

**Shades of Grey : Redefining Heroism and Villiany in
Salander and Chen Dawai**

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the complexities of heroism and villainy in contemporary narratives, focusing on the morally ambiguous characters of Chen Dawai and Salander. By challenging traditional binary notions of good and evil, these anti-heroes and anti-villains occupy a gray area, blurring the lines between heroism and villainy. Through a critical analysis of their characterizations, this research aims to redefine the concept of heroism and villainy, exploring how these characters subvert and complicate our understanding of morality. By examining the nuances of their motivations, actions, and consequences, this study sheds light on the implications of moral ambiguity in storytelling, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the human condition. This research considers postmodernism and the anti-hero character type. It considers how each character's motivation, actions, and past resist simplistic definitions as good and bad. Using qualitative approaches—mainly reading and comparing texts—it identifies key points that show their moral depth, psychological depth, and narrative value.

From this perspective, this research posits that Chen Dawai and Salander redefine the traditional character types by committing acts of justice that are rule-bending but are redemptive. This research explores a broad gap in current research by concentrating on Chen Dawai, a character who has been under-researched in literature and film. It contributes to debate regarding Salander as a representation of the strength and rebellion of contemporary women. While it is specifically aimed at the character and does not touch on broader social or political themes or film making practices, it is still to contribute to the current debates regarding moral representation in narratives.

This study illustrates how Chen Dawai and Salander redefine the traditional concepts of good and evil. It sheds light on how narrative ethics are changing and suggests the value of characters who are not necessarily good or evil in illustrating the complexity of human experiences. It ultimately dares readers to rethink what it means to be a hero or a villain, especially in an era of uncertainty.

Keywords: moral ambiguity, anti-hero, Chen Dawai, Lisbeth Salander heroism, villainy.

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1.1 INTRODUCTION:

The distinction between heroism and villainy is becoming more hazy in modern narrative. Conventional narratives frequently depended on sharp divisions between good and evil, establishing a binary that influenced readers' ideas of justice and morality. Characters might now occupy ethically ambiguous areas in modern narratives, nevertheless, where their motivations, actions, and personal histories are difficult to categorize. By analyzing two characters who defy the accepted definitions of heroism and villainy—Chen Dawai from *Blackhat* and Lisbeth Salander from *Stieg Larsson's Girl with a Dragon Tattoo*—this dissertation, *The Shades of Grey: Redefining Heroism and Villainy in Chen Dawai (Blackhat) and Salander*, aims to investigate this grey area.

Heroes and villains have played an important role in the structuring of stories throughout literary history. Classical literature frequently makes a clear line between the two, with villains standing in for the opposite—evil, greed, and cowardice—and heroes representing virtue, courage, and justice. Iago from Shakespeare's *Othello* and Beowulf from the Anglo-Saxon epic serve as prime illustrations of this dichotomy. Iago's villainy is characterized by his nefarious manipulation of others for his own benefit, whereas Beowulf, as a hero, battles to save his people and is praised for his courage and commitment. (Jones 23.) Literary character development mirrors the shifting definitions of heroism and villainy. Picaresque novels, such as *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *The Life of Guzmán de Alfarache*, which first appeared in the 16th century, are early examples. A roguish yet alluring character, the picaresque lived in a corrupt environment and frequently committed immoral acts to survive. These figures

were not heroes in the conventional sense; rather, they were early examples of antiheroes who disobeyed moral standards (Dunn 45). The novel became the most popular literary genre ²¹ in the 18th century, with works like Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* having protagonists who questioned the rigid moral dichotomies of earlier writing. The protagonists in these books combined aspects of heroism and villainy, reflecting a rising concern in the complexity of human nature (Watt 217).

The Romantic era saw the rise of the Byronic hero, which brought with it damaged and intensely troubled figures like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights'* Heathcliff. Although these characters frequently displayed ethically dubious actions, they were nevertheless heroes in the sense that they played a major role in the story and underwent difficult difficulties (Smith 44). As existentialist and postmodern narratives started to question the very essence of morality, the distinction between heroism and villainy grew even more blurred in 20th-century literature. The classic hero-villain distinction has been further broken down in contemporary literature and movies, giving rise to antiheroes and morally nuanced antagonists. ³ Characters such as *Walter White from Breaking Bad* and *Tony Soprano from The Sopranos* show how morality is no longer presented in black-and-white in modern tales. Characters instead exist in a grey area where, depending on the situation, their acts may be seen as either heroic or wicked. This change is indicative of a wider social realisation that morality is a subjective concept that is impacted by circumstances, culture, and individual experiences (Bailey 61).

As stories started to examine the intricacies of morality in contemporary life, this development mirrors greater societal shifts. The development of cybercrime and technical advancements in the twenty-first century have given this moral complexity a

new dimension. Cybercriminal characters, such as Salander in *Girl with a Dragon Tattoo* and Chen Dawai in *Blackhat*, work in areas where ethics, technology, and the law converge. They are a reflection of a society in which digital technology has evolved into a means of exploitation as well as an empowerment tool. Exploring the hazy boundaries between heroism and villainy has been increasingly popular in cybercrime fiction, as hackers like as Salander challenge conventional ideas of right and evil through their actions in the digital realm. Both characters operate in fields that are characterised by moral difficulty, such as cybercrime and obtaining justice by illicit methods. In *Blackhat*, Chen Dawai—who hacks for both personal and professional reasons—is presented in a way that evokes both fear and admiration for his skills. But in order to bring about justice, Salander navigates a society rife with institutional corruption and misogyny using her unique hacking abilities and her own moral compass. The dissertation compares and contrasts these two characters in order to examine how they reinterpret heroism and villainy in both their individual narratives and in broader social contexts.

The enigmatic antagonist Chen Dawai from Michael Mann's 2015 movie *Blackhat* is a prime example of the contemporary, ethically dubious villain. Chen Dawai uses technology to further his objectives, which include upending international infrastructures and obtaining personal financial benefit. He seems like a classic criminal at first glance, using cybercrime to jeopardize social stability. However, his intentions go beyond simple wealth or a thirst for mayhem. A critique of the power dynamics present in global capitalism and the part technology plays in upholding these control structures can be found in Chen Dawai. Lisbeth Salander, the protagonist of Stieg Larsson's movie *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*, offers a striking contrast to Chen Dawai, though both characters operate within the world of

hacking. Salander is a hacker and vigilante who seeks justice for herself and others, particularly women who have been victims of abuse and institutional neglect. Unlike Chen Dawai , who operates primarily out of self-interest, Salander's motivations are deeply personal, rooted in her own traumatic experiences and a desire to protect the vulnerable.

1.2 Research Objectives:

The study aims to address the following objectives-

- To examine the actions, motivations, and social contexts of Chen Dawai and Lisbeth Salander.
- To uncover how these characters subvert conventional ideas of heroism and villainy.
- To investigate the consequences of their intricate moral identities for modern narratives.
- To enhance the understanding of the changing dynamics of heroism and villainy in storytelling in the films respectively.

1.3 Research Question:

How do the morally ambiguous characters Chen Dawai from *Blackhat* and Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* challenge traditional notions of heroism and villainy, and what does such portrayal reveal about the evolving nature of these concepts in contemporary storytelling?

1.4 Hypothesis:

Characters like Chen Dawai (Blackhat) and Salander (Girl with a Dragon Tattoo) are ethically unclear, challenging traditional notions of good and evil with their complex actions and motivations, blurring the lines between heroism and villainy.

1.5 Rationale:

The growing intricacy of narrative structures and character portrayals in contemporary storytelling serves as justification for this study. Characters in classic literature were frequently idealized depictions of moral opposites: villains stood for the worst aspects of humanity, while heroes stood for perfection. However, literature has changed along with society. Characters that blur the lines between heroism and villainy, such as Chen Dawai and Salander, show a greater understanding of the intricacies and ambiguities of morality in the real world. Examining how contemporary narratives undermine and challenge conventional moral frameworks is essential in today's globalized and interconnected world, where one's actions can have far-reaching effects. The goal of this study is to rethink the way society perceives heroes and villains by examining how morally questionable people create a more authentic and approachable representation of mankind. Through an analysis of two characters who challenge conventional moral frameworks—Chen Dawai and Salander—this study seeks to contribute to the broader discussion on evolving concepts of morality and identity in contemporary stories.

1.6 Scope of the Research:

This study will compare and contrast Chen Dawai and Lisbeth Salander, emphasizing how each character challenges conventional stereotypes. Salander, the socially isolated but ethically motivated hacker in Larsson's Millennium trilogy, and Chen Dawai, a senior official in the Chinese military's cyberwarfare branch in *Blackhat*, provide a singular chance to examine how the boundaries between heroism and

villainy are becoming increasingly hazy in the digital age. Despite coming from various story settings, these individuals have one thing in common: they defy social expectations and conventions. The study will look at how their stories depict their deeds, motives, and moral choices, highlighting the intricate relationships between justice, the law, and individual ethics.

1.7 Literature Review:

Modern-day narratives are shifting from good versus evil to depicting heroes and villains in different ways, reflecting the changing nature of their themes. Contemporary characters are now positioned in a moral quandary, defying the established norms of literary heroes and villains. This chapter examines the existing literature that focuses on character depictions and dynamical shifts, particularly in the areas of cybercrime and anti-heroes. This review examines how characters like Chen Dawai and Lisbeth Salander challenge conventional archetypes by analyzing both film and literature. The review will tackle themes such as anti-heroism, the intersection of morality and technology, and how cybercrime narratives can shape character development. By examining literature from different perspectives, such as postmodernism and gender studies, the review will uncover the gaps in current scholarship on the complexity of digital-age protagonists.

1.7.1 In relation to Hero and Antihero :

In *Hero or Anti-Hero?* Eldridge examines the changing nature of journalistic identity in the context of digital journalism in *Narratives of Newswork and Journalistic Identity Construction in Complex Digital Megastories* (2017). He focuses on how journalists are portrayed as heroes or anti-heroes in extensive, intricate digital news stories. The article explores how the boundaries between conventional journalistic standards and modern issues—like the impact of digital platforms and public

involvement in news production—are becoming increasingly hazy. According to Eldridge, these changing dynamics make the heroism that has historically been associated with journalists more difficult to understand, portraying them as anti-heroes negotiating moral conundrums and credibility concerns in the digital age. The study emphasizes how important it is to have a sophisticated grasp of journalistic identity in light of the evolving news production environment.

In *Anti-Heroism*, Igor Prusa explores the concept of anti-heroes as central figures in modern narratives, characterized by their moral ambiguity and rejection of traditional heroic ideals. Prusa argues that anti-heroes challenge societal norms by embodying a blend of flawed, often self-serving traits alongside moments of empathy or justice. This complexity allows audiences to question conventional morality, as these characters reflect the nuances of human behavior. Prusa traces the evolution of anti-heroism through various literary and cinematic examples, highlighting how this figure subverts classic hero-villain dichotomies, ultimately contributing to a richer understanding of heroism in contemporary storytelling.

In *Female Anti-Heroes in Contemporary Literature, Film, and Television* (2016), Amato explores the rise of complex female anti-heroes, challenging traditional gender roles and moral archetypes. The study delves into how these characters subvert conventional expectations of female protagonists by embracing moral ambiguity and flawed behavior, much like their male counterparts. Amato argues that these figures reflect shifting societal norms and offer nuanced portrayals of women that go beyond the dichotomy of hero and villain. The work provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of female anti-heroes, demonstrating their growing prevalence in modern storytelling across various media.

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In *Heroic Mice and Villainous Rats: An Analysis of Heroism in Children's Films* (2023) Hannah Sophie Schiffner examines the representation of heroism through animal characters, particularly mice and rats, in popular children's films. Schiffner explores how these creatures, often associated with specific traits, are used symbolically to reflect societal notions of good and evil. She argues that the heroic mouse and the villainous rat are deeply rooted in cultural perceptions of size, cleanliness, and social roles, shaping the audience's understanding of heroism and villainy. Through close analysis of iconic films, Schiffner highlights how these animal characters serve as vehicles for teaching children about courage, morality, and resilience.

