Odin as his father, and then replies “You’re not” (00:36:04-00:36:09). Here audiences can see Loki’s pride showing, how he would rather deny Frigga as his mother than admit that he still cares about them, because for him admitting that he cares for them means that they still have power over him. Frigga’s last comment towards Loki is, “Always so perceptive, about everyone but yourself,” (00:36:15-00:36:19) to which he has no snarky or witty remark, unlike the responses to all her previous comments. Instead he just looks at her with teary eyes, looks down as if ashamed or hurt, gets closer to her shaking his head and reaches for her hand, as if for a moment he had decided to not go on the path he is on, only to watch her illusion slowly disappear, while the camera focuses on Loki’s doleful face (00:36:20-00:36:34). Furthermore, the last image audiences have of them together is of a Loki wanting to touch his mother but being unable to do so and being visibly dejected throughout this moment. Frigga’s last words to Loki are open to interpretation as to what exactly she meant by them. My interpretation is that Loki was unaware or reluctant to accept his own true feelings towards Odin and Thor and his true desires, which are not really for the throne and power, but acceptance. This scene adds the perspective of Loki as a son, not as a villain going around killing humans or committing genocide. Instead audiences get to see a glimpse of the struggle he now faces, for he is not the hero he was told he would grow to be as a child; rather, he had to become the villain he thought he could be.

Asgard can be considered to be Loki’s home, since he was raised there, or at least, it can be considered the “known.” So during this movie, after Asgard is attacked by Dark Elves, who kill Frigga, Loki joins Thor to save his love interest, Jane Foster, who in turn promises Loki to that they will avenge Frigga’s death. Loki is important to Thor’s plan because he knows of secret

passages to travel in between worlds, which they use to go to where the Dark Elves are. In order to go through it they have to escape Asgard and bypass all of its guards, or as Joseph Campbell describes them “threshold guardian” (77), who are actually trying to stop a prisoner from escaping his imprisonment. Loki’s “crossing of the first threshold” signals him becoming a fugitive, not his embarking on a heroic quest.

One must never forget that the hero’s journey is ultimately a journey of change, of a hero abandoning the world he or she knows, leaving what is known to him, embarking into the unknown and returning a different person. And in essence, this does happen to Loki, everything he knew of who he was meant to become was a lie; he goes on an adventure to find out exactly what is his role now. Entering the unknown, or as Campbell phrases it, when the hero is “swallowed into the unknown” (90): it is known as: The Belly of the Whale. This stage of the journey is described as follows,

the idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is a swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died. (90)

In other words, it is a moment where the hero faces some sort of danger in an unknown place, many times an enclosed one, much like the belly of the whale. Sometimes the hero seems to have perished, but ultimately reappears changed. Loki’s “rebirth” is a curious case since on more than once occasion he seems to die, only to reappear in another movie in the series perfectly fine. For the purpose of this stage I posit a specific scene that I believe to best fits Joseph Campbell’s “Belly of the Whale” even though at first glance one could see the disjunction present therein. In

Loki's case he does enter an unknown planet alongside Thor and Jane in *Thor: The Dark World*, where they intend to trick the Dark Elves into saving Jane. So although they did not exactly enter an enclosed place, it is still new to the audience, and maybe to Loki (it is never specified). While being there they run into some trouble and end up fighting the Dark Elves and Loki is stabbed by one of them while trying to save Thor. And as Thor holds him in his arms and promises to tell their father of what he did there that day, Loki lets him know that he "...didn't do it for him" (1:20:42-1:20:45). It can easily be argued that he intended to say that he did it for Thor or Frigga, maybe even both, but ultimately the importance of this is that it is completely the opposite of what he said in the first movie before he let himself fall. In this first movie he told Odin he had done all of it for him, but now he was doing this for someone else. This shows how he has outgrown his need for Odin's approval, and that he had given up his path of becoming a villain, as he dies trying to save Thor. This sacrifice in turn makes him into an antihero, considering all the chaos he caused to get to this point. In short, it can be said he went through a meaningful transformation; he put aside his differences with Thor to save his life. However, as the following movies will evidently show that Loki does not go through a literal rebirth, because at the end of *Thor: The Dark World*, Loki is shown to have taken Odin's place on the throne by using magic to disguise himself as him, meaning, he never actually died. Instead this rebirth, as the one Campbell suggests, is meant to be more symbolic.

Entering now what Campbell calls "The Road of Trials," the hero must go through some trials,

he must survive a succession of trials. . . The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance

into his region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage. (97)

In short, the hero goes through a series of tests or challenges, which he has to overcome with the help of a talisman or a “benign power.” Pertaining to Campbell’s monomyth, this is where Loki’s journey starts to drift away even further from it. At this point in the movies, or in his narrative, he does not go through any specific trials. However, it can be argued that the events of *Thor*: *Ragnarok*, and to a certain extent the other movies prior, test his integrity by the decisions he makes, whether or not he is redeemable or are audiences able to make an “emotional affiliation” as ADT theory suggests. If anything, Loki’s the biggest trial concerns whether or not he will at some point put aside his anger and finally recognize that he does not, in fact, hate Thor or his heritage, both his Frost Giant nature and Asgardian nurturing. As the title of this stage suggests, Loki faces this dilemma a few times on his journey, until ultimately, he makes a final decision.

The following stage is called “The Meeting of the Goddess,” here, the hero meets a woman after overcoming his trials. This encounter

is commonly represented as a mystical marriage . . . of the triumphant hero—soul with the Queen Goddess of the World[. . .]For she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul’s assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the bliss that once was known will be known again. (109-11)

The hero is to meet a female figure that will somehow bring about him a level of peace in the midst of all the chaos of his quest due to constant threats from creatures and dangerous beings. He is also supposed to receive aid from her, be it as a talisman or just as a guide. In none of the movies does Loki meet a woman who gives him a talisman or any sort of object that will help

him in the remainder of his journey. If anything, the female figure in Loki's life that serves as a form of guide would be Frigga, with her teachings in magic when Loki was younger and in her trying to give him advice and affection prior to her death. However, at this point in Loki's journey, she is not present. Instead Hela appears to him and Thor in the movie *Thor: Ragnarok*, and although subjectively she is played by a beautiful actress, Cate Blanchett, her role in the movie is far from what Joseph Campbell had in mind. Hela is not "the comforting, the nourishing, the 'good' mother—young and beautiful" (111). She is actually quite far from it, she has come back to Asgard to rule over it and slowly conquer the other realms, in short, the movie's villain. If I must point in what way she helps Loki in the long run, is in giving a common cause for him and Thor to get together and fight her, which results in their reconciliation.

Afterwards is the "Woman as the Temptress." Here the hero faces some sort of temptation not to go back into the known world: "but when it suddenly dawns on us, or is forced to our attention, that everything we think or do is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh, then. . . there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life . . . become intolerable" (122). The hero finds himself not wanting to go back to what he knew and to stay in the world he had found during his quest. Campbell describes it as a disgust for the world he used to know, which in this case for Loki is Asgard. And if any of the previous movies were any indication, Asgard is not Loki's favorite place, yet he repeatedly finds himself coming back to it. In *Thor: Ragnarok*, Loki and Thor, after their first encounter with Hela, end up falling into a planet named Sakaar. Upon Thor arriving (he arrives after Loki), a computer voice informs him, "It is the collection point for all lost and unloved things. . . But here on Sakaar, you are significant. You are valuable. Here, you are loved." (00:35:39-00:35:50), ironic for Loki to end up here by chance considering

he had felt “unloved” by his father and now he has found a place where perhaps others feel as him and they too have found where they are “loved.” When Thor arrives, he arrives two weeks after Loki, he sees his brother talking amongst many other people who all seem to be fascinated and charmed by what he is saying (00:39:40-00:39:48), making audiences assume he has fit in rather quickly. He is even shown to be in great favor with the Grandmaster, the leader of that planet, as demonstrated when he sits beside him to witness a tournament. He had never received such attention while living in Asgard, except when he disguised himself as Odin, so no wonder that why he would show resistance when Thor suggests they go return to Asgard to save it from Hela. This apprehension stems from the fact that their chances of winning against her were slim, but also because it meant going back to a place where he was unwanted by everyone. He even goes as far as trying to convince Thor that they should both stay and eventually could even rule, but Thor rejects that plan because as a hero he feels a duty to do what is right and save his people, a duty Loki does not share. Loki still holds the mentality of self-preservation, he is driven by his own needs, even if there are others in danger and he could possibly do something to save them, a selfishness far removed from the selfless Thor.

It is now that the hero’s journey has reached the stage of “Atonement with the Father,” where the hero faces a more personal challenge: “atonements . . . consists in no more than the abandonments of that self-generated double monster . . .but this requires an abandonment of the attachment to ego itself. . .one must have a faith that the father is merciful” (130) and where the hero relies on the “hope and assurance” of the female figure who appeared to him as a guide earlier on in the journey and with that the hero realizes that “the father and mother reflect each other, and are in essence the same” (131). Campbell describes that there is a figure, not

necessarily a father, but who has a power over the hero which instills fear. This is the stage where the hero faces this power and uses the help of the female figure to be able to face and defeat it, only to find that it was no threat at all, and with that recognition, breaking free from it. In Loki's case this figure is actually his father figure, even if it Odin is his an adoptive father. From early on Loki had a rocky relationship with Odin, even before finding out he was adopted. This is most evident in the scene where he confronts Odin about his Jotun ancestry, where Loki's anger grows because Odin had hid the realities of his birth from him saying "Well it all makes sense now, why you favored Thor all these years, because no matter how much you claim to love me, you could never have a Frost Giant sitting on the throne of Asgard" (*Thor*, 00:41:33-00:41:44). In the following movies, time and time again Loki denies being related to Odin because he still feels betrayed. Furthermore, this same anger was what mostly prevented him from reconciling with Thor. However, in *Thor: Ragnarok* after Thor is able to leave the planet, Sakaar, where he was forced to become prisoner/gladiator and returns to Asgard to face Hela, Loki is not far behind. Unfortunately, since Loki is not the main focus of this movie, there is no on—screen moment where audiences get to see the exact moment that Loki decides to let go of his anger and join Thor in defeating Hela. However, audiences are given a moment earlier in *Thor: Ragnarok*, that gives audiences a brief moment with Loki, Odin and Thor, which I believe served as a stepping stone for Loki's "Atonement with the Father."

At the beginning of the movie, Thor and Loki have one last moment with Odin before he dies. Here Odin apologizes to them saying, "I have failed you, it is upon us Ragnarok" since he is dying and will not be able to help them face Hela. And then he says "I love you, my sons" and the shot immediately cuts to show Loki's face, who has lifted his gaze to Odin, looking both sad

and surprised (00:19:15-00:22:12). In the previous films, Odin had never expressed such emotions towards his sons, especially Loki. The camera focusing on Loki's reaction when he heard Odin calling him son and telling Loki he loves him is an indicative that this was a crucial moment for Loki. It is this same affection that Frigga would show to Loki, so I argue that this is Loki's "Atonement with the Father," for here Odin and Frigga become one and the same for Loki.

And with this the journey moves into the stage of "Apotheosis." Campbell wrote, "those who know; not that the Everlasting lives in them, but that what they, and all things, really is the Everlasting, dwell in the groves of the wish—fulfilling trees, drink the brew of immortality, and listen everywhere to the unheard music of eternal concord" (167). In this moment the hero will come to some realization or gain some knowledge, and it is in by doing so that he reaches what Campbell describes as the "Everlasting," in other words, becoming immortal. My own interpretation of this is that the hero reaches a higher level of themselves since they are not held back anymore by the lack of insecurities. Later in *Thor: Ragnarok*, Loki and Thor share a brief moment where they explore how their relationship has changed from what it was when they were younger to what it is now. In the midst of all the chaos and trying to escape Sakaar, Thor and Loki share a moment in an elevator, where Thor wants to speak to him but Loki refuses, claiming their family was never skilled at "open communication" (1:28:26-1:28:29). However, Loki enters this mini monologue about how Odin's death is what will separate them, since the death was what brought forth Hela and now Thor wants to go and fight her, while Loki stays behind. Thor comically points out that Loki is talking about the subject after telling Thor he would not. Then he justifies his perspective because he wanted to tell Thor that maybe staying in Sakaar was the

best choice for him. To which to Loki's surprise, Thor agrees and says, "Come on, this place is perfect for you. It's savage, chaotic, lawless. Brother, you're gonna do great here" (1:29:19-1:29:25). And one would think this was in a sense a compliment to Loki, it seems that all of this is what describes him perfectly and what he likes; however, Loki answers with, "Do you truly think so little of me?" (1:29:25). He almost seems disappointed that this is the image Thor has of him, in this moment the camera focuses on Loki's face, which is looking at Thor in a surprised and soft expression.

Thor goes on to tell him how much greatness he saw in Loki at some point, and even acknowledges there might still some good in him, but is aware their paths "diverged a long time ago." Loki then agrees that it might be a good idea to never see each other again, to which Thor answers "It's what you always wanted" (1:29:53). Loki just nods at this while biting his lip; however, he does not seem convincing. I think that in this moment, Loki was half hoping Thor would ask him to come with him, but instead he was faced with the reality that Thor was okay being separated from his brother (1:28:26-1:29:54). And when faced with this reality that their relationship has changed two possibilities may occur. One, this might set him free from the pursuit of being accepted back into Asgard, or second, maybe this is Loki's last push into realizing that he does not like how their relationship has changed. This exchange between them is very quick and subtle, but if one is familiar with how Loki usually handles situations, he is often quick to answer with witty and snarky remarks. He always seems to enjoy having the last word. However, in scenes where he grows more serious, and arguably sentimental, it is when he is the quietest, for example, earlier when he spent time with Odin in his last moments.

In this scene Loki not only finds out what Thor thought of him at one point, but he also comes to the realization that his relationship with his brother might be dead, and a lot of it is his doing, and he must assume responsibility for it. Although never specified, this same realization is what makes Loki later decide to go back to Asgard, despite his wish to stay, he goes to help Thor, putting aside whatever resentment he felt, because at the end of the day, he cannot see himself having a life without the presence of Thor. Furthermore, with this choice he starts to leave behind his villainous path.

And finally, once the quest is completed the hero enters “The Ultimate Boon.” This is the culmination of the quest, “the ease with which the adventure is here accomplished signifies that the hero is a superior man, a born king” (173) and “the gods and goddesses then are to be understood as embodiments and custodians of the elixir of Imperishable Being . . . what the hero seeks through his intercourse with them is therefore not finally themselves, but their grace, i.e., the power of their sustaining substance” (181). Here the hero receives the fruit of their quest, their triumph, their wish, but more importantly he completes his quests or end goal. Arguably, at first glance, Loki’s goal always seemed to acquire power by becoming king of Asgard, or just someone in a position of authority be whichever planet he happened to find himself in. However, in the first movie, *Thor*, during his final battle with Thor, Loki tells him, “I never wanted the throne, I only wanted to be your equal” (01:36:21- 01:36:26). If so, then what would then be his “boon”? This revelation led me to believe that Loki suffered from an internal conflict and found himself in a position where he had something to prove, be it to Thor, Odin or other Asgardians, even to himself. Loki’s otherness has been highlighted throughout the movies, be it through the dismissive treatment he received from other Asgardians and even his magical abilities.

Alice Nuttall, wrote an article in which she describes Loki as a gothic character. In her study, she points to Loki's otherness within the Asgardian society because of his physical appearance and magical powers. When put side by side with Thor and Odin, they represent warriors, physically strong, while Loki is associated with magic and with a leaner body and "although he can fight, he prefers evasive action and trickery (65). She points out that Loki is living in a warrior governed society, ". . .the son will succeed the father as a warrior king" (65) and by Loki not being a warrior he falls low in the "established patriarchal order," as result being inferior to the "hypermasculine" Thor (65). This is again pointed out by Loki in *The Avengers*, "I remember a shadow, living in the shade of your greatness" (00:45:38-00:45:43). In short, even prior to the truth of his heritage being revealed to him, there was already an established norm, and by him being different he was already considered inferior, and never satisfied Odin's expectations. This began his constant desire to be accepted and considered as Thor's equal. Because of this, I posit that Loki's main goal was to reach some level of equality with his brother Thor, and he eventually does. Once they defeat Hela and Asgard is completely destroyed, they leave on a ship with the remaining survivors of the war. Loki goes to Thor's chambers and they have another brief moment, starting with Thor alluding to an earlier scene I discussed above. Thor tells Loki "Maybe you're not so bad after all, brother" (01:59:00-01:59:01), to which Loki

replies, “Maybe not.” (01:59:02) Thor follows up with “Thank you, if you were here I might even give you a hug” (01:59:06-01:59:07), and follows it with throwing an object at Loki.² However, to Thor’s surprise, Loki catches the object and says, “I am here” (01:59:13), maybe indicating that this time he is planning to stay with his brother and no longer wishes to be running away. In the following scene Thor takes the throne on the ship and is asked where they should go, to which he replies “I am not sure, any suggestions” (01:59:58-01:59:20) and he looks to his side at Loki.

I believe this is the moment Loki finally reaches the feeling of being treated as Thor’s equal, because instead of standing at the bottom of the stairs, as he was during Thor’s first coronation, he is now sitting beside him and is even asked for suggestions. And with this apparent change in status, leaving behind all the anger he had been feeling before.

With the boon finally obtained what is next for the hero is the “The Magic Flight,” Campbell wrote the following:

If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural

² This moment is alluding to an earlier scene in the movie where Thor is imprisoned and is visited by the image of Loki, at which he throws a rock and it passes through the eidolon and here he is expecting the same, since in all their previous adventures in the movies Loki seems to disappear in the end, not wanting to stay.

patron. On the other hand, if the trophy has been attained against the opposition of its guardian, or if the hero's wish to return to the world has been presented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical, pursuit. (197)

The hero must now return back home, wherever it is they left at the beginning of their journey. With them they bring something, an "elixir for the restoration of society" which he will use to help repair the world he came from; however, if this was taken without permission or stolen, then the return becomes more complicated, it is now more of a chase rather than an actual return.

In the midst of all the battle happening in Asgard at the end of *Thor: Ragnarok*, Thor sends Loki to go into the castle's vault and throws Surtur's crown in the Eternal Flame, this way summoning Surtur so he can destroy Asgard and put a stop to Hela. However, Loki, being himself, on his way there he saw the Tesseract, which is one of the six infinity stones and is also what he was trying to capture in *The Avengers* movie (the scene only shows Loki staring at it, but if audiences learned anything from the previous movies, they know Loki took it). They finally defeat Hela and leave Asgard with its survivors on a ship. And now Loki is reunited with Asgard and Thor once more and they are on route to their new settlement, Earth, ready to help his brother rule. Audiences were left questioning what use Loki would have done with the Tesseract. This question is never answered. However, tying it with what Joseph Campbell wrote, the Tesseract could count as Loki's "trophy", which he took without the consent from Thor. As a result of this, they run into trouble on their way to Earth, by being attacked by the ship of Thanos, who was in search of the six infinity stones. Unlike what Campbell describes, this is not

at all a comical chase; in fact, it ends up with a massacre of most of the Asgardians on board the ship.

Following the journey, now the hero enters “The Crossing of the Return Threshold,” is in other words when the hero finally reaches back the known world.³ Campbell describes it as the moment the hero returns to the “real” world with his boon and faced with the reality that everything is chaotic, filled with “sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life” (218). And so, the hero must use his boon and share it with the rest of society for its betterment.

The movie *Avengers: Infinity War* starts with the results of Thanos’ ship finding Asgard’s at the end of *Thor: Ragnarok*. The scene opens with the interior of the ship mostly destroyed and a great number of dead bodies displayed throughout its interior. This suggests how horrible it can be for the hero to return to the reality how now the hero is supposed to use the boon to help it. Thanos is an alien being from the planet Titan who is trying to gather the six infinity stones to fulfill his plan, so he needs to be stopped. Thanos grabs Thor by the head and threatens to kill him if the Tesseract is not handed over. Loki does try to lie about not caring whether or not Thor dies, but he quickly breaks and asks Thanos to stop hurting his brother, hands over the Tesseract, tells Thor, “I assure you brother, the sun will shine on us again” (00:03:58-00:04:01) and in doing so, assures his brother’s safety. These words allude to the fact that his action will lead to some sort of bright future for them. Additionally, it may not seem as much, but by saving Thor he makes sure the hero, by definition, of the story survives and later on play an important role in Thanos’ defeat; hence, restoring peace to the worlds.

³ Prior to this stage is Campbell’s “Rescue from Without” which does not coincide with the narrative trajectory of Loki and thus is omitted from this analysis.

In the next step in this journey, “Master of the Two Worlds” the hero finds a balance between the unknown world he had adventured himself in and the reality to which he must return. He gains “freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back—not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other — is the talent of the master” (229). He can now use all the knowledge that he gained from his journeys, because in truth, both worlds are connected and, in a way, he becomes a master of that connection. While living in this reality he is no longer ignorant of its truth.

Throughout this chapter, I have described the struggle that Loki feels with his two opposite identities. On one hand, he was raised as an Asgardian, but he was never treated as one and failed to fit the profile. On the other, he finds out that he was born as a Jotun, the son of the leaders of the Jotuns, who he had been taught were monsters. So, who is he? For a while he thought that if he was biologically Jotun, and since he did not fit with the rest of the Asgardians, then he must embrace the monster inside of him. However, as depicted throughout the movies through his desire to help Thor and revealing his vulnerability towards Frigga and Odin’s affection, perhaps there was still a longing within Loki for him to be part of Asgard once more. But in *Thor: Ragnarok*, it is shown that he is aware he is not wanted there. So, where does that leave him? I do not think this stage is about the hero finding out about who he is, but by using the knowledge learned from the unknown it empowers him in the known. He goes back to relying on his trickery and magic, which was taught to him by his mother Frigga, and tries to convince Thanos to join his forces, and in the process he introduces himself as, “I, Loki, prince of Asgard, Odinson, the rightful king of Jotunheim, god of Mischief” (00:07:51-00:08:09). Two

major points are made. First, there is there a pause before he says Odinson and looks at Thor right after he does, because it is the first time he embraces Odin as his father. And secondly, alongside with embracing his Asgardian family, he embraces the fact that he is indeed a Jotun. It is in this moment where Loki embraces both identities, not having to choose one over the other because they both make up who he is.

And so finally the hero reaches the “Freedom to Live,” where the hero is faced with the reality that everything lives and dies, and one lives at the cost of someone else. Hence, they believe that their wrongdoings are justified because of all the good they have done (Campbell 238). However,

such self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos. The goal of the myth is to dispel the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will. And this is affected through a realization of the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all. (Campbell 238)

The hero realizes that life takes its own course and there is not much, if anything, they can do to stop or control it. Death comes for all, regardless of what they have done.