In *Naming Edward Snowden's Actions As 'Heroic' or 'Villainous': Implications for Interpreting First Amendment Trends* (2015), Susan K. Opt explores the polarized perceptions of Snowden's actions, analyzing the broader implications for First Amendment interpretations. Opt examines the language used to label Snowden as either a hero or a villain, arguing that such designations shape public discourse and legal precedents related to free speech and whistle blowing. The article underscores the importance of these narratives in influencing societal views on government transparency and privacy, while also highlighting the fluidity of heroism and villainy in contemporary contexts of political dissent and civil liberties.

1.7.2 With reference to Cybercrime and Cyberpunks:

The New York Times review of *Blackhat* (2015), by A.O. Scott, highlights the film's portrayal of cybercrime within the context of a globalized world. Scott notes the movie's attempt to merge the technical realm of hacking with a traditional thriller narrative, starring Chris Hemsworth as a skilled hacker released from prison to track

down cybercriminals. While the film attempts to blend action and intelligence, Scott criticizes its execution, particularly its lack of depth in character development and its reliance on generic plot-lines. The review underscores how *Blackhat* struggles with balancing technical jargon and accessibility for general audiences, ultimately rendering its high-stakes narrative less engaging. The film's exploration of technology's role in modern villainy and heroism aligns with broader themes of moral ambiguity in cybercrime. Scott suggests that while the film presents a visually compelling concept, it fails to deliver a coherent, impactful story due to its superficial treatment of complex issues like cybersecurity and the characters' motivations. Scott's review underscores *Blackhat's* potential but also critiques its inability to fully explore the moral and ethical dilemmas tied to its cybercrime plot, providing a nuanced lens through which to view the evolving narratives around heroism and villainy in contemporary cinema.

In *The Posthuman Ethos in Cyberpunk Science Fiction*, María Goicoechea explores the depiction of posthuman identities in cyberpunk literature, emphasizing the transformation of humanity through technology and its ethical implications. Goicoechea argues that cyberpunk narratives often challenge traditional humanist ideals by presenting characters who blur the lines between human and machine, forcing a redefinition of what it means to be human. Drawing on works like *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner*, the article analyzes how cyberpunk fiction critiques the social, political, and existential ramifications of technological advancements. Goicoechea contends that these texts illustrate a posthuman ethos, where the boundaries of human experience are continually reshaped by cybernetic and artificial entities, questioning both human agency and identity in a rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Mahan explores how hackers are portrayed in German media as multifaceted, heroic characters in *Hackers as Heroes in German Film and Television (2023)*. According to Mahan, these figures frequently straddle the hazy boundary between morality and legality, representing the conflict that exists today between institutional authority and individual agency. Mahan uses a variety of films and TV shows to show how hackers are increasingly portrayed as heroes who defy social conventions and government authority. The book explores the cultural relevance of hacking in influencing public conceptions of power and justice, critiques contemporary technological landscapes, and shows how hacker personas have evolved from merely adversarial to multifaceted heroes.

Global Criminology: Crime and Justice in the Globalized World (2014) provides a thorough examination of how crime is seen and addressed in the worldwide community. Examining transnational crime, the influence of globalization on criminal behaviour, and the new issues facing criminal justice systems worldwide, the book is edited by noted criminologist Dr. K. Jaishankar. The interdependence of local and international criminal activity is emphasized by tackling both classic and modern types of crime, including cybercrime, terrorism, and people trafficking. The writers emphasize the necessity of international collaboration in the fight against crime as they examine how globalization affects criminal laws and policies.

1.7.3 With respect to change in Literature :

Philip Leonard examines how globalization has impacted literary output in his 2013 book, *Literature After Globalization*, examining how it has shaped the structure and content of literature in the modern era. In order to portray an increasingly interdependent and interconnected global world, he looks at how writers address

issues of identity, cultural interchange, and geopolitical changes. In examining how writers handle the intricacies of cultural hybridity, migration, and power relations in their works, the study examines how economic and technical globalization has affected literary practices. Leonard's method provides insightful information about how literature is evolving in the age of globalization.

Philip Gillett's 2013 book *Film and Morality* examines the relationship between moral education and cinema, emphasizing how films may be used to present, examine, and occasionally even question moral quandaries. Gillett highlights the intricate relationship between deontological laws, consequential ethics, and virtue ethics as he explores the development of cinema from its early fairground beginnings to its contemporary function in influencing society ideals. Hollywood productions and avant-garde films are among the examples used in the book to discuss the moral conflicts that exist within genres, the impact of cultural settings, and how films either reflect or defy prevailing ideas.

Emre Ahmet Seçmen's edited book *Analyzing Ideology and Narratology in Film Series, Sequels, and Trilogies (2024)* explores the many levels of cultural importance and meaning that are woven into cinematic storylines. The book looks at how films' sequential storytelling reflects and shapes cultural, social, and political views in addition to providing entertainment. It exposes the nuanced ways in which ideologies are created, maintained, or destroyed by examining narrative structures, character arcs, and thematic continuities throughout several film series editions. For scholars, researchers, and students interested in the relationship between cinematic ideology, psychoanalytic analysis, and narrative complexity, this scholarly book is an invaluable resource. □

The way that classical stories and old cultural elements are remade and interpreted in contemporary cinema is examined in Martin M. Winkler's 2001 book *Classical Myth and Culture in the Cinema*. Greco-Roman mythology's lasting impact on cinema is examined in the book, with particular attention paid to its narrative, thematic, and symbolic contributions to cinematic storytelling. By means of essays written by a variety of academics, the anthology examines a wide range of films, from epic historical plays to contemporary adaptations, demonstrating how classical myths are re-framed to speak to current social and cultural issues. Winkler's collection highlights the dynamic interaction between the language of film and ancient mythology, highlighting the latter's function in forming and preserving cultural memory.

Through a compilation of pieces by different academics, Mark T. Conard's 2006 book *The Philosophy of Film Noir* examines the existential and moral foundations of the genre. The book explores issues including ambiguity, alienation, and the human condition, examining how noir films' visual and narrative styles represent these ideas. Based on philosophical viewpoints from thinkers such as Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus, the articles analyse how noir subverts conventional cinematic conventions and depicts moral complexity. Both moviegoers and academics curious about the relationship between philosophy and film will find Conard's compilation to be a stimulating resource due to its multidisciplinary approach.

Peter Carruthers, Stephen Laurence, and Stephen Stich's 2005 book *The Intrinsic Mind: Structure and Content* integrates viewpoints from cognitive science, psychology, and philosophy to examine the current knowledge of intrinsic cognitive structures and mechanisms. By offering strong justifications and supporting data for

the presence of domain-specific intrinsic structures that influence human cognition, the book refutes the idea that the mind is blank. Leading academics who address subjects like modularity, mental development, and the interaction between nature and nurture contribute to it. The collection advances the discussion of human cognitive architecture by providing a detailed understanding of the ways in which intrinsic components contribute to language, reasoning, perception, and social cognition via the examination of empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.

1.7.4 About the characters Chen Dawai and Salander:

The figure of Lisbeth Salander from The Millennium Trilogy is examined as a feminist avenger within the rape-revenge narrative in Fredriksson's research, *Avenger in Distress: A Semiotic research of Lisbeth Salander, Rape-Revenge and Ideology*. Fredriksson uses semiotic analysis to look at how Salander reclaims agency after being victimized, challenging social conventions and established gender roles. The essay challenges the rape-revenge genre's ideological connotations, emphasizing how it may both strengthen and stifle feminist debate. While Salander challenges traditional depictions of victim-hood and femininity, Fredriksson contends that her portrayal also runs the risk of encouraging violence as a remedy, posing serious concerns regarding the ideological foundations of vengeance tales in modern media.

On paper, Michael Mann's cyber-thriller *Blackhat* is a bold approach to a never-before-seen type of story, but the reality was much less exciting — at least according to *Todd McCarthy's* review in *Variety*, which panned the film for its muddier-than-smooth execution and story. McCarthy feels that the story is too complicated and has no impact, though he does like Mann's unique stylistic approach to visuals and moody photography, primarily during the action sequences. In those comments that trolled

Chris Hemsworth for playing a great hacker, he pointed out his performance was badly cast. The film seems pertinent as it takes up cybersecurity threats, but its impact is undercut by its thin characters and emotional irrelevance. *Blackhat*, McCarthy concludes, is ultimately a visually arresting but narrative hobbled work in Mann's canon.

In her review *Lisbeth Salander: Redefines Heroines for a New Century*, Laura DeMarco examines how Lisbeth Salander, the heroine of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, deviates from archetypes of feminine heroism, forming a new heroine for a new generation. Here DeMarco finds Salander's more morally ambiguous traits—her emotional stuntedness, her complex morality, her fierce independence—to resonate with a contemporary audience interested in characters who subvert traditional ideas of femininity. The review notes Salander's actions, which were molded by a traumatic past, that make her a fighter in what was a patriarchal world, one in which the female protagonist does not play the victim. So he conclude that Salander's rebellious spirit and complicated identity offer a 21st-century version of heroism, a multi-faceted female figure who subverts conventional gender roles.

In her article *Salander the Superhero*, Robin S. Rosenberg describes the special features Lisbeth Salander encompasses that cannot be found in an ordinary superhero. Salander, Rosenberg contends, may not have any superpowers, but her amazing hacking ability, fierce independence, and underlying ethical framework make her a superhero for our times. Salander's relentless drive for justice, achieved sometimes through unconventional or ethically dubious means, frees her from conventional definitions of heroism and anti-heroism. This article showcases her strength, along

with her dedication to battling personal and institutional wrongs, and provides a nuanced definition of what we call a superhero in the modern era.

Pamela Rutledge considers the character of Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* as the survivalist archetype of an unlikely hero in her article *Unlikely Heroes: Resilience with a Dragon Tattoo*, arguing that her independence and subversion of gender roles makes her a feminist force. Rutledge asserts that it is Salander's defiance of societal norms rather than any strict adherence to them that makes her a hero, especially when it comes to confronting the injustices she suffers. Yet her characterization is successfully set by her traumatic past, and by her forming into a skilled and morally unambiguous figure. Rutledge shows how Salander's resilience comes from being adaptable; she survives by being able to protect herself and those she loves, and this provides a new lens for what it means to be a hero in contemporary storytelling. The article reinforces the themes of self-determination and resilience, likening Salander to a heroine for the digital age, free of traditional gender roles and societal obligations.

1.7.5 Observation and Gap:

The reviewed literature highlights the evolving nature of anti-heroism and complex identities, particularly in the context of modern narratives and media. Eldridge (2017) and Prusa focus on journalistic and general anti-heroes, while Amato (2016) and Lyons (2021) explore gender and moral ambiguities in media representations. Additionally, Goicoechea (2015) and Mahan (2023) expand this discourse into cyberpunk and hacker figures. While these works emphasize the fluidity between heroism and villainy, there is limited exploration of how these complexities manifest within cybercrime narratives, specifically regarding the psychological and socio-

political motivations driving characters in cyber contexts. A gap exists in connecting anti-heroism to cyber narratives, such as in *Blackhat* or characters like Chen Dawai, and examining how technological challenges and ethical dilemmas redefine traditional notions of heroism and villainy in a digital landscape. Further research could address how digital environments shape the moral ambiguities of anti-heroes.