Loki faced Thanos, despite the chances of winning against him. Unfortunately, he fails at tricking Thanos and is choked to death by him; but before dying he lets Thanos know “You will never be a god” (00:08:56-00:09:02). These words resonate with his earlier movies where Thor is questioning Loki about his actions against Earth, “You think yourself above them” (00:46:09-00:46:10) to which he replies “Well, yes” (00:46:12) as if this justified his actions. However, in his dying moments I posit that he realized that no one is above anyone and

everyone pays for their actions, and it can even be argued, that he was indirectly admitting to being wrong for considering himself superior to the life of humans beings. Loki faces Thanos knowing fully well he might die, despite in *Thor: Ragnarok* showing fear in facing Hela because he was afraid of dying in the process. However, as Thor told him in that movie, the hero does not run away from doing what is right. And even in his final attempt at stopping Thanos, he was relying on what puts him apart from his brother, his trickery.

I do believe Loki dies a hero, because he does a selfless act in trying to not only save Thor, but also stop Thanos. However, if a hero must go through the journey as Joseph Campbell describes, then as I have demonstrated, Loki does not fit this mold, on the contrary, he reshapes it on various occasions, making it unique to his journey. The fact that he does this is what makes him an antihero, by going against the pre-established “steps” a hero must undergo in order to be considered one. However, in essence, he still does heroic actions, even if they are done in his own way, and because he created his own journey, he is denied the title of hero, and instead given the title of antihero. The movies narrate how he went from a jealous brother, causing havoc, to choosing Thor’s side and then dying for him (actually dying this time). It is through his sacrifice that Thor is not only able to survive, but he finds the determination to fight against Thanos, and thus, saving the day as heroes do.

Through this chapter, I have performed a close reading of the MCU films where Loki shares and ultimately steals the narrative spotlight. While still remaining as a secondary character, his role influences and shapes the events that take place during the films; he has power over the outcomes. By applying the framework of Campbell’s Hero’s Journey, I analyzed the character’s progression from being other, with his awareness of how different he is from other

Asgardians, to when he finds out he is not Asgardian and how he tries to forcefully bury that side of himself by trying to commit genocide on the Jotuns in a desperate attempt to be an Asgardian hero. Next, as the villain when he attacks Earth trying to rule it and then assumes the role of antihero when he helps his brother on several occasion while staying true to his own personal desires and habits. Finally, he commits the ultimate sacrifice, offering his own life, to save Thor and ending his journey as a hero. It is this journey filled with twists and turns, with his internal struggle of not really knowing what to do and often times doing the un-heroic thing, that qualifies Loki as an antihero. His path was not straight, it did not follow Joseph Campbell's hero's journey as a guideline. The depth of this transformation is further cemented through the application of ADT theory to observe how Loki's acceptance by those closest to him becomes parallel to that of the audience's appreciation of him. As he slowly redeems himself in the eyes of his brother and Odin, audiences change their perception of him, and eventually, end up wanting him to succeed.

Chapter 3: The Adventure Expands: Following Loki's Character Progression in the Marvel Comic Books

With the release of the first *Iron Man* movie in 2008 onto the big screen, Marvel movies have taken the spotlight, in a way, obscuring the popularity of the medium where these characters first appeared, comic books. Marvel has been releasing comic books since the 1939 (DeForest). However, it was their big blockbuster production that got noticed by a wider audience and welcomed a new wave of fans. Some of their stories have even been told across multiple publishing formats, e.g. comics and TV; in a practice known as transmedia storytelling. Transmedia, as defined by Carlos Alberto Scolari from the University of Vic in Spain, is “a particular narrative structure that expands through broth different languages (verbal, iconic, etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.),” the stories are not the same, instead each one “participate[s] and contribute[s] to the construction of the transmedia narrative world” (587). By using different kinds of media, the story is expanded and continued, for example: it could have started in the form of a comic book and later on expanded in a movie, that way getting different parts of a story in different media. Loki's story as explained in my previous chapter began and ended in the realm of movies but is set to continue through the media of television on 2021 (IMDb). Although many of Marvel's stories begin with movies or comics and then move onto another media, this is not the case for Loki, at least, the Loki in the comic books. However, Loki's movie version has been widely disseminated. The Loki present in the comics is a completely different version from his movie self and has a vastly more complex story. However, they do share some similarities, for example, the fact that he is half Jotun but was raised in Asgard. Additionally, his relationship with Odin and Thor is fairly similar,

sometimes they are enemies and other times they are fighting on the same side; in both media Loki wants their acceptance. They may share traits, but their narrative and character progression are unique to each rendition of the character. This is why in this chapter I will be doing another close reading of Loki's journey in the comic books through the lens of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey and how Loki deviates from it. I will highlight the most defining moments of his journey and how they shape him into the antihero he becomes.

In the previous chapter I highlighted Loki's hero's journey and how it went against Joseph Campbell's theory by analyzing the character as presented in the MCU series of films. However, Loki also exists in the comic books, although the story does not align with that of the movies, he still goes through a drastic transformation in the most recent comic books installments of Loki. His first appearance dates back to 1949 ("Loki Laufeyson [Earth-616]"), so his history in the comics being a villain is longer lived than in the movies. It is important to now take a look at how this character goes through his own journey, because despite being the same character, their narratives are completely different. Is it possible then that the road to heroism has more than one path? They both share similar moral and personal dilemmas, creating a basis for their transformations, however, their motivations are completely different. As I discussed in the first chapter, Loki seeks out where exactly he fits in the world he lives in, as both as an adopted Asgardian and as a complete outsider, all the while fighting against his desire to be accepted by his family, but ultimately wanting it. Conversely, in the comic books I discuss in this chapter, there is no struggle with Loki knowing he is not Asgardian by blood; instead, his struggle lies with his past actions and quite literally, his past self. He is seeking to redeem himself in the eyes of the Asgardians in the hopes of no longer being seen as the villain they all believe him to be.

One noticeable similarity between comic book Loki and movie Loki is their affection for their adoptive brother Thor. In both versions, they include the family element as a source of motivation, and even a way to make audience sympathize with his character.⁴

Despite this, I discuss his recent published appearances in a few comic book collections. I explore how Loki's story is actually one of redemption and reinventing himself. As a result, and as a direct consequence goes through his own interpretation of a hero's journey without intending to, and in doing this, he flouts the established pattern. By embarking on more of a journey of atonement, he goes against the fundamentals of what the hero's journey is, according to Campbell. Despite what seems to be his refusal of the canonized journey and definition of a hero, he still manages to become one at the end, without leaving behind the essence of who he is, much like in the movies.

Loki's first appearance in the comic books dates back to the year 1949 (Stan Lee et al *Venus Vol. 1 #6*) and an entire series of books would be necessary to perform a proper analysis of this development. For the sake of this thesis I will be looking at Loki since his appearance in *Siege #4* (2010) up until his appearance in *Loki Agent of Asgard* (2014-2015), but the two biggest focuses will be *Loki: Journey into the Mystery* (2011) series and the *Loki Agent of Asgard* series. The reason why I focus on these works is because the dates of publications do not coincide perfectly with the release of the films, but are done during the same period, almost as if the Loki from the cinematic universe was going through his journey while the comic book Loki

⁴ Even this interpretation in the movies is still being developed, since Loki's story is migrating from the movie screen to the tv screen. Unfortunately, the Loki series has not premiered and I will not be able to study it for the purpose of this thesis.

simultaneously was going through a process of change, which in essence, embodies the core of his journey. Although his history as a villain is relevant, for the purpose of this thesis I wanted to focus how these rewritings of Loki turned him into a contemporary antihero.

Ever since his first appearance in the comic books, much like in the movies, Loki has played the role of the antagonist, as the God of Lies. And it is this reputation Loki wants to escape, so he conjures up his greatest scheme yet, to stop being known as the God of Lies and become one of Asgard's heroes. It is this new direction writers like Kieron Gillen, comic book writer of *Loki: Journey into Mystery* and, Al Ewing writer of *Loki: Agent of Asgard* are taking that I want to explore to see how they follow, go against, and alter the hero's journey described by Joseph Campbell. In these texts, the creators forge a new path, transforming Loki, God of Lies into just Loki, the god of something new.

Both interpretations of Loki are valid, despite being written by different writers, appear in different media and are not the continuations of the each other, in simple terms, the Loki of the comic books is not a continuation or a prequel or sequel to the Loki we see in the movies. First, their adventures are completely different, and separated from one another, and yet the essence of who this character is remains the same. He is still the son of Laufey, he was still taken in by Odin as an infant, he has a fondness for his brother, he schemes, plays tricks using his knowledge of magic, lies and above all, creates mischief. Moreso, in the comic book series I focus on, Loki is trying to find that acceptance he has longed for within the Asgardian community, to be appreciated as something more than the villain everyone thought he was. Similarly, in the movies he searches for the acceptance and love from his adoptive father, to be considered as worthy a son as Thor. The movies and comic books show different struggles on his journey, of self-

transformation, giving different perspectives. Despite being the same character within the Marvel universe, his character arcs in cinema and comic books are distinct.

Secondly, are they both canon interpretations of the character within the Marvel Universe? The short answer is yes, however, there are different canon versions of Loki that exist in different universes within the greater Marvel storyverse. The ones I discuss occur in the main universe (Earth-616) and are part of his main story arc. As I briefly mentioned earlier, Marvel is known for using transmedia to tell their different stories. And yet, they have created this universe and technique where every story they publish essentially becomes canonical, meaning, they are valid within the Marvel universe. William Proctor compares the Marvel Universe with quantum physics as he notes how:

The Marvel multiverse is an exemplar of what I describe as quantum seriality — that is, a labyrinthine narrative network that incorporates a wide array of transmedia expressions into an ontological order that rationalizes divergent textualities as a part and parcel of the same story system which canonizes all Marvel creations—whether in film, TV or, indeed, comics—as official and legitimate. (2)

Although each installment is separate from the other, by following an established order, without jeopardizing the other stories, then within the Marvel reality, all of them become possible and canonical. It is because of this that studying the comic book Loki is just as valid studying the film versions.⁵ Proctor continues describing the Marvel universe not only as a “vast narrative”

⁵ I find it particular that *Journey into the Mystery*, the most recent installments of this series, came out the same year as the first *Thor* movie and are both simultaneously telling a version of how Loki is beginning his journey onto becoming a hero.

but also an “unfolding text,” for this he quotes Lance Parkin who defines an “unfolding text” as “fiction based around a common character, a set of characters, or location that has had some form of serial publication,” who often are written by many writers and may be composed of different “distinct series, in a different media, usually with different creators and even intended audiences” (10). For example, each *Thor* movie has different screenplay writers such as Ashley Miller, Zack Stentz and Don Payne (*IMDb*) for the first *Thor* movie and Christopher L. Yost, Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely for *Thor: The Dark World* (*IMDb*) and yet they are telling a continuation of the narrative, which is overseen by Kevin Feige, the producer of all these movies (“Kevin Feige”), who makes sure the stories align. Now these stories are being transferred to the media of TV to continue with the upcoming *Loki* series. Similarly, the comic books are written by different authors, for example *Loki: Journey into Mystery* was written by Kieron Gillen and *Loki: Agent of Asgard* was written by Al Ewing, although both follow the timeline, one being the continuation of the other, it does not mean one author agrees with the direction the next installment takes. This is where the Marvel comic book editors play a part, much like Kevin Feige in the movies, they make sure the comics’ stories make sense with each other and follow a logical sequence. Both in *Loki: Journey into Mystery* and *Loki: Agent of Asgard* the executive editor is Tom Brevoort. Within the Marvel comic book universe, no single comic book that is part of the main arc is written by a single person, it takes a team, as Gabriel Romaguera points out in his dissertation about the nuances of serial authorship,

The concurrent serialization of these characters’ stories (and many other characters that entered the fray over the years) meant that writers and artists had to take care not to overstep their boundaries in order to avoid raising a narrative ga[p] that the authors had

not intended to make [of] fill. . . A serious unyielding continuity was not in place until the 1970s with the “Bronze Age of Comics” . . . This additional production performance at the corporate level made for a more uniform narrative across all titles. However, this meant that writers and artists had to constantly check with their editors ahead of time to see if their stories could be viable in regards to long term narrative production. Authorial autonomy (as per Bourdieu) decreased at an individual level though a more collective form of authorship emerged. (135)

It would take a team composed of writers, artists and editors to produce a comic book while taking into account other ones being created or that have been created, this way avoiding overstepping or contradicting other works. Despite of this, there are several storylines taking place at the same time; comic books work differently than the movies. Although I will try to follow a time line, sometimes different stories are happening at the same time. For example, in between installments of his own series, Loki goes off to some other comic book series to defeat the villain: however, in the next issue of *Loki: Agent of Asgard* “Issue #8” his adventure is briefly mentioned but not fully explained and there was some visible character development that happened in a separate comic book series. These momentary references of Loki’s exploits add a level of difficulty when analyzing Loki’s character because there is development occurring simultaneously in other comics. In the same way, characters featured in Loki’s narrative, like Thor, who has his own comic books but makes appearances in Loki’s. To put it briefly, these comics are created collectively and writers have to check in with Marvel editors go forth with the narrative because it needs to follow the continuity of an entire universe. Hence, while the comics



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

were written by different people they still needed to pick up where the previous one had left off. Even at the end of *Loki: Agent of Asgard*, that specific story of Loki ends, but the comic says he is ready for his next adventure, but it is not specified which one it is, leaving the door open (quite literally, see figure 3.1 and 3.2) for the next writer to pick up where this one left off. Consequently, there might never be a full ending to Loki's story, since the Marvel universe is constantly changing, evolving, and expanding.

I begin my delving into Loki's story with *Siege*, a limited series with 4 issues written by Brian Michael Bendis and illustrated by Olivier Coipel ("Siege"). Norman Osborn is the new Iron Patriot and is in control of the Avenger Tower, inhabited by the Dark Avengers and the leader of a group called Cabal, composed of Doctor Doom, The Hood and Loki ("Siege Event"). Osborn wants permission to invade Asgard, which is floating above Broxton, Oklahoma. It is Loki who gives him the idea that if something tragic were to happen and they could blame the Asgardians, then Osborn would have a valid reason to invade them. In order to do this, Osborn sends U-Foes, "energy-based villains at the bidding of Osborn by way of the Hood" who take the fighting to a sold-out football game at Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois. They bombard Volstagg, an Asgardian friend of Thor, with energy blasts and in an attempt to dodge them people die and Asgard is held blame. During the siege, the Sentry, who plays for Osborn's team, is fully possessed by the Void and is winning the battle. Loki prays to Odin and summons the "Norn Stones" taking them away from the Hood and uses them to empower the heroes. Because of this betrayal the Void kills Loki, right after he begs Thor to "avenge him" ("Siege (Event)"). This brief overview of the events of this comic book highlights the beginning of Loki's change. There is little to no explanation as to why Loki changes his mind and decides to betray Osborn after being one of the main reasons why the siege on Asgard was such a success. It is left open to interpretation at the end of the series, but the question is answered later when Loki reappears. This sets the tone for *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. Additionally, it is also the pinnacle moment where Loki's story takes a drastic turn and he goes against who he has been portrayed as in the past.

As I mentioned before, Loki's adventure is peculiar because his journey was never meant to be taken as that of a hero's, but because of his actions and the result of them he becomes a

version of one, an antihero. His comic book narrative is one of redemption. Loki is trying to break free from that which has power over his life: himself. He quite literally dies, but through his scheming and plotting, he cheats death and is reborn, ready to start over as a new person. However, his past follows, in both the literal sense (the spirit of his old self is alive and lurking) and in the opinion, everyone had of him. It is in this redemption story that he becomes a hero, without it ever being his goal. This is why, although he does go through the stages of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey (with its variations), they are not as essential in the comic books as they were in the movies. In the films, in each stage, audiences could see a shift with Loki, a new turn in his personality and role; and yet, in the comics, it is different, the stages are present but only a selected few stand out and hold significant importance.

In order to begin any journey of a hero according to Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, he needs to receive the "Call to Adventure." The hero is presented the opportunity to set forth into an unknown world, as I discussed in the previous chapter, he called to the quest by a "herald," in other words, a messenger. The call puts into motion a series of events, the hero's "familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit" (51). The limits of the world he knows are erased and the possibility of surpassing them are presented to him. In the first comic book I shall be looking at, *Journey into Mystery*, Loki has been reborn as a child after being killed by the Void in *Siege* #3.⁶ Despite resistance of the Asgardian citizens to the idea, Thor brings him to Asgard, believing this new Loki has been freed from all the evil inside him, and this is where the *Journey into Mystery* begins. The "Call to

⁶ Loki's rebirth is better explained in *Thor* #617, where he was reborn after the events of *Siege* with no knowledge of his past crimes. It is Thor who finds him and helps him remember.

Adventure” is as straight forward as it can be in Loki’s case, he is now living in Asgard where he is subjected to some bullying and many disliking his presence. Then, a magpie appears to him and the metatext says “And so commenced Loki’s journey” when it begins. For Loki, the herald is a magpie, which later plays an important part throughout the story, but first it explodes (literally explodes) and leaves him a key. Of course, given Loki’s curiosity, he investigated the key and what it unlocked, which set him forth finding a trail of clues, like a scavenger hunt. The last object he finds is a book, “The Siege of Asgard,” which retells the events of *Siege*. It is through what he finds out in this book that Loki’s journey takes shape, because he meets his old-self and spends the rest of his journey fighting against him. In Loki’s case he does not set out into any unknown world literally, but instead he starts to fight against the world he is living in for it to accept him. In other words, instead of his journey taking him to another world, he tries to transform his world into a place that no longer treats him as a villain.

When Loki finds the aforementioned book, the text’s layout changes as the panel composition of the page features a question mark and its dot serves as a void that pulls Loki in to another dimension known as “Elsewhere” (Issue #622). Here he sees the magpie again on top of old Loki’s helmet, which serves as a gravestone and resting place for the spirit of the Loki that died during *Siege*. The spirit reveals to the younger Loki why he sacrificed himself and says that kid Loki must become a new Loki, one without suspicion that must survive all that is to come, all while the old-Loki serves as a guide to the kid-Loki. However, kid-Loki does not accept this, for he wants to carve his own path, so he transforms old-Loki into a magpie and says “You are done. You are gone. You are now Ikol, my opposite, bird of mine. Pet supreme. You are an ear-whisperer and a worm-eater. You’ll tell me what I want, nothing more.” By making him into his

pet, he is lowering his former self to a category that is beneath him. Ikol is there to serve Loki not the other way around. In addition, Ikol is described as Loki's opposite, meaning, kid Loki is no longer the old Loki. This is quite different from what Joseph Campbell had in mind in "Supernatural Aid," which is when the hero is supposed to meet their helper, "the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure...who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (69). The old-Loki, or Ikol, does not provide any amulets or tools to the young-Loki, however he does offer his guidance and knowledge, which kid-Loki rejects. Nevertheless, by being transformed into the magpie Ikol, he stays at young Loki's side and serves as a companion and at times, giving him guidance. However, as it is later revealed, he ends up being Loki's downfall, not fulfilling the actual role Joseph Campbell intended for the "supernatural aid."

With their "supernatural aid" by their side the heroes are ready to set forth on their adventures, leaving behind the world they know. This is known as "The Crossing of the First Threshold." To go through it he must meet the:

"[T]hreshold guardian" at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. . .Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger. . .The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored. (77-78)

In other words, the hero leaves behind his home in order to enter his adventure and hero's journey. However, for Loki this is not necessarily the case. He does go on multiple adventures, entering different worlds and realms, but he never leaves Asgard officially or for long periods of time. In fact, the main goal of his journey is to be accepted and wanted in Asgard. As far as this

stage of a the “hero’s journey” goes, this is one of many examples where Loki defies what has been established as canonical. As the “Call for Adventure” established, it is expected for him to depart where he is, and yet Loki does not. Arguably, his journey is more about trying to get back to Asgard since he has been exiled away from it because of his past actions.

The hero then enters “The Belly of the Whale,” which refers to a universal symbol used when denoting to a “sphere of rebirth” (90). On this stage the hero goes through a process which is a kind of a “rebirth” or transformation. “The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (90). As a part of this transformation, the hero goes through a somewhat death-like experience, which accomplishes their transformation. Loki’s case, both in movies and comic books, he goes through various “deaths.” For example in *Siege* he was killed by the Void, only to come back as a child. From what I have discussed, this kid-Loki, although he does cause mischief, has a more innocent element to his personality than the old-Loki did not have. While the old-Loki would do mischief to create chaos, the young-Loki creates mischief to not only be funny, but to also help Asgard. More importantly, he suffers a different death at the end of *Journey into the Mystery*, where Mephisto, the ruler of hell, has become a threat by getting his hands on a crown which is fueled by nightmares and its main source of power are Loki’s nightmares. The only way to stop him is for kid-Loki to die and for the old-Loki to take over, “The crown is of your thoughts and dreams. If they ceased to be, the crown would too. The part of me you carried in your head. It is not you. If you let it overwrite your mind, you will no longer exist...and neither will the crown.” (Issue #645). For this plan to work the kid-Loki dies and the old-Loki takes over his body; hence, going through a transformation, because as the kid-Loki tells him, “I played and won. I changed.

You're just being yourself, as always." He believes the old-Loki will never change, unlike the kid-Loki who actually did. He helped Thor and never betrayed him. He even used his last moments to ask Thor to kill him if he were ever to turn out evil, because of his fear of reverting back to his old ways. And so kid-Loki in his turn ceases to exist, a new Loki is born and this comic book story line ends. However, this is not the last time Loki "dies," and arguably, the third death is the most important for Loki's narrative, as I mentioned before. This is not a journey where Loki sets out to become a hero; instead, it is one of redemption. The death of kid-Loki reinforces this, because his desire to change influences the Loki who has now taken over his body and sets him on the path of redemption, not of heroism. By wanting to rid himself of his past and redeem himself in the eyes of Asgard he believes he can pay for all of his past crimes, and in doing so, unintentionally, he ends up becoming a hero. In other words, while trying to regain the favor of Asgard, he becomes its hero.⁷

Continuing with the stages of the hero's journey, now he must go through a set of trials, better known as "the Road of Trials." What happens in this stage is quite literally to what the title suggests. The hero goes through some trials with the help of "amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region" and sometimes even

⁷ If following the timeline, Loki appears in other comics between *Journey into Mystery* and *Loki: Agent of Asgard*, however, for the purpose of this thesis I will not be discussing them since they do not focus on Loki's journey when it comes to his redemption. In other words, they are not part of the main storyline. In *Loki: Agent of Asgard* he has now the body of a teenager instead of a kid. This is where his redemption narrative is more evident, for he is taken on missions that for each successful one, the knowledge of one of his past crimes is erased.

discovers there is a “benign power” supporting him (Campbell 97). The beginning of *Loki: Agent of Asgard* by Al Ewing features Loki’s first quest given to him by All-Mother, which is composed of Freyja, Gaea and Idunn, who now rule over Asgard now. Loki struck a deal with them, for every successful mission he did for them, they would erase one story of his crimes. Thus, these “trials” as Campbell describes are supposed to test the hero and slowly move him towards heroism, in Loki’s case, they are moving him towards redemption. The hero must show his intentions are true and selfless. However, Loki’s intentions for taking on these missions are completely selfish and were never meant to make him into a hero. He simply becomes a sort of errand boy in order to eliminate one bad story from his past, in order to change other’s view of him. Being accepted and not universally hated is not equivalent to him being a hero.