1.8 Chapter Overview:

The first chapter titled 'Introduction and Literature Review' gives a brief account about the traditional notions of hero and a villain and also provides an overview of both the movies as well as both the characters of the movies respectively. It introduces the research argument, the objectives which the research aims to address, the rationale behind the topic, and scope of the research. The chapter also explores the existing discourse about both the movies. It also observes the literary discussions which contribute to this research and identifies the lacuna in the existing literary articles. The second chapter titled 'Theoretical Framework' introduces the theory of anti-hero and postmodernism to analyze both the characters. The third chapter titled 'Chen Dawai :A Complex Anti-hero' critically analyzes the character and establishes how the character is blurring the lines between a hero and villain. The fourth chapter titled 'Salander: A redefined villain' explores how the character of Salander subscribes to the notions of being a villain. The fifth chapter titled 'Challenging the binary: A comparative analysis' will show how both the characters defy the traditional notions of being a hero or a villain and how they become an anti-hero or an anti-villain. The last chapter titled 'Conclusion' winds up the research with the idea that both the characters in the respective movies are different from the traditional notions of a hero and a villain.

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CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories for analyzing two complicated characters—*Chen Dawai* from *Blackhat* and *Lisbeth Salander* from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* —are covered in this chapter. These individuals don't conform to the conventional notion of heroes or villains. We may better understand how postmodernism and anti-hero theory function in today's stories, which frequently question the conventional distinction between good and evil, by using these theories.

2.1 An Overview of Postmodernism:

Postmodernism, both as a literary and philosophical movement, eschews grand narratives and absolute truth and celebrates ambiguity, fragmentation, and the collapse of traditional forms. In the context of heroism and villainy, postmodernism enables us to reinterpret characters that do not function within binary oppositions. Jean-François Lyotard's incredulity towards metanarratives (Lyotard, 1979) emphasizes postmodern scepticism about universal truths, especially in the context of moral judgments, and thus is an appropriate perspective from which to interpret Chen Dawai and Salander. Postmodernism, in the context of heroism and villainy, enables us to interrogate the rigid moralities that make heroes virtuous and villains immoral.

2.1.1 Fragmentation of Identity and Moral Ambiguity:

Postmodernism's emphasis on fragmented identities is central to the understanding of Chen Dawai and Salander as characters. Neither character fits into tidy moral oppositions but contains aspects that refuse to be described as straightforwardly heroic or villainous. Salander, for instance, is both victim of social injustice and vigilante who metes out her own brand of justice through violence. Her own moral code is flexible, adapting to the circumstances she finds herself in. This is a postmodern element, one that emphasizes the collapse of firm oppositions between

moral categories (Jameson, 25). Salander's identity is fragmented by her abusive history, her skills as a hacker, and her role as survivalist warrior in a corrupt world. Fredric Jameson's theory of pastiche (Jameson, 1991) is useful in an understanding of the blurring of heroic and villainous elements in these characters. Kimball's pastiche is blurring of different elements, and in Chen Dawai and Salander we have elements of traditional heroism (skill, toughness) blurred with elements more traditionally associated with villains (deception, manipulation). This hybridity, a postmodern element, collapses the oppositions between traditionally opposing moral categories, and we end up with characters who inhabit a liminal space. Chen Dawai also inhabits a gray moral space as a military officer who frees an cybercriminal. His actions collapse the oppositions between right and wrong, heroism and villainy, and reflect what Fredric Jameson describes as pastiche—a blurring of different elements that do not necessarily fit into traditional shapes (Jameson, 32). In each character, there is a blurring of elements more traditionally associated with heroes (skill, toughness) and villains (deception, manipulation), resulting in hybrid figures who refuse to be stabilized by moral expectations.

Lisbeth Salander's personality is the ultimate postmodern fragmentation, her identity constructed from several, sometimes contradictory roles. She is, in turn, a hacker, an abused victim, and a vigilante. Each of these roles presents a different facet of her identity, none of which fit into traditional heroic or villainous archetypes. Instead, her identity is fluid, constantly shifting to accommodate her situation and personal experiences. Chen Dawai from *Blackhat*, is also a representation of the fragmentation of identity among postmodern characters. Like Salander, Chen Dawai lives in a world where traditional legal and moral frameworks no longer hold. He is neither fully villain nor fully hero, instead living in a moral space defined by pragmatism and survival. Chen Dawai, exists inside the law and order framework. While his abilities are criminal in nature, however, his motivations are more complex. This dualism in his actions is representative of what Linda Hutcheon calls "postmodern irony" where characters are complicit in and resistant to the systems they subvert (Hutcheon 48). Chen Dawai identity as a hacker is not fixed; as he does not get involved in hacking directly in the movie.

2.1.2 Deconstruction of Traditional Heroism and Villainy:

Postmodernism dismantles conventional opposites—heroism and evil, as it happens—is a pervasive theme. The postmodern worldview, heavily influenced by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, opposes conventional notions and structures. In no way does postmodernism see heroism and evil as fixed or essential aspects of a character, but rather as a call to examine how the character roles of heroism and evil are constructed by social, cultural, and narrative forces. Derrida's theory of deconstruction is essential in understanding the way in which traditional hero-villain dichotomies are reversed in postmodern texts. Deconstruction of meaning and language shows that binary oppositions such as heroism and villainy are not inherent but constructed by a system of signs that can be reinterpreted or deconstructed (Derrida 43). In the case of characters like Chen Dawai and Salander, the process demonstrates the way in which their actions and motivations break down the hero/villain dichotomy and make these terms fluid and context-specific.

In the film *Blackhat*, the character Chen Dawai is not first described as a hacker behind bars, but as someone in the military with knowledge about cyber warfare. From the beginning, he is acting within the parameters of legality, but his actions throughout the film testing the standard paradigms of moral sensibility. Initially, his presence as a law-abiding officer trying to stop cyber crime makes him an uncomplicated character. However, as things progress, Dawai definitely becomes more complex in his character development. Dawai recruits Nicholas Hathaway, a convict and a hacker, as a former college roommate - to battle a cyber-terrorist at an international scale, leaving Dawai's role somewhat "sticky" as he is riding a line between law enforcement and dealing with a crime. Over the course of the film, Dawai's transformation dismantles the counter-heroic view of likelihood of good versus bad - villainous. Dawai's character is motivated by pragmatic-leaning values, rather than purely moral values, as he maneuvers to stop a larger threat. He is willing to push the boundaries and play with the rules of sorts, leveraging Hathaway's illegal skills and experience to outsmart a greater adversary. Dawai is not acting on a matter of justice but acting from a place of survival, execution of tactics, and mental competition. For this reason, Dawai complicates and embodies Linda Hutcheon's description of postmodern ambivalence by complicating notions of heroism to the

beautiful of definable action devastatingly ugly in window, skills, tact, and education. (Hutcheon 51)

Lisbeth Salander is a reinterpretation of conventional heroism. As a vigilant hacker, her actions are frequently characterized by brutality and violence, far from the altruistic or empathetic form of heroism in conventional narratives. Her actions are motivated by personal vengeance and not by a need to do justice in the classical sense. This reversal of the heroic stereotype is reflected in Derrida's contention that any system of meaning contains the seeds of its own deconstruction. Salander is not the archetypal hero, but her actions serve to underscore the tenuous and arbitrary nature of the hero/villain dichotomy. She is both at different times, depending on the perceptions of other characters and the reader. Furthermore, Derrida's theory of *différance*, that meaning is always deferred and contextual, is also evident in the changing responses of the audience towards both Chen Dawai and Salander in their respective stories. Neither of these characters has fixed moral identities; rather, their actions lead the audience to constantly redefine heroism and villainy. This flexibility is an indication of the postmodern deconstruction of determinable, fixed categories and identities (Derrida 11).

2.1.3 Foucauldian Power Structures: Heroes and Villains as Social Constructs:

Michel Foucault's analyses of power relations and social organization further complicate the postmodern critique of heroism and villainy. Foucault argues that power is not so much the domination or control that one group imposes upon another but is instead diffuse and intrinsic to the social structure and institutions (Foucault 90). This model of understanding is particularly relevant in the case of figures like Chen Dawai and Salander, whose moral selves are developed through their interactions with and resistances of institutional power.

In *Blackhat*, Chen Dawai villainy stems from a system that criminalizes hacking. However, when the same institutions that had once incarcerated him hire him to help battle an even worse evil, his character shifts. Foucault's theory would state that Chen Dawai shift from hero to anti-hero is less a change in moral character and more the ways power constructs and reconstructs his identity in relation to social needs and threats (Foucault 101). The government, once an antagonist, is a friend, in a

way demonstrating how power reconstructs characters into heroes or villains based on context. Chen Dawai deeds in this regard are neither heroic nor villainous; they are understood in light of institutional power and shifting social needs. The figure of Lisbeth Salander is a manifestation of Foucault's theories of power dynamics and social regulation. As a victim of systemic abuse, Salander's reactions to her oppressors challenge the dominant power relations that have victimized and marginalized her. Her status as a vigilante is both a reaction to and a rejection of these institutional structures. Salander operates beyond the law not out of inherent wickedness, but because the system of law has ultimately failed to safeguard her. Foucault's critique of institutional power explains why Salander's actions, though marked by violence and illegality, are presented as justified within the discursive structure. Her struggle is not merely against individual enemies, but against the larger societal institutions that perpetuate injustice (Foucault 124). This critique of legal and moral power further erodes the dichotomy between heroism and villainy, reproducing the postmodern critique of absolute moral definition.

The evolving concept of heroism and villainy along the prevailing power paradigms facilitates the existence of the postmodern anti-hero—beings who defy all assigned moral codes. In contrast to their traditional peers, postmodern anti-heroes like Hathaway and Salander lack the idealized features that define the classic heroes (Rosenberg and Coogan 7). Hathaway is motivated by survival instincts alongside intellectual incentives of outwitting a threatening adversary. Salander is in pursuit of justice that is deeply connected with her individual trauma and survival, making them anti-heroes whose complex moral paradigm defies the simple hero-villain oppositional paradigms.

2.1.4 The Postmodern Anti-Hero: Embracing Complexity:

The postmodern anti-hero is of great help in understanding heroism and villainy in a new way. Unlike classical heroes who are defined by virtues like courage, justice, and righteousness, anti-heroes are morally complex figures who lack any of the idealized characteristics that define classical heroes (Rosenberg and Coogan 7). Chen Dawai and Salander are both archetypal examples of such a character, whose motivations, actions, and moral choices sidestep the simplistic definitions of heroism and villainy.

Chen Dawai , for example, is not motivated by some grand ideal to save mankind but by the need for survival and intellectual stimulation at outwitting a more malevolent hacker. His skills, while required to prevent disaster, are also the skills that led to his imprisonment. This kind of morally dubious position places him firmly in the anti-hero category, marked by his faults and pragmatic approach, as he is more motivated by necessity rather than by any sense of idealistic responsibility (Rosenberg and Coogan 12). The postmodern development of the anti-hero is part of a broader cultural movement toward complexity, where heroes are no longer ideals of virtue but multifaceted characters shaped by their surroundings. Salander is also a prototypical example of the postmodern anti-hero. Her experiences of trauma and systemic oppression inform her rigorous approach of meting out justice. Her actions are not motivated by a selfless desire to save others; instead, they are the result of a very personal need for revenge and survival. Her moral complexity and inability to fit into conventional frameworks of justice challenge conventional expectations of heroism. In the view of Christopher Vogler, the moral complexity entailed in the anti-hero reaches audiences more convincingly today, who might experience the world with similarly ambivalent eyes (Vogler 9). In Salander's case, her heroism is not defined by altruism but by her ability to resist and challenge the power structures that have attempted to oppress her. This resistance, though violent and illegal, redefines her as an anti-hero in the postmodern world, abandoning the simplistic dichotomies of good and evil.

2.2 The Anti-Hero: A Postmodern Redefinition of Heroism and Villainy:

The anti-hero is a figure who has come to prominence in contemporary literature and film. They allow us to perceive the complex and ambiguous path of moral identity in contemporary narratives. Unlike the classical hero, who is typically the epitome of society's perception of what it means to be good, brave, and virtuous, the anti-hero does the opposite. In contemporary narratives, the anti-hero lives in a society that disregards the simplistic notion of good and evil or hero and villain. They are flawed characters who perform dubious actions and challenge social conventions, yet manage to win the sympathy and loyalty of the audience. In contemporary narratives, the anti-hero is representative of

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the fractured and messy nature of contemporary life. The clear morals of past heroes of classical or Romantic literature have been abandoned in favor of uncertainty and contradiction. As Linda Hutcheon states, postmodernism “undermines the idea of coherent and unified subjectivity” (Hutcheon 42), and the anti-hero is representative of this fragmentation. Unlike classical heroes, whose identities and moral convictions are unproblematic, the anti-hero’s motivations for behaving are often self-serving, ambiguous, or rooted in personal suffering rather than the greater good.

This section looks at how Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Chen Dawai from *Blackhat* represent being a postmodern anti-hero. Both characters act in ways that are both noble and evil, placing them in ethically dubious situations. Chen Dawai and Salander are driven by their want to live, exact retribution, or meet their basic necessities rather than by conventional notions of justice or good behaviour. Their actions reflect a postmodern world with no clear-cut answers, but only grays. Because of this, they are good models of how postmodernism has changed what it means to be a hero or a villain today. This section will utilize the concept of the anti-hero to examine how these characters cause us to question what it means to be a hero or a villain. Their actions are not so clearly defined as good or bad, and their motivations for acting challenge simplistic moral definition. Instead, they exist in a realm of ethical nuance, reflecting the postmodern suspicion of grand narratives and universal truths. As Philip Zimbardo states, “the anti-hero is a reflection of a culture that no longer subscribes to clear moral distinctions and instead embraces moral relativism” (Zimbardo 35). This study will illustrate how the anti-hero of postmodern film and literature resists traditional moral and ethical positions, ultimately providing a greater understanding of heroism and villainy.

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2.2.1 The Rise of the Anti-Hero in Postmodern Literature:

Moments of the “Anti-Hero-esque” in post-modern literature are a rather striking feature that acts against the mindset where previous literary trends saw heroism in a different light. In ancient and Romantic times, heroes were often elevated into idealized figures fused with societal virtues such as being brave, having moral fortitude, and being honorable. In contrast to this, the anti-hero of the postmodern era boldly challenges these norms by accepting vagueness, ethical ambiguity, and egoism as inherent to human nature. The inception of the anti-hero can be seen as the result of various shifts that take place in the cultural and philosophical realm of the period, especially with regard to its rejection of grand narratives, its adoption of fragmented identities, and questioning of universal truths.

While post-modern anti-hero figures are commonly characterized by flaws and their deeds seldom seem ethically dubious, traditional heroes typically represent the gods with extraordinary powers. The characters of a post-modern anti-hero, for instance, may hint at being somewhat egoistic and cynical in the one line that sums up their temperament since they are more motivated by their own desires than by feelings of justice or altruism. The fact that the contemporary audience loves them despite their flaws is not the least of these factors, though. As observed by Robert Giddings that a post-modern anti-hero “closely approaches a council, which is more and more excluded of the traditional structures of power, authority, and morality entirely” (Giddings 54). These characters are similar to the actual human situation in the modern world, where the majority of people live and are plagued by uncertainties and questions. The distinction between good and evil, as well as between right and wrong, is becoming less and less sharp. The acceptance of anti-heroes in postmodern literature is only one element that relates to broader philosophical and cultural trends. Postmodernism’s profound mistrust of meta-narrative, or those broad, trans-historical explanations that aim to explain the human predicament forever. “Postmodernism is incredulity towards metanarratives,” according to Jean-François Lyotard (14). The anti-hero shares this mistrust and is inclined to avoid conventional tales of ‘good’ and ‘evil’(hero/villain) in favour of individual redemption and free will. Traditional heroes, who are those who strive for the greater good or have a common purpose, are the antithesis of anti-heros. Furthermore, postmodern anti-heroes confidently confuse

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the hero from anti-hero conflict. Despite their sporadic acts of kindness, these behaviour is typically motivated more by retaliation or self-interest than by a moral desire to make amends and protect others. This is demonstrated, for instance, by Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and the Blackhat Chen Dawai. Both operate illegally and take all necessary actions to obtain what they want. Nevertheless, they continue to enjoy widespread popularity because, in the end, one almost hopes that their acts are justified because they are all the result of an unethical or corrupt system. "A rise of the anti-hero is indicative of a society so post-modern that the colour lines are somewhat shrouded and we no longer choose between good and evil but shades of grey" according to Philip Zimbardo (Zimbardo 35).

A fundamentally critical element of the postmodern anti-hero is their broken identity. Rather than the monolithic, integrated heroes that frame earlier literature, postmodern anti-heroes are usually portrayed as characters in constant self conflict or caught between warring aspects of self. This fragmentation mirrors the postmodern view of the self as porous and plastic — a shifting, embodied notion engrained by milieu forces both internal and external to the self. A point that Linda Hutcheon makes in saying, "postmodern literature often battles the coherence or stability of identity, undermining identification with unified, individual self" (Hutcheon 88). The anti-hero with his shades of grey moral & inner turmoil is a potent emblem of this postmodern predicament. Also, postmodern anti-heroes are common in stories that often dismiss heroism entirely as a whole. The characters are frequently thrown into gray moral spaces where there are no easy answers presented, challenging both audience and characters to decide for themselves what course of action is right. As Leonard Wilcox notes, "postmodern anti-heroes force us to confront the limitations of conventional morality and to acknowledge the messy, contradictory nature of human existence" (Wilcox 124). So the anti-hero functions as a critique of this neat binary morality, which so often animates hero-tradition stories. The emergence of the anti-hero in postmodern literature as such is a substantial redefinition of hero and villain. These characters are a retelling in popular form of that very postmodern murkiness. While the anti-hero subverts this duality of good and evil, giving a people who refuse to see the real world as black or white portrait of human nature that we encounter and want today in our complex broken society.

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This narrative change is best exemplified by Chen Dawai performance in *Blackhat*. He operates inside the law and outside the law at the same time which shows that he does not maintain the hero/villain dichotomy. But when it comes to dealing with a more significant cyberthreat, his knowledge is invaluable. Postmodern narrative is typically characterized by this transgression of the traditional hero-villain dichotomy. "Neither totally heroic nor wholly wicked, but a multifaceted person fashioned by circumstances, whose acts transcend simple moral categorization" (Zimbardo 33) is how Philip Zimbardo describes the postmodern anti-hero. This postmodern ambiguity is exemplified by Chen Dawai moral complexity, which combines aspects of criminality and valor. In a similar vein, Lisbeth Salander challenges conventional notions of heroism. As a "social misfit, a hacker, and a survivor of terrible trauma," Salander operates outside of the bounds of conventional morality (DeMarco 45). Her methods are frequently illegal and aggressive, driven more by personal vengeance than by the need for justice or other people's safety. She is hardly a villain, though, because she takes harsh action against those who do injustice, particularly against women. Salander's moral ambiguity makes him a quintessential anti-hero, representing the postmodern rejection of absolute morality.

2.2.2 Personal Motivations vs. Traditional Moral Codes:

For a postmodern anti-hero, old-fashioned moral rules are subordinate to reasons of self-interest. And the skewed pursuit of vengeance that Lisbeth Salander engages in in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, for example, is clearly a case in which she pursues justice to serve her own agenda, rather than society's. One of the main characteristics of postmodern tales is how a good story of adventure, admittedly, has a hero that distinguishes it from a conventional heroes-change in the motivation of the anti-hero. Traditional heroes are usually motivated by moral righteousness, duty, or justice. Often difficult or selfless, their actions are driven by a higher moral code or ethical standard that aligns with the societal consensus of right and wrong. In contrast, postmodern anti-heroes, such as Chen Dawai in *Blackhat* and Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, are motivated by personal desires, trauma, or pragmatism, often rejecting or subverting traditional moral codes. This fundamental

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shift from collective moral ideals to individualistic motivations serves as a reflection of postmodern skepticism towards universal truths and ethical absolutes.

In classical literature, heroes like Odysseus or King Arthur abide by explicit, codified moral paradigms that govern their behavior. Such frameworks tend to be embedded in larger social, religious, or cultural ideals. The basic structure of a mythic tale is outlined by Joseph Campbell (1956) as to involve a protagonist embarking on an adventure, a quest of sorts, which transforms the individual and benefits others as well (Campbell 45). Saving a kingdom, defending the innocent, upholding justice: Traditional heroes act in ways aligned with a greater moral good, a good that transcends their own self-interest. However, such models disrupt in postmodern accounts, where those kinds of transcendental moral frameworks are treated with suspicion, if not outright rejection. In contrast, they act on personal motivations that put them in battle with conventional moral codes. Instead of following some societal sense of duty or ethical righteousness, these figures operate in morally ambiguous areas in which personal survival, revenge or emotional catharsis trumps collective moral good. Postmodern characters, in the words of Sarah Kofman, "are not defined by a universal moral framework, but rather by their rejection of such a framework and their refusal to accept it. Instead, they manufacture their own moral codes, born of personal trauma or desire" (Kofman 62). For example, one of Lisbeth Salander's central motivations in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is vengeance in its rawest sense: those who have hurt her have done so, and she wishes to see them punished for it, much more than she wishes society to become more just itself. Although her actions are technically illegal, violent and often morally questionable (her hands do get bloody, after all), they are justified by her code of ethics, forged in the fires of her traumatic past dealing with abuse and injustice.

This tension between individual desires and established moral dictates echoes a more general postmodern assertion that there are no absolute truths or universal ethics. In a postmodern world, "the idea of a stable, objective reality, including the reality of moral or ethical absolutes, is undermined" (Baudrillard 28). Such characters as Chen Dawai and Salander serve as embodiments of this postmodern repudiation of metanarratives as they attempt to progress through a world without a moral compass. Topsy-eyed from flinching at the drumbeat of violence in the film business today, and

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from scrolling through one Netflix binge next exchange to the next, the movie-answering anti-hero keeps our gaze riveted, giving us a new way of seeing things that would otherwise feel stultified by societal paradigms of good and evil. Chen Dawai's actions in *Blackhat* further illustrate this move away from traditional moral imperatives to personal motivations. Chen Dawai is a little hacker, an octopus attached to the Internet, who operates on the edges of legality and engages in criminal activities. But he is not just greedy or evil; he has a desire to break down corrupt systems and protect himself and others he loves. This morally ambiguous position underscores the friction between self-interest and social ideals of justice. Philip Zimbardo explains, "the anti-hero's defiance of traditional moral codes causes us to question the validity and relevance of those codes in a fragmented, postmodern world"(Zimbardo 41). Unlike many movie villains, Chen Dawai does not easily fall into categories of good and evil.

In addition, the anti-hero's embrace of more nihilistic attitudes and rejection of traditional moral codes often reflects a sense of disillusion with societal institutions that are frequently depicted as corrupt or ineffective within postmodern literature. The postmodern anti-hero's moral ambiguity suggests, as Linda Hutcheon has argued, that "he is a deep skeptic regarding the authority and legitimacy of societal structures"(Hutcheon 57). Both Chen Dawai and Salander work outside of the legal and institutional frameworks, not out of some root villainy or even sociopathy, but because they believe those frameworks are implicated in the injustices done to them. In the case of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, for instance, Salander's distrust of law enforcement and the legal system is caused by her victimization at the hands of those institutions themselves. Her failure of traditional moral codes, then, is a survival mechanism in a life that has failed her. The personal vs. societal tension is a common theme in postmodern narratives, where anti-heroes must come to terms with the death of absolutes and navigate a world where such a thing is increasingly difficult. Characters like Chen Dawai and Salander are in this sense not merely rebels against society: they're manifestations of a postmodern epistemology that challenges the idea of stable, universal moral codes. Personal motivations, however self-referential, expose the weaknesses and failings of the larger social structures that used to provide moral certainty.