In his first mission he has to find Gram, the “sword of Sigurd, the first of our great heroes —to be stabbed by it is “to suffer all the truths you deny yourself,” a fitting weapon for the God of Lies. This can be considered a version of an “amulet” since he does use it during his first mission, when he stabs Thor with it to rid him of some “corruption” that entered through Malekith’s touch.⁸ Gram is a weapon Loki uses throughout his journey a couple of times. However, once a sample of this corruption is taken back to the All-Mother to study, it is revealed that it was Loki, future Loki to be exact, all along, who was inside of him. He is locked away;

⁸ This happens in another comic book referenced at the bottom of the page, *Thor: God of Thunder* #13-17.

however, this does not keep him away from meddling into his younger self's journey.⁹ In short, here, much like Joseph Campbell states, there is an entity working behind the scenes to help the hero. However, this is not a benign entity, and as the story progresses, his actions are geared towards making young Loki fail and for Midgard to be destroyed. This version of Loki represents what would happen if Loki were to continue his old ways and never go through his journey of redemption. If we follow Campbell's theory, the hero is supposed to be aided by a "benign power", but instead he is given the spirit of the old Loki, who threatens his entire redemption.

In William Proctor's studies, he uses Spider-Man to describe Marvel's works storytelling methodology, particularly the different universes and iterations of the character. Proctor highlights is that even if there was one "original" Spider-Man, and one follows his story line in order, he does not share the same personality as the one first written in 1964, because he has gone through "ret-cons" (18). This is the abbreviation of "Retroactive Continuity" which is the "reframing past event to serve a current plot need" ("Ret-con"). In other words, writers take a different direction with the characters and/or plot that contradicts some aspect of the story which has been previously established, be it to satisfy a newer audience, change the character's personality or some outdated aspect of his story or maybe to even cover up a mistake. Following the events that occurred in *Siege*, Loki has fallen out of villain-hood and into the side of the

⁹ In fact, it is revealed that it was he who traveled back in time and through some trickery and mischief made sure the events that had to happen for the creation of Gram occurred. And this comic even had a young Odin build a box for it for Loki to open someday. Of course, Odin at that time did not know who Loki was.

heroes, despite this not being his main goal. He went from being the antagonist who wanted the death and destruction of Asgard, to wanting to no longer be known as God of Lies. His longing for change was so strong that when reincarnated he did so in the body of a younger self, a physical representation of his abandonment of his old self, of starting over, trying again. As Proctor points out, Spider Man has a change in personality, Loki had a change of mindset and goals; he wants a clean slate, one where those around him no longer know him as God of Lies, where he feels like he can be himself without automatically being accused of some villainous plot. This shift is not only transformative for Loki, who is a character within the Marvel comic book universe, it also gives him his own story arc where he is the protagonist. This shift allows a shift in categories, whereby he becomes an antiheroic figure whose favorite past time is to create mischief.

The “Meeting of the Goddess” is often the point of the journey where the hero meets a woman, who gives him the opportunity to “win boon of love” and is destined to become his “consort.” By the end of *Loki: Agent of Asgard* he does not marry or fall in love with anyone, however, he does continue his journey with Verity. He meets her at the beginning of this comic book series and is quickly taken with her because of her magical ability to see through any lie. She helps him at a few moments during his adventures and even serves as a bit of a moral compass for Loki, since he is trying to learn how to be a good friend towards her, for example, she plays a key part when young Loki enters “Elsewhere” where he is to make a choice as to die or take his place as the God of Lies. Verity calls him and reminds him that there is still a chance for him to change the future.¹⁰ Her words influence him because when he is going to make a

¹⁰ Somehow, he can receive phone calls within this “metaphorical place”.

decision, he prefaces it with, “I have a friend who believes in me. . . I am my own, and will not sit long in any box built for me” meaning that she is a key in his pushing himself towards fighting this future he has been told he cannot escape. Later on, in the end of this comic series, when the world seems likely it is about to blow up, Loki separates the essence of who she, is her “story,” from her body and stores it in an amulet he has. When asked why he explained, “Because we’re friends! . . .Because you had faith in me when nobody else did! And I don’t want to lose you! I don’t want to watch you blow up!” Loki not necessarily finding a romantic love companion at the end of his journey, he does find a friendly love, one he has struggled to find among other Asgardians who would reject him because of his history, a love and acceptance he always longed for but did not achieve up until now.

Verity’s role is also important because I contend that she is part of the validation of Loki’s redemption story arc, or in other words, part of the reason it is even believable, or possible in the first place. She is a key element for readers to create an emotional bond with Loki; at some point readers start to root for him and hold out for hope he will change, much like she does. The Disposition Theory (ADT), discussed in an earlier chapter, tries to explain why it is viewers enjoy “media entertainment,” and according to this theory, this is governed by the “emotional affiliations” with the outcomes for the characters, or as I prefer to call it, emotionally invested in what happens to a favorite character. However, according to this theory, this liking supposed to increase depending on how “morally upright” the character is (Raney and Janicke 152-53). It is safe to say that this theory fails to include anti-heroes, such as Loki. Janicke and Raney conclude, in short, that creating these “emotional affiliations” with anti-heroes has more to do with “identification rather than oral judgement” and in order to overcome their ethical

shortcomings “moral disengagement” techniques are used; for example, the belief that all a character’s actions have “worthy motives” (159-60). Other cues are also used throughout the narrative that lead viewers to, in a way, forgive and forget about these character’s questionable actions. As I mentioned before, Verity has a special power, she can see through any lie, so Loki cannot lie to her. This special power of hers, plus her constant support of Loki, demonstrates to readers that not only are Loki’s intentions real, but built-in lie detector also helps readers sympathize with Loki and see him as someone who simply just wants to change, and in a way, undo the horrible actions he had taken in the past. She humanizes him and helps bring his redemption full circle by not only acting as a beacon of love and hope for him, but also of reason.

Loki does go through a version of the following stage leading up to Atonement, “The Woman as Temptress,” when he realizes the All-Mother to be lying to him in issue #5 of *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. He learns they have been keeping his older self locked away in the dungeon as a reassurance of the future of Asgard, in other words, believing Loki would eventually revert to his older self, despite repentant missions for the All-Mother in order to erase his past deeds. Knowing this gave All-Mother a sense of security. When young Loki realizes that All-Mother had no real intentions of seeing him for anything but the God of Lies, he quits being their agent, putting a halt on his redemptive quest in finding redemption, because he realized it was ultimately fruitless.

One of the most distinct aspects of Loki’s journey is his relationship with Thor and Odin. At times it almost feels his longing for acceptance within the Asgardian community would mean nothing if Odin and Thor choose not to accept him. This is why the stage in the hero’s journey

known as “Atonement with the Father” is especially important for Loki. Unlike the movies, where it is easier to point out a moment where Loki confronts his struggles with Odin, in the comic books his struggles are more complicated. The stage is defined by Joseph Campbell as one where the hero abandons “that self-generated double monster- the dragon thought to be God . . . and the dragon thought to be Sin . . . One must have faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy” (130). This is the part where the hero has to face that which is pushing him and giving him self-doubt on his ability to succeed. And this is not always the father figure, but in Loki’s case, it does play a part. Loki’s biggest insecurity in *Loki: Agent of Asgard* is to never be able to escape his role as the God of Lies. This is projected through different outlets, like his fear of being rejected by Thor, the All-Mother’s control over his story and lack of support (as I discussed earlier), his inability to feel worthy and his older version reminding him of what he believes to be the inevitable future. The second reason why this stage is such a defining one for Loki is because Loki’s entire purpose in embarking on this journey was his past and let it go, to change who he is, not only to himself but also in the eyes of others. It was never about becoming a hero like his brother Thor; it was only about being accepted and not hated. I believe this stage in Loki’s case progresses in a series of events, starting with his confession to Thor about how he murdered kid-Loki and took his place, because although it makes one of his biggest fears come true (being rejected by Thor) it is what sets in motion all that happens afterwards. Furthermore, Loki owns up to his crimes and shows the full regret he bears. Loki then confronts Freyja on how All-Mother has used him to keep their hands clean (figures 3.3 and 3.4). Essentially, during this confrontation he calls them out on their plot for wanting to keep Loki as the villain he was to serve their agenda instead of actually giving him a



Figures 3.3



Figures 3.4

chance to redeem himself. This confrontation gets him exiled and it is in this exile where he confronts Odin. Here Odin lets him know that despite it all, he still loves his son Loki and that he

must face his own “trial,” which I believe is to face his biggest challenge of all, rewriting his future. The most important part of this moment with Odin, which I argue is the true atonement, is when Odin tells him “Your hour of trial, when the storm is at the door and all is darkest. Hold to yourself, God of Lies. Be Worthy-not of your brother’s power, but your own. Remember. Remember what a lie is.” (Vol #11) Here Odin is urging Loki to not let go of who he is, even though it is something he has been fighting against in the entirety of *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. His words remind Loki that his downfall was never being the God of Lies, but in believing that made him unworthy because he was not a hero like his brother, to never acknowledge that he himself already has worth inside him, and although he is different, his worth is still valid. Being the God of Lies does not necessarily have to be something negative.

It is by fulfilling the “Atonement with the Father” and realizing his worth that Loki fulfills the next two stages, “Apotheosis” and “The Ultimate Boon.” “Apotheosis” there is a realization of some bigger understanding, which helps them in whatever is left of their journey (Campbell 167). Secondly, “The Ultimate Boon”, is the reward, so to speak, the hero had been searching for throughout his entire journey. He has accomplished his goal (173-81). The reason as to why these two go hand in hand, and are in fact the same, for Loki his “boon” is the “apotheosis.” Loki’s main goal was to become a new version of himself, to stop being known as the God of Lies, but his older-self was getting in the way of his this. In the 13th issue of *Loki: Agent of Asgard*, older-Loki takes young-Loki into “Elsewhere,” a “metaphorical space-hidden behind a whim, buried in a daydream. The place we Lokis always go...for the final act.” This is essentially where kid-Loki died so the young-Loki could be born. Now he is faced with the version of himself which died in *Siege* and the kid-version of himself, who he killed in *Journey*

into *Mystery*. Both versions urge him to make a decision, one asks him to take on the crown as the God of Lies and embrace what is “expected” of him and the kid-version urges him to take his path, which is to die to save himself from himself. And this is where Verity comes into play, which I discussed earlier and her role in helping Loki achieving his goal. With her help of her and his recent conversation with Odin, both help him realize the truth, “A Lie is a story. . . and we can rewrite our stories. . . We don’t have to be what we’re told to be. Even by ourselves” (*Loki Agent of Asgard* “Issue #13”). In realizing what a lie really is, Loki is able to deny both of the paths offered to him and create one completely new, he decides to “tell a different story”. He embraces the crown and is reborn as something completely new, the God of Stories, ceasing to be the God of Lies and in so, achieving his “boon.” This is the ultimate goal of his journey from the beginning, this was his purpose. By having this realization, he fulfills his journey of redemption.