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This tension between personal motivations and conventional moral codes within postmodern anti-heroes such as Chen Dawai and Salander reflects a wider cultural movement towards moral relativism and suspicion of global ethical standards. These roles interrogate traditional notions of good versus evil, providing a more sophisticated and subtle understanding of human nature. In chasing their individual desires, they reflect postmodernist belief in personal truths not beholden to the grand narratives that once guided society, embodying that the idea that the lines between good and evil have begun to rust.

2.2.3 Moral Ambiguity: The Blurring of Heroism and Villainy:

Moral ambiguity, where the distinction between good and evil is less obvious than it was in the past, is one of the defining characteristics of postmodern literature. In contrast to the rigid moral norms of earlier literary periods, postmodernist literature permits people and stories to be complicated, ambiguous, and contradictory. Characters like Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Chen Dawai from *Blackhat* are examples of urban anti-heroes who reside in the grey area between good and evil, and readers are made to consider the moral aspects of characters they would not typically agree with. Mainstream narratives presented heroism and villainy in stark, black-and-white terms. The hero embodied societal values and generally carried out a trajectory of righteousness, self-sacrifice, and moral clarity. In contrast, the antagonist was defined by evil intent and actions threatening to the social order or the common good. This resulted in a binary structure of good and evil that acted as a moral compass for the audience, helping them to determine right from wrong. As Joseph Campbell writes in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* the hero's journey is a quest not just for self-discovery but also for the discovery of a higher moral truth the ultimately benefits society (Campbell 89). But postmodern literature challenges this binary, creating characters who possess heroic as well as villainous attributes, even at the same time.

Chen Dawai is part of this moral ambiguity in *Blackhat*. He is a hacker and his morals might not be 100% legal but they are in the name of the greater good, that is, he wants to expose the fraudsters and bring corrupt who manipulate powerful organizations to justice. His methods — illegal hacking, deception and, at times, violence — put him at odds with the law, painting him as a villain. Yet, his actions

are motivated by and build towards an idea of justice, bringing into question the definition of his character as a typical villain. It challenges these binary constructs by making us question the terms through which we perceive heroism and villainy, challenging us to reflect on the nuance of real world ethics (Gurevitch 54). No less ambiguous is Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Salander seeks personal justice in her own way, and especially against people who have victimized others or exploited them. However, her methods are often brutal and illegal, from hacking to physical violence. The people at the heart of her violence, though without question the violent people she kills, the criminals of her history, the men who willfully sexually assault women, these men, too, exist outside the frame of moral society. And that puts Salander in a murky middle ground where her actions do not lend themselves to just being written off, one way or the other, as unambiguous good or evil. David Denby writes that "Salander's complex moral code, shaped by her traumatic experiences, forces readers to confront uncomfortable questions about the nature of justice and whether ends justify means" (Denby 76). Her borderline evil willingness to lie, manipulate and, if all else fails, betray, or kill, to get what she wants, suggests a postmodern take on the relative nature of morality as something that is conditional or historical rather than self-evident.

This obfuscation of the distinction between hero and villain within works of postmodern literature is indicative of a larger cultural trend towards moral relativism wherein ethical choices are determined not by universal imperatives, but by personal biases and circumstances. This relativism strikes at the very heart of the idea of an objective moral order, proposing instead that morality is socially constructed and context dependent. Herein lies the importance of Jean Baudrillard's treatment of perhaps the best-known of these forms, his theory of simulacra, which is best to illustrate that question and reflects on the combination of material and moral collapse common with postmodern ideas that led to the inability to discern between representation and reality (Baudrillard 34). It is in this light that the anti-hero, who possesses qualities of both hero and villain, emerges as a marker of the postmodern condition, in which the lines of morality are becoming increasingly permeable and nebulous. In addition, often the postmodern anti-hero's moral complexity mirror a profound sense of disillusionment with traditional institutions of power and authority, which they see as thoroughly corrupt or morally compromised. Chen Dawai and

Salander both operate outside the limits of the law, not because they are villainous but because the legal and government systems in which they are embedded have broken down. In *Blackhat*, the hacking of Chen Dawai is portrayed as a kind of rebellion against the unchecked power of corporations and government institutions that abuse people's trust and get away with them. Likewise, Salander's skepticism of the legal system is borne of her own abuses and institutional betrayal.

Liotard famously described, was probably the first to see that postmodernism's institutional critique of grand narratives also extended toward broader attitudes toward authority (Liotard 23). From these two figures emerges a grittier vision of a hero, someone who moves in his own, darker light, someone who acts outside a strict moral code. In contrast to earlier literary heroes, who sought to navigate through established ethical systems (usually defined in theological or cultural terms), postmodern anti-heroes undermine or abandon these frameworks altogether. Instead, they forge their own moral codes, shaped by personal experience, trauma or survival. In Zimbardo's words, noting that "the anti-hero's rejection of traditional codes of morality...is a statement of postmodern rejection of grand narratives and acceptance of individualism and moral complexity" (Zimbardo 43). Lucky it's not modern day, where these beardless men couldn't be hired for nothing, and no one would let them get anywhere near their aprons, but Salander and Chen Dawai are operating on their own sense of justice, one no matter how deviant it would be by the standards of both books outside of their respective moralities marks a consistent sense of right and wrong. Their characters' moral ambiguity, embodied by Chen Dawai and Salander, also mirrors a cultural fascination about flawed and complex people. In an age when time-honored moral quarters — religion, government, the law — ring hollow to many, popular anti-heroes speak to us because they personify the ethical quandaries and conflicts of contemporary life. Something that John Gray points out perfectly when he states, "the postmodern anti-hero is appealing precisely because they are not bound by the simplistic moral binaries of good and evil; instead, they navigate a world where the lines between the two are increasingly blurred" (Gray 61). This grey area enables readers to sympathize with individuals who, however tragic or flawed, mirror the intricacies of what it means to be human.

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This transformation in the conception of moral ambiguity is foreshadowed in postmodern literature, with the blurring of heroism and villainy. Chen Dawai and Lisbeth Salander are examples of characters that challenge traditional binaries and instead adopt a fluid, situative approach to ethics that embodies the postmodern rejection of universal moral truths. Although morally ambiguous, their actions are driven by a sense of justice or a will to live, challenging readers' preconceived notions of good or bad. This is indicative of the postmodern condition: moral ambiguity; and ambivalence, and moral vacuity, as postmodernism challenges the previous era's ideas of the normal, sick, and moral.

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Chapter 3

Chen Dawai : A Complex Anti-Hero

Chen Dawai in Michael Mann's *Blackhat* (2015) stands out as a several-sided character capturing the traits of an anti-hero in the cyber-thriller genre. Unlike conventional heroes who are obviously defined by moral clarity, Dawai works in the grey areas between good and evil, driven by motives that expose his multifaceted personality. By closely examining his dialogues across the film, this chapter deconstructs Dawai's depiction as an anti-hero. Every part analyses important film scenes where Dawai's speech reveals his complex character and questions traditional heroism.

3.1 The Unconventional Hero: Dawai's Introduction:

Chen Dawai in Michael Mann's *Blackhat* (2015) is presented not as a typical hero but as a person who operates in the moral grey area characterizing much of the cyber-thriller genre. Unlike traditional heroes who follow rigorous moral standards, Dawai negotiates the complex and sometimes ethically hazy realm of cybercrime with a pragmatism that values results above moral purity. His choices and deeds distinguish him from the usual protagonist and clearly place him in the anti-hero category—a person who combines both heroic and morally dubious traits.

Dawai's first appearance is especially revealing. Dawai is instantly placed as a key player in the story since he is a former classmate and colleague of Nicholas Hathaway, the protagonist of the movie. His first notable conversation comes when he asks Chinese authorities for authorization to hire Hathaway, a convicted hacker, in their battle against a threatening cyber-terrorist. By saying so, Dawai questions traditional approaches to law enforcement and defends his choice.

"I need him. He's the best chance we have of stopping this."(*Blackhat* 00:14:23).

Dawai's character is shown in several significant ways by this opening conversation. First, it emphasizes his intelligence and inventiveness; he knows that

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Hathaway's hacking abilities are vital to their goal even if it means violating traditional norms. It emphasizes, second, his desire to work beyond legal limits, a characteristic of an anti-hero. Although his ultimate aim is for the greater good, his approach implies that Dawai is willing to compromise his ethical values for the sake of expediency by using an incarcerated criminal for assistance. Dawai's first appearance makes it clear that he's not your typical hero. His character is all about dealing with tricky moral choices that blur the lines between right and wrong. As we watch his story unfold, we see that Dawai is not in it for himself—he really gets the tough issues of the online world. His approach might be a bit unconventional, but it puts him at the center of the battle against cyber-terrorism. Dawai's character really shakes things up when it comes to what we think of as heroism. He does not just stick to the rules or follow a strict moral code. Instead, he's ready to make tough choices for what he sees as the greater good. This makes him an interesting anti-hero who mixes up the ideas of right and wrong, law and crime.

3.2 Loyalty and Brotherhood: Navigating Personal and Professional Tensions:

As the movie progresses, the bond between Chen Dawai and Nicholas Hathaway takes center stage, highlighting the clash between personal loyalty and work duties. Their relationship is key to the story, showing the mixed feelings that shape Dawai's character. Having been good friends and colleagues in the past, this shared history is what leads Dawai to spring Hathaway from prison. He knows Hathaway's hacking skills are crucial for the job, but there's also a personal loyalty that makes things tricky for Dawai when it comes to his professional role.

A key moment that shows Dawai's inner struggle happens during a crucial talk between him and Hathaway. Dawai expresses concern about the dangers of Hathaway getting back into hacking. When he warns Hathaway, "You go back to your old ways, and it's over for both of us" (Blackhat 01:03:15), he's not just acting like a government worker trying to manage a risky situation; he's also a good friend worried about Hathaway. This moment shows the tough spot Dawai is in: he has to keep his friend safe while making sure they succeed in their mission to stop the cyberterrorists. Dawai and Hathaway have a strong brotherly bond, but it often leads to some tension. Dawai knows that Hathaway can be his own worst enemy, and he

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worries that getting involved could really backfire. Still, Dawai is determined to help his friend, even if it means bending some rules. He gives Hathaway more freedom than the authorities would like, risking his own job and safety just to let Hathaway work more effectively.

“I’m giving you this chance, don’t waste it.” (Blackhat 01:04:10)

This really shows how Dawai struggles to be both a friend and a professional. He’s trying to protect Hathaway from getting in trouble while also feeling frustrated with the situation. Dawai is trying to find a balance between his loyalty to his friend and his responsibilities on the job as things keep unfolding. Dawai acts like an anti-hero, especially when it comes to his relationship with Hathaway. Unlike typical heroes, who usually stick to their duties and may cut ties with friends for the greater good, Dawai values his bond with Hathaway, even if it risks the mission. His loyalty to Hathaway shows a different side of him. Instead of being the traditional detached hero, Dawai lets his feelings shape his choices. Their shared past adds more layers to Dawai’s character. Hathaway’s history isn’t just a job risk; it’s a personal challenge for Dawai. Throughout the story, Dawai wrestles with the possibility that freeing Hathaway might backfire, yet he chooses not to abandon his friend. By involving Hathaway in the mission despite the danger, he highlights themes of friendship and responsibility. Dawai’s reasons for his actions go beyond just practicality; they reveal a deeper emotional side to him.