With his initial goal accomplished Loki has fulfilled what he wanted, however, he simply cannot allow his old-version to go roaming freely about causing chaos, so he comes back to save the day, in a matter of speaking. In this specific journey of Loki’s there is no “Magic Flight” because he does not escaping with the “boon” since in this case, the “boon” is more of a personal journey of self-discovery instead of an actual object. Therefore, in this case he breaks away from Joseph Campbell’s narrative, as he has done before not only in the comics but in the movies as well. Similarly, with “Rescue from Without,” he does not need any help in returning to the world he left at the beginning of his journey. In fact, he is the one who saves the world from another Ragnarok, “The end of this universe-the final death of the world tree” (*Loki Agent of Asgard* “Issue #14”). The old-Loki brings on the army of Hel, including Jormungandr to Midgard and

unleashes Ragnarok. The young-Loki goes to the battle and confronts his older-self and introduces his new title, “Goddess of stories...the Moon Queen. The Magic Theatre.” However, he has not changed, telling the old-Loki a riddle, “But I’m not doing anything you can’t do, am I? If you let yourself, I mean. So what’s the big change? What’s the one thing that means I’ll never be you?” (*Loki Agent of Asgard* “Issue #16”) suggesting they are still the same person, however, the young-Loki went through his journey of atonement and this unlocked his own potential. The big change is that he does not care anymore what others think of him, so there is no need to redeem himself in their eyes. He has realized that he was worthy all along (figures 3.5-3.7). This makes the old-Loki flee. And when both sides in the war ask Loki to join their ranks, he says no, refusing to pick a side and simply leaves them to fight their own battles. By doing this he refuses to play a part of whatever plans they have and instead choosing his new-found-self. However, he does an un-Loki thing in a very Loki way, he saves them, by saving their “essence” in an orb, “And now I’ve got their stories-their essence-nice and safe. . . no sides. Everyone gets what they wanted.” (*Loki Agent of Asgard* “Issue #16”). Technically this way the world never really ends, their stories live on and are kept safe by Loki. He does not barge into battle like Thor would have, instead using his intellect and tricks, he sets them in an endless cycle of battle by holding them in an orb, no realms are destroyed. Meanwhile, Loki leaves the nine realms. Verity points out that is not exactly saving them, but he lets her know that if he would have let the battle rage on all the realms would have been destroyed, doing it his way, preserves them. Until he finds a way to save them, he will leave them as they are. Becoming a part of this war, saving the realms, was never his intention. He wanted to clean his name and past, to be accepted, and by achieving self-acceptance, something in him changed and led him to

want to help. He acknowledges his plan is flawed, but it was better than the destruction everyone was facing.

Although Loki is the hero of this comic book, since it centers around him and he does essentially save everyone, it is important to remember that this was never his intention, he just wanted acceptance, not heroism. This makes him different and goes against Campbell's theory



Figure 3.5.



Figure 3.6



Figure 3.7

that in order to be a hero he (or she) must go through the hero's journey. However, Loki's journey does share some similar stages of Campbell's schema, but his was never intended to

be a hero's journey. Instead, his journey was centered around redemption, and in doing so, he became a hero; it can even be said he became hero almost as an accident. The characteristics, usually attributed to that of a hero, is that of someone who is powerful, enough to save everyone in the end. Although Loki has great power, it is shown differently from his hero counterpart, Thor. Even in the comic books, while Loki is scheming and plotting, Thor is the one that goes into battle and wins the fight. Thor is continuously introduced as a "powerful" warrior, not only in the comic books but also in the movies, and this applies to Odin as well. This type of "masculinity associated with Odin and Thor is 'an aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness...[equated] with ... moral superiority'" (Nuttall 65). Heroes are usually front and center in the midst of battle in order to defeat the big bad monster. For example, in *Journey into Mystery*, while Thor wages battle against Surtur, Loki with his charisma and manipulating skills was able to not only convince Hel to provide Thor with the army of the undead but found a way to provide Thor with a weapon strong enough to defeat Surtur, which he did by, of course, stealing it from Surtur himself in *Journey into Mystery* #643. Although Loki can fight, "he prefers evasive action and trickery" (Nuttall 65), which he himself points out to Thor when scheming to defeat Surtur, which involved Loki sneaking into Muspelheim, his domain, "You are trained for the general melee, the crush of men and the spilling of blood. Loki and his folk are well trained for tasks such as this," (Issue #643) because as I have said before, Loki's methods deviate completely from Thor's, not only in style, but also in results. Many times, Loki's plan involve betraying Thor, being on the enemy's side, lying and tricking others in order to get what he wants. His methods are inherently unethical but the end results are what justify them, at least, it does in Loki's eyes. There is even a moment when Loki does try to adapt Thor's heroic

methods when battling Nightmare, but he concludes that “rushing around playing hero” (Issue #635) will get everyone killed, so instead he gives Nightmare what he wants, of course this is part of his sneaky plan. He points out to Hellstorm and Leah, who are helping him, “If I am going to save anyone, it’s going to have to be in a Loki way” (Issue #635). Sometimes the heroic way is not the only way to defeat a villain. In fact, there is even a moment where Thor asks Loki to trick Odin into helping them defeat Surtur, in *The Mighty Thor* #21, which just further shows that both methods are sometimes needed in order to win the final battle. While Thor takes on the front lines of the battle, using his physical strength, Loki uses his magical and intellectual strength to move all the chess pieces in such way then when both are combined the antagonist does not stand a chance of victory.

By saving everyone he acts out as the hero of the story, however, from the beginning he did not set out on a hero’s journey, and yet, he had the same outcome, that is why he shares the final steps of Joseph Campbell’s theory. The events previously mentioned fall under Campbell’s “The Crossing of the Return Threshold” because here the hero is back in his original world and realizes that “the values and distinctions that in normal life seem important disappear” (217). Meaning, what the hero found important in his world are no longer so. This is shown when Loki tells his old-self that what others think of him is no longer important, that getting their approval has always been a waste of time. In accepting this he is free from their expectations and in doing so, no longer trying to satisfy others, and only focusing on himself. This is why he refuses to join their war and choose a side; he simply was no longer interested in their quarrel or difficulties.

By storing the nine realms he leaves that reality with Verity by his side in ghost form. This is where I argue he enters into the last two stages of Campbell’s narrative. First, as the

“Master of the Two Worlds,” here the hero achieves the ability to “pass back and forth across the world division” without “contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other” (229). The hero uses the knowledge of his adventure into the other world and employs it to live his new life. However, with Loki, he leaves his world behind in order to save it, and in a quite literal sense, becomes the master of it. He will get to decide whether or not to set it free, but as he said, he would only if he found a safe place to do so. Additionally, with the knowledge he gained from his adventure, he is no longer tied to his past. Furthermore, this stage for Loki is different from other heroes, since his adventure takes place within his known world, Asgard. His battle is more against his past, and future, represented by the haunting of his past selves and the antagonist of this comic book, his future-self.

At some points of the story there are two of them battling, each representing a life and truth of their own. When he leaves the nine realms, he enters this middle place, and there he confronts old Loki who had fled the battle and who looks defeated. He reveals his true face, which is the same one as the young-Loki, because they were the same person all along, he just took the face of the older version because he thought that was what everyone else wanted. The future-Loki is actually crying, which destroys the image those in Asgard had of him of this evil, heartless man (figure 3.8-3.9). Here the new-Loki lets him know that the reason why this death was different from the rest was because he let go of all his grudges, hate, anger, ignorance, “the



Figure 3.8



Figure 3.9

repeating of the old, expecting the new”(Loki Agent of Asgard “Issue #17”) and only when he had let go of all of this, was he able to return. However, the new Loki lets him know that if it was not because of all his plotting and mistakes, this Loki would never have been born, “You were horrible. You hurt people. You didn’t do it right. But I think your plan worked” (Loki Agent of

Asgard “Issue #17”). This makes the future-Loki start to cry again, and the new Loki comforts him with an embrace, while simultaneously storing him away in his staff, “I let him come home...he was the me that could’ve been—the cautionary tale. It’s not right to pretend that’s not me...We’re all going to change again. That’s just life. I can’t be this Loki forever...Five years, ten years, we’ll both be different people” (*Loki Agent of Asgard* “Issue #17”). I believe this is where Loki becomes the true master of two worlds, because he is acknowledging that the version he stored away from himself is still who he is. He is both, and from future-Loki’s mistakes he learned and will keep learning. It is a truth he will carry with him forever.

The last stage in this journey is the “Freedom to Live,” by this moment the hero has come to peace with the fact that all life is destined to end, by realizing the “true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that live and dies in all” (238). By releasing this fear of death, the hero is finally able to live his life freely, never forgetting the lessons he or she has learned. It is hard for a god to be fearful of death since they rarely ever die and even if they do, they know they will just go to Hel or Valhalla. However, there was a fear that was holding Loki back, the fear of becoming he whom he had fought so hard against becoming. As I discussed before, Loki accepts that change is inevitable and although the “evil” side of him still exists, he is no longer afraid of it. Instead he embraces it as just another part of who he is and who he was, “There is still that gravity. What people expect. But ...birds feel gravity too. And Acrobats and Dancers. And they dive and swoop and tumble anyways. Loop the loop, walk the wire...do tricks. Nah. No more evil. Mischief, now. That’s still got legs” (*Loki Agent of Asgard* “Issue #17”). Loki acknowledges that part of him, but does not want to make the same mistakes, instead he wants to keep being a trickster, though avoid being an evil-doer. He has finally let go

of all the fear he had. With this acceptance is that he is able to go on to start his next adventure alongside Verity.

I cannot simply state that Loki is indeed a hero, since that term has been coined to define a different type of protagonist that Loki simply does not embody. Loki's methods are questionable at best, and it is hard to trust him when in one moment he betrays Thor but at the end tells him it was part of his plot to get Surtur to trust him (*Journey into Mystery* #643). Raney and Janicke attempt to use the ADT theory to explain why audiences enjoy "morally complex" character, one of their points being that viewers (or in this case, readers) "character identification" it is easier for audiences to relate to these kinds of characters because they are "flawed, with many weaknesses, selfish, immoral, but all the while they have some heroic characteristics that the viewer can admire" (158). They argue that the reason why they are willing to identify with these morally complex characters is because they want to enjoy the narrative, which is facilitated with "emotional involvement" through "character liking." As a result, they find ways to like these characters, even if it means overlooking their questionable actions (158). For example, Loki, as I have discussed before, lies and cheats to get his way, but ultimately makes a decision to save others, like when kid-Loki sacrificed himself in order to prevent Mephisto from gaining the power of fear, when he saved Asgard from The Serpent and from Ragnarok, amongst other examples. Loki's methods would not have been used by Thor (the hero by definition), but without Loki none of these triumphs would have been possible. The definition of what a hero is, is changing and that is the real reason that, not only are audiences able to enjoy them, but also the reason why Loki's redemption story was possible to begin with.