As an anti-hero, Dawai deals with the inner conflicts that come with that role. His loyalty to Hathaway is both a strength and a weakness. It shows his human side and his readiness to support those he cares about, but it also makes him vulnerable. In his conversations during the film, we see him torn between his responsibilities as a government worker and his commitment to an old friend. He navigates a gray area, driven more by practical needs and loyalty than by strict morals. This clash between personal and professional responsibilities plays a big role in Dawai’s growth as an anti-hero. He’s not entirely good or bad, but a character who can handle complex emotions and ethical dilemmas. His loyalty to Hathaway complicates his mission, forcing him to balance his feelings with his job. This ongoing struggle is what makes him a classic anti-hero, and his actions and dialogue really flesh out his character in Blackhat. By letting his past influence his choices, Dawai steps away from the

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typical hero mold and embraces a path filled with uncertainty. His mix of loyalty and practicality places him in a distinct spot in the story, where he constantly faces the aftermath of his decisions. His conversations reflect this tension, offering a closer look at his complicated character as he tries to balance friendship with duty.

3.3 Strategic Mind and Moral Ambiguity: Dawai's Role in Combatting Cyberterrorism:

Chen Dawai is all about strategy, but it's his moral choices that really paint him as a complex character in *Blackhat*. As the fight against a serious cyberterrorist heats up, it's clear that Dawai is more practical than concerned about rules or ethics. He knows that the usual methods of justice just don't cut it when it comes to dealing with the tech-driven threats we face today. This makes him a classic anti-hero—he's ready to bend the rules if it means stopping the bad guy.

One standout moment is when Dawai has to make a tough call and green-lights a risky, non-traditional approach. The cyberterrorist, Sadak, has already caused major damage with his attacks, and the usual law enforcement strategies aren't doing the job. Dawai realizes that the situation is too serious to stick to the standard playbook, so he pushes for bolder actions. He knows that traditional ways aren't going to cut it when it comes to taking down a cybercriminal like Sadak. He also touches on a bigger issue: that the police and government often struggle to keep up with the fast-changing world of cybercrime. His choice to go off-script and try more extreme measures shows his anti-hero side, where he's willing to blur moral lines to get justice. The tension really ramps up when Dawai decides to share classified info with Hathaway, which is usually off-limits. This happens after it becomes clear that Hathaway needs sensitive government data to catch Sadak. You can see Dawai is really conflicted about it, knowing that this risky move could lead to misuse of the information. In a tense exchange with his superiors, Dawai defends his decision:

"We either trust him to do the job or we all fail." (*Blackhat* 01:45:12).

This conversation really shows how Dawai thinks strategically and also highlights the tough moral choices he faces. He knows the risks—Hathaway's a known hacker, and giving him sensitive info could backfire. Still, Dawai takes that chance because he realizes the usual methods won't cut it. His remark, we either trust

him or we all fail, really points out how desperate their situation is and how far Dawai is willing to go, even if it means bending some rules. In this moment, Dawai comes across as a character who lives on the edge of the law. He is not driven by a sense of right and wrong but by what needs to be done. He's ready to overlook ethics and trust someone with a shady past if it means they can defeat a much bigger threat. This really captures the essence of an anti-hero—someone who knows that in a world filled with cybercrime, there are no straightforward answers and that sometimes you have to break the rules to do what's necessary.

Dawai's moral complexity really stands out during a heated talk with Hathaway. They talk about what their actions mean. Hathaway, who is been dealing with his own tough choices in the film, challenges whether what they're doing is right. Dawai answers with a straightforward yet strong line:

"We do what we have to do. It's not about being right, it's about winning."(Blackhat 01:52:08).

This line sums up Dawai's view of the world. He does not care about whether his actions are right or legal; his main focus is winning the battle against Sadak. Dawai shows he's willing to make questionable choices because he knows what is at stake. For him, there's no room for idealism when facing such a tricky enemy. He sees things in gray areas, where the usual ideas of right and wrong don't mean much in cyber warfare. Dawai's mix of strategic thinking and moral grayness really comes out in a key moment of the film when they get closer to Sadak. As they get ready to take him on, Dawai makes a big call to mess with the system, taking advantage of loopholes and ignoring the usual rules to get the upper hand. This moment shows how he is willing to use the same tricks he is fighting against—deception and bending the rules to reach his goals. It highlights how Dawai, as an anti-hero, operates in a world where hero and villain often look the same. While talking with his sister Lien, who's been helping out with the investigation, Dawai thinks about the tough choices he's had to face. He says:

"I didn't choose this fight, but now that we're in it, we do whatever it takes."(Blackhat 01:58:44).

This line shows that Dawai feels pretty resigned about his situation. He is not really after fame or a strong sense of right and wrong. He feels stuck and has to bend his morals to get ahead. When he says he did not choose this fight, it highlights how he's been pushed into a corner, becoming an anti-hero not by choice but because he had no other option.

In the end, Chen Dawai is an anti-hero because of his strategic thinking and his readiness to deal with complicated moral choices. He is practical, always weighing the ups and downs of what he does, and ready to let go of his principles for a bigger goal. In the cybercrime world, where usual justice does not really work, Dawai's way shows how you sometimes have to operate in the gray areas. His conversations in the film show his inner battle with these tough choices, making him a standout character in *Blackhat*. By accepting the complexity of his role, Dawai gets viewers to think about the thin line between being a hero and a villain, and what justice really means in a tech-driven world.

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Chapter 4

Salander: A Redefined Villain

Few characters in modern literature have captivated readers and critics attention as much as Lisbeth Salander the lead character in Stieg Larsson's *Girl With A Dragon Tattoo* . Salander is a character that both appeals to and unnerves audiences because of her unique punk-goth look, brilliant mind and difficult past. She differs from the typical literary heroines or villains in that she is morally ambiguous she is neither the pure villain nor the selfless hero. Rather her existence lies in the intricate gray area that defies conventional notions of villainy heroism and morality.

By introducing a complex character whose actions defy easy classification Salander's story blurs the line between good and evil. Salander frequently takes the law into her own hands and employs extreme violence as a form of justice operating outside the bounds of traditional morality. Her violence however is motivated by a deeply rooted sense of right and wrong that is frequently derived from her experiences as a victim of abuse and injustice rather than by personal gain power or cruelty—qualities that are typical of traditional villainy. It is difficult to distinguish between justifiable retribution and callous vengeance because of her decision to exact revenge on those who have wronged her particularly the men who have abused or injured women. By dissecting how Salander redefines villainy through her defiance of social norms her unreserved use of violence as a tool for justice her fight against patriarchal

oppression and her rigorous personal moral code this chapter will examine the complex nature of Salander's character. We will look at Salander's role in the changing literary tradition of anti-heroes and how she challenges convention by redefining the villain archetype to suit a more nuanced and modern moral philosophy. We seek to comprehend how Salander both embodies and transcends conventional ideas of villainy by looking at her unusual morality relationship with violence resistance to patriarchal power structures and personal code of ethics. Although radical Salander's ideas raise significant issues regarding the nature of justice morality and power in a society where legal systems frequently fall short. Salander's distinct brand of vigilantism will also be examined in light of how it challenges more general societal problems especially systemic corruption and gender-based violence.

This chapter will examine Salander's role in the Millennium series and make the case that she is a complex character who completely defies the dichotomies of villain and anti-hero. By embodying both the destructive power typically associated with villainy and the protective justice-oriented traits of a hero she redefines what it means to be a villain in contemporary literature. By doing this she forces readers to reevaluate the lines separating heroism and villainy as well as right and wrong ultimately changing how we perceive these ideas in the context of modern literature.

4.1 Rejecting Conventional Morality:

A character like Lisbeth Salander in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* has her own morality, which often requires her to violate current social standards and legal conventions. Her reasons are never fear of facing legal retribution or being shunned by society but a highly personal sense of justice. Salander's moral system is markedly different from those of most archetypal heroes or villains; she's not interested in upholding the moral code of society or committing amoral acts out of self-interest. Salander is something other than an anti-traditional morality, but she is fascinated by vengeance for wrongs against herself and those who resemble her. Salander's behaviour in her response to the attack which her legal guardian, Nils Bjurman, unleashed upon her is one of the most striking examples of her transgression of conventional ethical boundaries. For instance, in a harrowing scene from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) directed by David Fincher, Salander is subjected to

sexual domination by a man, Bjurman, charged with overseeing her welfare (Fincher 01:12:00-01:18:00). Bjurman uses the power at his disposal to exploit Salander's identity as a ward of the state, believing that she will not respond violently to provocation, or that even if she does, she will pay the consequences. But Salander violates the social convention that victims of assault should be passive. Instead, she decides to dispense her own justice.

In the wake of this assault, she exacts a horrifying revenge upon Bjurman, ensnaring him, overpowers and physically disables him. In one of the more terrifying of (many) examples, she scrawls "I am a rapist pig" on his chest and stomach (Fincher 01:24:30-01:26:30). This violence is more than just revenge; to her it is a justice, one that Yasumura has never received from the legal system when it fails to protect her from these abuses of power. According to the traditional moral perspective, to inflict such violent and indelible branding of an individual would be considered too cruel and unjust. But for Salander, it's not just about personal revenge but a way to make sure that Bjurman will never be a danger to another woman. And to take matters into her own hands is to redefine what justice is in a way that adheres to her own personal sense of morality, a rejection of cultural norms that dictate she should rely on an ineffectual legal system to set things right for her. Lisbeth's decision to exact revenge on Bjurman is a repudiation of conventional codes of morality and systems of justice. In idealistic narratives, villains always act outside the laws, so they must use violence and lies for evil or selfish ends. Salander is not a performer of evil; she acts out of the reflex of survival, a species of self-defense. "Salander is not exactly a villain in the traditional sense," James Keller writes. It is her refusal to submit to society's rules and willingness to use violence that arises from the knowledge that society's institutions often fail the powerless (Keller 29). Readers or audience members who observe Salander's journey cannot help but question the assumption that "the ends justify the means"—which happens specifically in the hands of those with unchecked institutional corruption and misuse of authority by means of authority. And more broadly, Salander shares a fascination with alternate moralities that often appear at the fringes of the law: her adept hacking skills, for example, which she uses to expose the misdeeds of the powerful.

In the book describing *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Salander frequently hacks into personal computer systems and steals information about those who have

committed evil, such as in the case of the Vanger family, where the father has hidden a lifetime of misogyny and murder for decades. Salander also uses her hacking skills when she conducts a more thorough investigation of the historical archives that she had access to, sifting through thousands of pages of confidential documents, and eventually finding a wide range of evidence that various members of the Vanger family took part in one or more criminal activities (Fincher 01:41:00-01:47:00). This act of intrusion is deemed acceptable for Salander because, after all, this is a job, and a means for her to keep searching for the truth, legality be damned. Such is the framework of Larsson's Salander: her renunciation of normal ethical values is one that speaks not, in the ultimate sense, to a personal choice made by an individual; it is, rather, a practical response to the dysfunction the governing systems contain. The rules of law would define such a thing as criminal, the violation of a person's privacy by a hacker. But her hacking always has a goal of revealing injustices, especially crimes committed against women. For Louise O'Neill, Lisbeth Salander "uses her skills...not for her own personal gain but for the greater good: to get revenge on herself and other women for powerful men" (O'Neill 47). This hack, though, is illegal by the letter of the law, is a vehicle made of means to a higher end of justice that the ordinary law can never bring about.

The final turning point that marks Salander's rebellion against conventional systems of morality comes in the film's ending, when she discovers the serial killer Martin Vanger, who murders many women. Instead of waiting for the police to take the necessary action, Salander steps in and faces Martin on her own. She pursues him in a dangerous chase—ultimately leading to his death in a car crash (Fincher 02:08:00-02:12:00). Sabotaging sexual fantasists and murdering rapists is no job for a solitary humanist, and Salander's decision to pursue a known killer rather than wait for local justice agencies to catch up is a statement of the faith her character embodies: that institutional justice is slow at best and often the leaving of a track, a prolonged trail-marker of bloody failure. What sets her apart from the paradigmatic crime fiction heroes is her own definition of justice — swift, direct and sometimes deadly — who would deem the judicial system fit to take over. Salander's motivations and actions across the film highlight her need to operate outside of the law as well as her belief that in a corrupt and unjust society, the traditional structures of morality break down. By stepping outside of these social norms, Salander re-imagines the figure of villain, situating herself, morally, in a space where hero and villain are

fluidly interchangeable. Her distaste for traditional moral referents underscores the gray areas of morality & justice in a world beholden to inherently dysfunctional power structures where personal survival sometimes requires operating outside of that which is, or ought to be, normative.

4.2 Violence as a Tool for Justice:

Here, Salander's unapologetic approach to using violence as a means of achieving justice is one of her key defining character traits. Salander's violence in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) is not out of cruelty or malice; rather, it is rooted in a desire to assert herself, to reinstate herself as a subject that must be recognized, as well as to seek justice in a world that has failed her again and again. Salander's regrettably gory acts of violence are framed throughout the film as an audience-expanding response to the aggression experienced by herself and others as a kind of radical justice that if placed in a modern moral context makes it much harder to classify the violence of the film into neat pejorative terms of victim versus aggressor. One of the key scenes that showcase Salander's approach to justice through violence is her revenge against her legal guardian Nils Bjurman after his sexual assault of her. This scene is crucial to understanding her character's relationship with violence. After Salander is brutally attacked in Bjurman's apartment and forced to submit to Bjurman's sexual abuse that he wields over Salander with his position of power (Fincher 01:12:00-01:18:00) Salander carefully orchestrates the details of her revenge. She does not simply act on impulse but rather analyses the situation, plotting and executing her revenge to ensure Bjurman never has the chance to hurt her or anyone ever again.

In a later scene Salander appears in Bjurman's apartment carrying a video camera and a taser weapon. Handcuffing him to the bed and tattooing him and making him feel the way she felt when she was sexually assaulted by him (Fincher 01:23:00-01:25:00). Yet this act of sexual violence shocks and angers by reversing the roles of victim and perpetrator and mirroring the power dynamics of the initial assault. While Bjurman is hog-tied, Salander gives him a permanent mark of a sexual predator by tattooing 'I am a rapist pig' across his chest (Fincher 01:24:30-01:26:30). This violent act serves three purposes: it is a kind of revenge it prevents Bjurman from subjecting others to him it ensures he can never hide his crimes. That Salander

contextualizes his violence in this sequence as a doer as opposed to viciousness is all that makes it so meaningful. By taking control of the circumstance, Salander regains the power that was stripped from her during the assault. Her actions in the film pose serious questions about the righteousness of using violence to achieve justice, even in cases where the legal system fails to protect the very people who were abused. Peter Bradshaw indicates "Salander's violence is measured targeted and always in response to the harm done to her or others it is neither random nor sadistic... She perceives violence to be an necessary for any survival and self-defense"(Bradshaw 34). The other example of how Salander uses violence as a tool for justice is her final act against Martin Vanger the main antagonist of the movie and a serial killer who has been hunting women for decades. After stumbling upon evidence that Martin was behind the deaths of several other women, Salander moves quickly to put the final pieces of the puzzle. She faces him in his house as he gets ready to torture and kill journalist Mikael Blomkvist in one of the most critical moments. Even her willingness to employ violence to serve the purpose of others is demonstrated when she swiftly renders Martin unconscious and frees Blomkvist (Fincher 02:00:00-02:02:00). But it's the following scene that most fully illuminates Salander's complicated relationship with violence. After Martins finds a way to escape, Salander hops on her motorcycle and speeds away to try and pursue him. Over the course of the chase, Martin loses control of his car and ends up crashing while attempting to escape (Fincher 02:08:00-02:12:00). Salander doesn't intervene to prevent the vehicle from catching fire, but she does witness it from afar. While she does not kill Martin intentionally, her refusal to save him when she has the chance indicates that she believes that the man who has caused so much pain deserves death. In this case, the thin line Salander straddles between justice and retaliation is highlighted by her passive role in Martins death. Because Martin's death is the direct result of his own actions and Salander believes his death a justified consequence for the violence he perpetrated on others, her refusal to save him is arguably an act of justice. But it also reveals her pragmatic attitude toward violence because there are times when the only way to catch a bad guy is to shoot him dead.

In Judith Halberstam's theory, the violence that characterizes Salander's actions is a queer resistance that challenges hetero-normative power structures and refuses to fit into hetero-normative ideals of justice (Halberstam 51). Because the legal system has repeatedly failed to protect its most vulnerable, her refusal to

intervene and prevent Martins death can reasonably be seen as her declaration that she will no longer treat the legal system as the ultimate arbiter of justice. In her case against Wennerström the fraudulent businessman who has been playing the financial system for his benefit, Salander shows a third example of using violence as a tool of justice. After hacking into his accounts and attracting evidence of his shady dealings, Salander comes up with a plan to steal his money and ruin his name. Despite the lack of physical violence, Wennerström is doomed to fail guaranteed because of this offensive and strategic move (Fincher 02:25:00-02:30:00). Here Salander's violence is intellectual and strategic as she employs her hacking skills to financially ruin a man whose greed has harmed countless others. Her actions raise the question of whether justice can indeed be served through illicit means in a system where the powerful rarely seem to be held accountable.

In *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Salander's violence is framed at all times as a response to the depravity and violence that surrounds her. She uses her violence to defend herself, and to retaliate against those who abuse their position in power, not for malice or a desire to rule. In doing so she subverts the archetype of the villain, using violence to enact her own sense of justice in a world in which the legal system has failed, not out of malice but for a greater good. Her violence crosses bounds as she partakes of both heroism and villainy. Through his actions Salander compels moviegoers to reconsider the role of violence in the enforcement of justice and whether or not standard morality is always enough to serve the interests of the powerless and disenfranchised. She is framed as a morally complicated character who operates outside traditional hero or villain parameters and works within the framework of violence to protect herself and others often in the absence of any other form of justice.

4.3 Morality Beyond the Law:

Her willingness to accept horrible things happening without it being followed up by horrible things happening to the person at fault is one of Salander's most important character traits. Salander acts violently in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) because she needs to regain control and get justice in a society that has repeatedly let her down, not out of cruelty or malice. Salander's violence is framed as a response to the violence endured by her and others throughout the film, which

places them in a morally complex context that questions the delineation between victim and perpetrator. The scene where she exacts revenge on her legal guardian Nils Bjurman after he sexually assaults her is an important scene that showcases Salander's use of violence as a means for seeking justice. This scene is key to understanding her characters attitude toward violence. Having already been savagely assaulted in Bjurman's place where he works his strength to invoke Salander (Fincher 01:12:00-01:18:00) Salander masterminds her revenge. Instead of just acting impulsively she methodically plots and executes her revenge to guarantee Bjurman can never harm her and anyone else again.

In a later scene, Salander arrives at Bjurman's apartment carrying a video camera and a taser weapon. In the meantime, she gets him handcuffed to the bed, and just to taunt him she sodomizes him with a dildo for revenge (Fincher 01:23:00-01:25:00). Even if this act of sexual violence is shocking and upsetting inverts the roles of victim and perpetrator, in keeping with the power dynamics of the original assault. Once in control, Salander effectively brands Bjurman a sexual predator by tattooing the words I am a rapist pig under his chest (Fincher 01:24:30-01:26:30). This act of violence serves three purposes: it is a form of revenge, it prevents Bjurman from harming any other people, and it ensures he will not be able to conceal the crimes that he's committed. People might directly be a victim of the attack, but Salander gives a clear responsibility in this frame of action, this is what makes the scene so impactful, the clear meaning he gives to his violence as empowerment and not aimless over-zealousness. In seizing control of the circumstance, Salander cultivates the agency stripped away from her during the attack. The acts she commits in the film broach deep questions about the use of violence to achieve justice when the legal system fails to protect victims of abuse.

Peter Bradshaw argues that Salander's violence is calculated, both in that she always acts in retaliation for a harm inflicted on herself or other people, and also because it is not random nor sadistic but a biological necessity she uses for survival and self-defense (34). Another example of how Salander employs violence as a means of justice is in her encounter with the antagonist, Martin Vanger, a serial killer who has been targeting women for several decades. Salander quick to act when she harnesses evidence that Martin killed several women. In a key scene of vengeance, she shows up at his house as he is getting ready to torture and murder journalist one Mikael Blomkvist. This is illustrated when she knocks Martin unconscious almost

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instantly before freeing Blomkvist (Fincher 02:00:00-02:02:00) But it's the scene that comes next that truly illuminates Salander's ambivalent relationship with violence. After Martins escape Salander speeds on the motorcycle to catch him. As he runs away, Martin loses control of his car in the chase and crashes (Fincher 02:08:00-02:12:00). Salander does detach herself from the action, but does not get involved to prevent the car from exploding, only watching from afar. She does not kill Martin intentionally but when she refuses to save him, it proves that she believes no man who brought so much pain deserves to survive. In this instance, it's emphasized by Salander's passivity and unwillingness to kill Martins; the thin line she walks between justice and vengeance. Because Martin dies as a direct consequence of his own lifestyle and because Salander is convinced that the only thing inevitable about his death is its timing, given the violence he has wreaked on others her refusal to save him reads as an act of justice. But it also showed her pragmatic understanding of violence: That sometimes the only way to bring an offender to justice is to slay him.

Like for example Salander's violence is a queer resistance against heteronormative structures of power and a refusal to assimilate to traditional ideals of justice (Halberstam 51). Because as long as the legal system has failed over and over again to provide protection for its most vulnerable citizens, then her refusal to intervene and prevent Martins death is a rejection of the idea that it is the final arbiter of justice. It is in her suit against Wennerström the corrupt businessman who has been falsifying financial systems to his advantage that Salander provides another example of violence as a mechanism of justice. After managing to hack into his accounts and reveal his nefarious activity, Salander sets a plan in motion to embezzle his money and ruin his reputation. There is no real physical violence being used but this is such an aggressive and intentional move that Wennerström is doomed to failure (Fincher 02:25:00-02:30:00). Here, however, Salander's violence is strategic and intellectual as she leverages her hacking skills to inflict financial harm on a man whose greed has damaged countless others. About Amy Cooper: Her actions raise the ethical question again of seeking justice through unlawful means, not least in a system in which the powerful and wealthy tend to evade accountability. Salander's acts of violence is framed throughout *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* as a response to the depravity and corruption surrounding her. She resorts to violence in self-defense and as revenge from those who do abuse their position of power, not out of spite or lust for power.

In this way, she subverts the archetype of the villain as an agent of chaos who uses violence to appeal solely to their own selfish ends, instead using brutality to create her own moral order in a world where the courts have proven inadequate. Her use of violence does not distinguish between the two because she is both hero and villain. Through the character's actions, Salander demanding that the audiences question the adequacy of violence in dispensing justice and the ability of traditional morality to provide justice to the oppressed and the disenfranchised. She is cast as a morally ambiguous individual who operates outside the usual frameworks of heroism or villainy due to her readiness to employ violence to protect herself and others, often when no other kind of justice can be found.

4.4 Salander's Revenge as an Act of Empowerment:

The revenge of Lisbeth Salander is not a simplistic reactionary act of violence; it is a deliberate and controlled act of empowerment. Her vengeance against abuse, subordination, and oppression shows she will no longer be a scapegoat for the actors and systems that would use her to subjugate others. Through this, Salander reclaims control of her life, body, and story. This chapter analyzes how *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* eschews Salander's revenge as an immoral act replacing it instead with one of empowerment that manages to exceed the tropes of victimhood and revenge. Perhaps one of Salander most important revenge scenes is her reaction to her court appointed guardian Nils Bjurman. Salander does not report him to the authorities after he sexually assaults her in one of their mandatory sessions because she knows full well the justice system will fail her like it has so many times before. Instead, she bides her time and plots her revenge. However, when Bjurman calls her in for another session, hoping to take advantage of her yet again, Salander comes prepared with a hidden camcorder, successfully capturing the whole incident on tape (Fincher 01:18:00-01:24:00). That tape is her main source of empowerment against him and this is where she starts to reclaim her power.