Through his vulnerability, wittiness, and genuine wish to redeem himself, readers were not only able to forgive him, but believe him.

Loki begins his journey with the goal of changing his past by eliminating stories of all the horrible deeds he committed, which turned into him becoming a hero, almost by mistake. His journey should have ended when he had the atonement with his father, when he realized his own worth, because after all, that was what he was after. However, his story continues; and he becomes the hero by saving the nine realms from Ragnarok. What I wanted to showcase in this chapter were not only the similarities between Loki's journey and Joseph Campbell's theory, but also how different they are, much like I did in the first chapter. Loki's goal was never to become the hero, and so during his redemption he becomes one, unlike Campbell's theory suggests. His theory is based more on a journey where the protagonist is slowly molded into becoming the hero, they set out to be in the beginning; being a hero was the end goal of their story. However, while Loki holds to a different goal, he still achieves heroic status. Is it possible then that the road to heroism is not set in stone? I argue that it is not, and characters like Loki, antiheroes, are the perfect example of this.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

I have always been fascinated by antiheroic characters, the rule breakers, the rebels. The earliest life memory I have of a hero going against the established norm was *Mulan*. Mulan was a rebel and went against what the hero was supposed to be, a man. She lied and cheated in order to get into the army and refused to follow the rules in order to protect her father's life. Taking the historical context of the story, what she did was deemed high treason, punishable by execution. At the end of the movie, she received a heroic recognition for her actions celebrated as the savior of China, despite her illegal methods to achieve this. Even so, it was my first taste of a rebellious hero and I was immediately drawn to it. What initially drew me to Loki were his trickery and manipulation skills, the way he would not use brute force and instead opted for a more intellectual approach towards every situation. With his charisma it was hard not be charmed by him, he somehow seemed to be one and even two steps ahead of everyone else. Finally, his journey of self-discovery, of finding his own place in the Asgardian society, being always the outsider looking in, were some of the qualities that made him, not only enjoyable to watch, but relatable. As a result, it was not surprising to find that many others shared positive opinions towards him, despite being introduced as the main villain in the *Thor* and *The Avengers* movies.

At the beginning of this thesis, I explored the concept of antihero in order to identify the term and outline how characters can be deemed as such. With a quick search of the Merriam Webster Dictionary's definition, one would find that an antihero is a "protagonist or notable figure who is conspicuously lacking in heroic qualities." This definition is not only vague, but one does not fit as is evident in my analysis of Loki. If anything, through my study of Loki's journey,

I found that he had in fact shown heroic qualities. I further posit the possibility that maybe it is not the definition of antiheroes that has changed so much, but the definition of heroes. Through my readings and investigation, I quickly found that antihero was so broad a concept that few seem to be able to agree on with what the term actually means. It seems that in every era there is a different kind of antihero. In short, an antihero is simply the opposite of what the hero was during a specific time period. However, the more I moved into contemporary works I realized that this simple definition was not viable. First, not every antihero was the same, there was no one way to be an antihero. They all had different personalities and qualities, and they varied from character to character. Their decision-making and personality is directly linked to the story they belong to and not to an era. Secondly, more and more antiheroes were becoming protagonists or prominent characters in media, instead of side characters. Their influence was being felt. More often than not, they were becoming fan favorites, with characters like V from the *V for Vendetta* series, *Deadpool* from the Marvel universe, and Dexter the eponymous protagonist from the American drama series, to name a few. Lastly, not every character with a lack of hero qualities is an antihero. This definition could easily fit a villain, and not every villain is an antihero.

The question then remains, what is an antihero? In my introduction I highlighted a few of the variations when it came to describing the antihero. For example, he was “buffoonish in picaresque literature,” “sophisticated and introverted within the romantics” and for modern readers he was an “angry young man” trying to find his own identity (Kadiroglu 7). Essentially, the antihero was the opposite of whatever the definition of the hero was at a given time or type of literature. Arguably, an antihero as defined today may not be the same in 50 years. However, like I previously observed, it is hard to even define the contemporary antihero since they all vary

from one another. When it comes to Loki, given the findings I have made through my studies, I have found that Loki's anti-heroism is very much a result of not feeling like he belongs and his constant quest of finding his own individual identity in a society where he was told that who he was is wrong. This leads him to do many crimes and play the antagonist a few times, like in *The Avengers*. However, through his trickery he does show he can do right by others and help the heroes of the story and even become one himself, like he did at the end of the comic book series *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. It comes down to his methods and ways of reaching heroism that sets him apart and qualifies him an anti-hero.

Throughout my thesis, I utilized Joseph Campbell's theory of *The Hero's Journey* in order to trace Loki's journey, in both the Marvel cinematic universe and in the comic books. This way I hoped to see if Loki actually stayed true to the hero's journey or if he deviated from it, and in doing so deeming him an anti-hero. In the Marvel movies, Loki's journey followed a variation of Campbell's theory, however, some stages were done differently, almost completely in the opposite. For example, the stage of Supernatural Aid, for Loki was the titan Thanos. In this stage the hero is supposed to receive aid for his journey from a benevolent entity. In Loki's case he did receive aid, but it did not come from a benevolent being and in reality, instead it came from the biggest antagonist the Avengers would eventually face. Additionally, the talisman he gave Loki (the Tesseract) was used to control his mind control him instead of actually providing him with a helpful tool. However, it goes beyond just having some variations in his journey and the hero's journey. His started as an infant, when he was taken away from his birthplace, Jotunheim, and thrust into the Asgardian society and told he was being raised to be king. He later found out that not only is he not going to be king, but he never stood a chance because of his heritage. Loki is

now faced with an identity crisis, where the hero's journey he was promised or placed on is taken away from him, so he tried to regain it during the events of the movie *Thor*. In doing so, he tried to destroy the entire realm of Jotunheim because, one, they were seen as the enemy so he devised a plan where the King Laufey would kill Odin, with Loki's help, only to betray him. This way Loki would be seen as a hero and have a valid excuse to commit genocide on Asgard's biggest enemy. Second, it was Loki's twisted way of denying that side of him, by killing his birth father and others like him, he would be embracing fully his Asgardian side, in other words, the hero within him, because Jotuns were seen as evil creatures.

When Loki's initial plans fail, he goes on to then to be a villain, since after all being half Jotun meant he was a "monster," this is seen during the events of *The Avengers*, yet again he fails at being a villain as well. This leaves him somewhere in the middle, which is explored in the movie *Thor: The Dark World*, where he simply does not know what to do or whom to trust, on one hand he still exhibits love for his Asgardian family but at the same time there is his memory of their betrayal. Everything comes together in *Thor: Ragnarok*, where Asgard is being threatened and Loki is faced with the decision of either running away or helping his brother Thor in trying to save the Asgardians. Ultimately, he decides to help Thor and for the first time, actually remain by his side, instead of running away again, perhaps a sign that he had finally forgiven the betrayal he felt in the first *Thor* movie. It is in the beginning of *Avengers: Infinity War* where his journey culminates. He dies in a final desperate attempt at stopping Thanos and saving his brother. More importantly, in this scene is when both where after a struggle for his identity, portrayed throughout various movies, Loki finally comes to terms with his hybrid identity. He realizes that both his Asgardian and Jotun side can coexist and make him who he is,

still worthy and capable of heroism, just a different kind from his brother's Thor. Their methods and ways of thinking are drastically different, yet they complement each other. While Thor uses more brute force and battling the enemy straight on, Loki relies on his magic and trickery. It is in this realization and his sacrifice that he achieves, for me, the title of hero, because he dies a hero. However, due to his unconventional, according to Campbell's theory, due to Loki's unconventional way of achieving heroism, is what deems him an antihero.

Loki's journey during the films is a rollercoaster sequence of events, at times taking steps back instead of taking steps forward in his journey. In spite this, there is one constant, the longing for acceptance from his father and brother. Through my close reading of his journey, by Loki being placed on the hero's journey already his trajectory is quite different from what Campbell had suggested, since there was no accepting the "Call to Adventure." His journey becomes even more twisted, and corrupted, upon realizing that he was not meant to have the throne. Arguably, his first journey ends with him not being able to complete it, and so in the movies he sets forth on a second journey. While embarking on a second hero's journey, trying to defeat the biggest enemies of Asgard by committing genocide, he instead becomes the villain, failing once again to become what he had been told he would be all this life, a hero. However, his journey does not end there, it continues, and audiences are shown a struggle within Loki between whether or not he actually does see himself as a villain and his longing to be accepted by Odin and Thor. Through this familiarization with the character, it created a level of sympathy from the audiences and a wish for him to redeem himself. In short, he wanted a place to belong, which is seen at various points during his journey, for example: his desire to have everyone in Midgard worship him, taking Odin's place on the throne and having everyone venerate him and

his temptation to remain in Sakaar where no one knows who he is and are instead charmed by him.

Loki knows he will never be a hero like Thor, his tactics and methods are quite the opposite. While Thor likes to take the righteous and straight-forward path, Loki enjoys to scheme, plot, lie, and does not mind dabbling in the immoral acts. Arguably the most important event that defines Loki's journey is during the movie of *Thor: Ragnarok* when Odin tells both Thor and Loki that he loves them and refers to them as his sons. The camera emphasizes Loki's reaction, for he had finally achieved what he had longed for from the beginning of his journey, Odin's acceptance. By gaining it, I posit that this is what pushes Loki into being able to succeed in the completion of his hero's journey. What had prevented Loki from completing it had been his inability to trust Thor and actually remain by his side, and instead looking out for himself. However, between the ending of *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Thor: Infinity War*, Loki is shown setting aside his own personal interest and helping Thor, despite their limited chances of being successful. More importantly, he embraces both the Jotun and Asgardian sides himself, recognizing that both make a part of him, and he does not have to give up one or the other to be a hero, or in his case, an antihero.

In regards to his narrative in the comic books, Loki's journey became one more concentrated on him redeeming himself over his past actions, not so much following a hero's narrative, but one of redemption. He quite literally goes against his past self in both *Journey into the Mystery* and *Loki: Agent of Asgard*. His past self is present trying to sabotage his progress and mission to redeem himself in the eyes of the Asgardians. However, similarly to the Loki from the movies, his journey is more of a personal and internal one, because until he accepts his

own worth, then he will never be truly happy. His redemption becomes more of him not redeeming himself for the sake of others, but for the sake of who he is. It is in letting go of the pressure of what others believe him to be that he finds freedom in doing what he truly believes is right, and that is to save everyone in his own way.

As a result, I highlighted the differences in Loki's journey in the comic books in my chapter two. He goes against many of the stages Campbell established. Loki's narrative does not pay much attention or importance to the first stages. The real weight of his story lies in the last few stages, mainly in the "Atonement with the Father," "Apotheosis" and "Ultimate Boon". During the stage of the "Atonement with the Father" he is speaking with Odin, who tells Loki that to be worthy of his own attributes and to stop trying to be like his brother Thor. This constant battle to try to live up to Thor's reputation is what truly traps him in the self-victimizing role of the villain. During "Apotheosis", the hero gains a better understanding and is able to solve his problems with this high level of understanding. Here Loki realizes that there is nothing wrong with being the god of Lies, and he even changes his name to the god of Stories, embracing fully who he is, letting go of his wish of wanting others approval. I explained in chapter 2 that the "Apotheosis" and the "Ultimate Boon" for Loki are one in the same since because his apotheosis is the ultimate goal of his quest, which was to break free from the cycle of his villainy. These stages are what ultimately frame Loki's journey of redemption, because instead of going on a journey trying to find a prize or victory, his journey is about insight into himself and the social construction of his personality. His journey could have ended there, however, he still chose to help the realms and stop them from being destroyed, when he could have easily, as he

shows, escape unharmed. This is what ultimately makes him have a hero's ending, but because of his rebellion against the canonical stages established by Campbell, he is deemed antiheroic.

In embarking in a journey to redeem himself, his journey is automatically set apart from Campbell's Hero's Journey. It is in wanting to redeem himself that Loki, almost as a mistake, falls into the hero's journey, without never really intending to. As a result, his path is filled with different trials that he has to surpass in order to gain favor in the eyes of the Asgardians. However, Loki proves to the reader that he is not one to follow in the footsteps of his brother Thor. His methods are his own, and at times, they even involve betraying his brother Thor instead of confiding in him and asking for help. Loki is not one to follow the heroic way. This is even shown when he is trying to stop the Lord of Nightmares. Once he realizes that the heroic way is simply not working in their favor, he resorts to his plotting and scheming methods, despite the risks and possibility of hurting others.

Loki wants to redeem himself not for the purpose of becoming a hero, but because he was tired of being known as the evil one. He wanted to be accepted by those around him, especially Thor. However, he learns that no matter what he does, those around him will always see him as the god of Lies who committed countless of crimes in the past. In his completion of the hero's journey, Loki breaks free from the expectations of everyone else and accept that he is indeed the god of Lies. He realizes that this does not mean he is destined to be a villain, instead, he can choose to do whatever he feels is right to him. There is no longer the pressure to be the hero they expect from him. Despite not being bound to any obligation, he does play the role of the hero in the end because he defeats the villain and saves everyone, using his own methods.

Although the adventures from Loki in the comic books and Loki in the MCU universe are completely different, they do share some basic characteristics that transcend both stories. Both Lokis are searching for acceptance, while the MCU Loki longs for his father's and brother's, the comic book Loki wants that of all the Asgardians, so he can be welcomed back into the community. It is this same longing for acceptance that initiate the journeys of both versions of the character. However, the Loki in the MCU universe seems to move further away from the acceptance he longs for due to his extreme decisions, such as trying to commit genocide over the Jotuns in order to win Odin's praise, then trying to take over Midgard, and even impersonating Odin and stealing the throne. Meanwhile, the Loki in the comic books actually does prove himself to have changed his ways through his help in various adventures. Arguably, the Loki from the MCU does not redeem himself until *Thor: Ragnarok* when he helps Thor defeat Hela. More importantly, the movie does not end with Loki betraying Thor at the very last second, like he had in the past, which led audiences to believe that he had finally decided to join Thor and leave behind his villainous ways. Meanwhile, the Loki from the comic books had been working on his redemption right from the beginning of his journey by helping out Thor and Asgard as a whole.

Despite what seems like an assured redemption arc for both Lokis, there was one aspect that was holding them back, and that was the acceptance of who they were. With Loki from the MCU universe, at first, he denies his Jotun side, and then he denies his Asgardian family, therefore also rejecting that side of himself. As a result, he is left without a place to belong, that is until *Avengers: Infinity War*, which takes place after the events of *Thor: Ragnarok* and deals with the threat of Thanos. Loki sacrifices himself trying to save Thor, but before doing so, he

vocally expresses his acceptance of both his Jotun and Asgardian side. In doing so he is letting go of all the resentment he had felt and embracing who he was. Similarly, the Loki in the comic books struggles with his identity as the god of Lies, because it had always been burdened by negative assumptions. However, when he recognizes that if he does not accept the fact that he is indeed the god of Lies and that he can make with that whatever he chooses, he will never be able to reach his full potential and break free from his cycle of resorting to old ways whenever he gets upset.

In the end, both Loki's journeys are not at all about proving himself a hero, as like Campbell's hero's journey suggests. Both versions break away from Campbell's theory in different ways, however, they share enough similarities and key moments for it to be considered a hero's journey, even with the variations. It is these same variations that I posit offer a new, updated, version of what a hero is. However, due to their, more often than not, immoral methods, constant lying, plotting and scheming, they are unable to be called heroes, despite their heroic actions. Regardless, I believe Loki offers a new possibility to a new generation of what a hero journey could look like.

The future of Loki's story is uncertain because with the last Marvel movie installment of *Avengers: End Game* audiences were shown how the Loki from *The Avengers* movie escaped that earlier incarnation of himself by using the Tesseract. There was a television series announced and from what the trailer showed, he seemed to be jumping to different worlds getting into all sorts of trouble. This Loki will exist in a different timeline and he would have not gone through the character development the Loki I studied went through, so for the purposes of this thesis, Loki actually does die. However, this new Loki offers new possibilities of where his

journey might go. Perhaps he will be given a similar character development but with different events to lead him a similar point where the other Loki was or he may go on a completely different direction. Although, the Loki from the films and the Loki from the television series have the same origin and feeling of betrayal and not having somewhere to belong, the new Loki will not have helped Thor avenge Frigga's death or save Asgard from Hela, both key points in his journey. This same idea applies with the comic book version of Loki. As I explained in my previous chapters, in the world of Marvel, especially in the comic books, different authors take on the story of characters, for example, the author who wrote *Journey into the Mystery* is not the same as who wrote *Loki: Agent of Asgard* and although there is an editor that has to approve these stories and make sure they make sense and fit into this universe, there is still no telling what his future might look like.

I briefly used the Affective Disposition theory (ADT) to further explore the likeness of Loki, but more importantly as a possible explanation as to why characters like Loki, although they lack in morality, are still liked by audiences. In my investigation I found that in Loki's case, the fact that his story is played out for audiences to see, he is able to explain himself, showing off why exactly he does what he does, plays an important part. This is because usually narratives are centered around the hero's point of view, their struggles and their journey. However, Loki's journey is not only shown to audiences, but his journey is told from his point of view. In the movies, this is shown by giving him moments where he is the focus of the scene, for example, during his last interaction with Frigga, audiences were shown a vulnerable side of Loki where instead of painting the picture of this cruel heartless villain, audiences get to see him show his insecurities on the topic of not really being Asgardian. This relationship with Frigga is one of the

humanizing characteristics that Loki is given in the movies, and they help portray him in a different light. This results in audiences sympathizing with him and justifying, to an extent, his attitude and actions later on. Furthermore, audiences start to hope and cheer for the character's triumph, in Loki's case, for his redemption. Meanwhile, in the comic books, the narrative is centered around Loki's journey as the protagonist. Similar methods like in the movies are used in order to get audiences to sympathize with him, like his missions in order to erase all his past deeds, because he was repenting for all the he has done. Additionally, the old Loki quite literally dies and is reborn as a new character, keeping all the mischief without the evilness, in doing so wiping the slate clean for this character. In other words, the Loki that did all those past horrible deeds is no longer alive, and this Loki is a completely different one, hence, he should not be punished or judged the same.

At the beginning of my research, I set out to study not only Loki's journey as an isolated case within the antiheroic narrative paradigm, but more importantly, how his story is part of a bigger movement and shift in the realm of storytelling. Through my analysis of Loki, I found some core elements that showcase his qualities as an antihero. Starting with the fact that he goes through a similar journey of a hero's, however his is not linear or progressive. At times, he found himself in positions that hindered his progress or diverged his path, resulting in him committing what could be considered the wrong choice. It is important to note that no antihero's journey is identical to Loki's, but I propose that if they were to be studied, they would be a corrupted version of the hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell, much like Loki's. Furthermore, in defining the contemporary hero the main overarching characteristic to describe them is that they are antiestablishment. It varies in how they do it and it depends on the context that they

were created in. For example, Loki goes against Asgardian principles when it comes to being a hero. While the Asgardian society values combat and brute force, Loki prefers other methods like magic, trickery, using his wittiness to get himself out of trouble and lying. Loki is just one example of many, but through my research and analysis of other contemporary antiheroes these were the common factors I found. So if I were to define them, I would say that given the context they were created in, they will go against the established norm of what is expected to be inherently moral. In addition, they will follow the hero's journey but in their own twisted and corrupted way. In short, they do not follow the rules, but have heroic intent while applying villainous tactics.

With all of this in mind, how are antiheroes redefining the definition of a hero? Firstly, they are taking on their roles by being the protagonists of many narratives. Not only are they taking on the roles of protagonists, they are being heroic in unheroic ways. In other words, they are not following what it is expected of a hero, making moral choices, and instead are applying their own tactics which at times seem villainous. However, they are still performing heroic acts, and in doing so differently than how a hero would, implies that there is more than one single way to be heroic. Does this mean they are the opposite of a hero? No, because that would be a villain. Despite being named antihero, the prefix "anti" meaning to go against or opposed, they are not acting out as villains. At times, they even may appear to be against the hero, but that does not take away from the fact that they are doing heroic actions. Where does this leave the hero? The hero has not disappeared as of yet, there is still a place for them in storytelling and they are still being featured in narratives. However, they are just sharing the spotlight with antiheroes. In fact, I have seen some classical heroes, like Captain America, being rewritten and even given some

antiheroic traits with recent development in his story, which would be a possible future area of study for my research. I posit that with all that I have discussed through this thesis Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" has to be reevaluated at the highest model of heroic storytelling. More and more characters that are doing heroic actions are not following his journey. Although I do not propose a complete disregard for his theory, since it can still be used as a starting point to understand the binary between heroes and antiheroes, it is time to create and define a new journey.

Moving forward with my research there are a few points I would like to touch upon. Firstly, I would continue my study of Loki as his story progresses, but I would also venture out to study other antiheroes to see where exactly their journeys coincide. This way I can further and more clearly, define what an antihero is. Furthermore, like I mentioned before, the hero's journey needs revision and an antihero journey needs to be created, so that is another area of interest when it comes to my research. If I were to study a wide range of contemporary antiheroes, I could find an overarching journey they all share. Finally, the societal implications of the rise in popularity of antiheroic characters. This is a movement and there is a societal reason behind it which has room to research and explore. One of the reasons being that these antiheroes are resonating with the audiences. For example, Loki represents someone that is struggling to find their place in a society that tells them that in order to be liked you have to be a certain way, and yet he does not fit that mold. Once he is rejected due to his failure to adapt, he alienates himself further by antagonizing them, which only results in his self-hatred and anger to increase. Additionally, he represents the child who would do anything to please their parents and the child who is always being compared to others, making them feel inferior and inadequate. These are

just some of the main characteristics that connected Loki to the audience. Creating these sorts of connections is one of the reasons why these characters are being popularized nowadays. In short, much research is left to be done on contemporary antiheroes, their sudden rise to popularity and their reshape of the hero and villain binary.

Loki's journey, in both the movies and comic books, is filled with constant changes. Audiences never know exactly what Loki is about to do next. Overall, Loki challenges the canon established by Joseph Campbell of what a hero must go through in order to achieve this title, by warping and, in a way, corrupting the journey, but still becoming a hero in the end. This is why he is named an antihero because although he does help the "good guys" and does heroic actions, he still does not do them in accepted or conventional ways. Loki still holds a lot of negative traits and in the end acts only when he seems fit or when he just feels like it. However, I do believe that as time passes by, more and more heroes are going to start showing and showcasing traits that are not favorable, slowly moving away from the traditional heroic canon while creating a new one.

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