Because by far the most important visit as far as introducing us to Salander's evolution from victim to avenger comes in the order we see her go to see Bjurman following the second attack. She is appropriately armed at his apartment with her own implements of revenge: a taser, ropes, a tattoo needle. In a chilling and satisfying role-reversal, Salander assaults a physically powerful Bjurman, literally tying him to

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his bed, before tattooing the words “I am a rapist pig” on his abdomen (Fincher 01:24:00-01:28:00). This serves a double purpose; it punishes Bjurman immediately, by branding him in an irreversible way, and it ensures that he is never able to be a threat to her or anyone else again. Instead of killing or mutilating him, Salander decides to tattoo Bjurman, symbolic proof of how strategically Salander avenges herself. She chooses an eternally emasculating and shameful punishment without killing him, thus making her revenge methodical rather than impulsive. By tattooing Bjurman, Salander reclaims the body as a site of resistance. Tracing the action of Salander’s revenge over the course of the series, the scholar Laura Mulvey explains, “Salander’s revenge is concerned with reversing power relations in terms of bodily control. Where Bjurman previously wielded power over her body, Salander reverses the power dynamic and excises his body with a permanent mark of his crime” (Mulvey 38). This tattoo is also a physical and visual reminder of his abuse, ensuring he can never erase its fact from his own body.”

The revenge Salander takes on Bjurman is not a direct physical violence. She deploys recorded evidence of his assault as a strategic weapon, blackmailing him into submission under the threat that she will expose him if he does not agree to her ultimatum. The implied threat compels Bjurman to relinquish not just control of her finances, but also her status as his ward, which frees her from his guardianship (Fincher 01:28:00-01:30:00). Through his transgression (and the evidence of it), Salander not only acts in self-defense against further abuse, but gains the upper hand with regard to control of her life, her finances, and her freedom. So, her act of revenge is depicted as an action of liberation for herself, not revenge. Salander’s method of revenge against Bjurman is echoed throughout the rest of the story as she aids Mikael Blomkvist in pursuing justice for Harriet Vanger, another woman who has been abused by powerful men. While delving into the sordid details of the Vanger family, Salander discovers that Harriet’s brother, Martin Vanger, is responsible for a string of gruesome rapes and murders. After Martin arrests, tortures and nearly kills Blomkvist, Salander arrives just in time to save him, using a golf club as her weapon of choice (Fincher 02:00:00-02:02:00). As the action is a flashback to her earlier run-in with Bjurman, this is not the first time Salander has used physical might for self-defense, and to shield others, against male assailants.

The new curving fight between Salander and Martin starts to showcase Salander’s unique idea of justice. Instead of just killing Martin while she has the

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chance, she goes home and chases him as he runs. Martin eventually end up losing his car and dies in the explosion (Fincher 02:04:00-02:07:00). While Salander could have slain him on the spot, the narrative makes clear that his death is a natural outcome of his deeds, not an expression of a thirst for revenge. Her need for justice is not a desire to inflict pointless violence, but a need to prevent the dangerous from doing dangerous things. Salander's decision not to kill Martin goes to her moral complexity, as film critic Manohla Dargis puts it, who intones, "Feminism is about choice. She wants control, but on her own terms, so that she doesn't end up playing the part of a sadistic avenger" (Dargis 42). The third instance of Salander using revenge as empowerment comes at the end of the film, when she engineers Hans-Erik Wennerström's financial destruction. After Blomkvist's efforts to take down Wennerström through conventional legal channels don't work out, Salander starts hitting back herself. Under the cover of her new identity, Salander hacks into Wennerström's accounts and embezzles millions of dollars, while simultaneously spilling Wennerström's nefarious deeds to the press (Fincher 02:15:00-02:20:00). This revenge, as with her action against Bjurman, is planned and executed with deliberation. It not only destroys Wennerström but vindicates Blomkvist's earlier probe, and in so doing it is another example of how Salander's own method of doling out the justice she feels has been denied to her is more effective than the legal justice system that had previously protected Wennerström. In the movie as it stands, Salander's vengeance is presented not as a wicked impulse but one of self-empowerment and restorative justice.

With each act of revenge, she reclaims the power she was robbed of by the powerful. My villains are very calculated in what they do, they are set up for a purpose, whether that be to deliver justice that the legal system has failed to provide. Salander's conception of justice is not exactly conventional, but it certainly works when it comes to punishing those who have long evaded justice. Through revenge, Lisbeth Salander progresses from a victim into an agent — and then into a point of view. She sheds the identity of passive victim and empowers herself, rewriting the narratives of her life, and the lives of her aggressors, in real time. Her brand of vengeance is not aimed at causing unnecessary harm but rather mete out justice where the justice system has failed. In doing so, her actions subvert the traditional notion of revenge, making her a morally ambiguous figure whose motives come to lie somewhere on a continuum between hero and villain.

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Chapter 5

Challenging the binary: A comparative analysis

The study of amoral characters in modern storytelling has undermined the traditional dichotomy of heroes and villains, especially with characters such as Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Chen Dawai in *Blackhat*. Both these characters defy conventional norms and make the identification of good and evil amorphous. This chapter contends that Salander and Dawai are both 'grey' characters, transcending the binary model due to their multifaceted actions, underlying motives, and moral ambiguities. Through close analysis of their actions, choices, and the narrative context under which they operate, it is certain that these characters cannot be neatly classified as either purely heroic or villainous.

5.1 Lisbeth Salander: An Avenger with a Moral Code:

Lisbeth Salander is a strange character who cannot be pigeonholed by conventional means. She does not fit into what society expects a hero to be; she does not fit into villainy, either, since she sometimes finds herself doing violent and dark things. In her, one sees a character created by trauma and suffering, who channels her suffering into a specific, though extreme, definition of justice. She is a victim of extreme violence—everything from abuse by her family and rape to systemic oppression—and she will not be defined solely as a victim. She strikes back at a world that has wronged her, and we are forced to redefine our own ideas of morality.

One of the defining characteristics of Lisbeth is her idea of justice. She doesn't live by the standards of the legal system; she develops her own sense of justice, one that is frequently brutal and unforgiving. This becomes evident in the scene in which she pays back her abusive guardian, Nils Bjurman. In a sequence both horrifying and triumphant, Lisbeth flips the script after being sexually assaulted by him. She also tattoo the words "I am a rapist pig" onto Bjurman's chest after she's incapacitated him (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* 00:58:12–00:58:45). This cycle of vengeance muddles the line between victim and perpetrator. Though the audience might sympathize with her plight as a victim seeking retribution, her violent pull

inaction renders her external to conventional heroism, and into morally grey territory. The extent of Salander's hacking skills also amplify the complexities of her character as a grey character. Similar to Blackhat's Chen Dawai, she exploits her skills to break the law and infiltrate systems for her own ends. While hacking into Mikael Blomkvist's computer to gather information on him, Lisbeth obviously could care less about whether her actions are legal or not (The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo 00:31:17–00:31:42). While her interest in helping Blomkvist with his investigation is sparked by self-preservation, and she sees what she does as helping, her methods are still illegal and highly immoral. The fact that she doesn't hesitate to leverage hacking as a tool, even for arguably good causes, shows her readiness to operate outside the law as it suits her. This demonstrates that Salander, like Dawai, lives in a world where morality is fluid and where lawbreaking can be justified by some greater good.

The extent of Salander's hacking skills also amplify the complexities of her character as a grey character. Similar to Blackhat's Chen Dawai, she exploits her skills to break the law and infiltrate systems for her own ends. While hacking into Mikael Blomkvist's computer to gather information on him, Lisbeth obviously could care less about whether her actions are legal or not (The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo 00:31:17–00:31:42). While her interest in helping Blomkvist with his investigation is sparked by self-preservation, and she sees what she does as helping, her methods are still illegal and highly immoral. The fact that she doesn't hesitate to leverage hacking as a tool, even for arguably good causes, shows her readiness to operate outside the law as it suits her. This demonstrates that Salander, like Dawai, lives in a world where morality is fluid and where lawbreaking can be justified by some greater good. Additionally, Lisbeth's personal relationships underline her grey nature. Her connection to Mikael Blomkvist is not mediated by classic romance or friendship. Rather, their connection is built on mutual respect and a common mission. Even as they become lovers, Lisbeth is emotionally aloof; she would rather protect herself from vulnerability. Because of her traumatic past, she displays a form of detachment that makes it difficult to think of her as a purely heroic figure. At one point, she saves Blomkvist's life, electing to help him get out of danger, but her motives are complex and her emotional investment in him is unclear (The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo 2:00:32–2:00:47). While Salander's actions in the films are heroic, they are often

driven by deep personal pain and distrust and as such complicate her character and make her operate in the moral grey.

The core of Lisbeth Salander's character is a profound mistrust of authority. This comes across in many ways over the course of the movie, not least in her dealings with state and law enforcement officials — and, even with Blomkvist. Her distrust comes from her experiences as a ward of the state being abused and betrayed. That background informs her grey morality: she keeps turning traditional power structures on their heads. When it comes to seeking justice, her distrust of the system leads her to hack into government databases and take matters into her own hands. In her mind, the legal system has failed her; she's justified in bending the law or breaking the law to survive, to protect herself. So in the end, Lisbeth Salander eventually lives in the liminal space between right and wrong. Yet although she pursues justice and frequently defends the defenseless, her means are unorthodox, violent and frequently illegal. Her hacking skills, her savage payback on Bjurman and her personal code of justice all suggest a figure who can't be reduced to either of the conventional binaries of hero or villain. In the same way that Chen Dawai operates outside the bounds of traditional heroism in *Blackhat*, Salander serves as both a complex and morally ambiguous figure. In so doing, she pushes our notions of a hero to their limits, reminding us that right and wrong often fall somewhere in between.

5.2 Chen Dawai: A Loyal Brother and Ruthless Operator:

Chen Dawai is the national hero of China as he is a military officer and is placed in the Intelligence department where he monitors the cybersecurity of China. He finds a RAT in the malware and decides to decode the same with the help of Hathaway, his convicted hacker friend, who is released from the prison with a band tied to his leg to keep an eye on him and he was asked to sign some NDA papers before getting released with the help of NSA from the US government (*Blackhat* 00:16:47- 00:22:24). The act of releasing a criminal for using him as a hacker for saving the world from the global threat shows a trait of Dawai functioning in the grey area of characterization as hacking is an illegal act even if performed for the government.

The scene where Hathaway tells Officer Berett, Dawai to get away from the 'crime scene' where he was hacking into the 'Black Widow' software from the NSA and they agreed to move from the space where he was doing an illegal crime . This proves that Dawai was operating from a grey area and was not performing any particular notions of being a hero or a villain because being a police officer he did not directly witness the act of hacking but was indirectly involved in the planning of hacking into the system of NSA (Blackhat 1:14:23-1:14:50). Another instance where Dawai is operating from a grey area is when he receives orders from his superiors to arrest Hathaway and hand him over to the US government but instead he informs his sister and tells her to run away with Hathaway without anyone from the NSA team knowing about it (Blackhat 1:19:40-1:21:12) .His act of taking Hathaway and running from the US Police shows that he is operating from a grey area because as a police officer it is his duty to put criminals behind bars and here he is subverting the notion and making a criminal escape from the hold of the police that too of a different country which can a global threat and his motive behind using Hathaway was saving China from a global threat.

Chen Dawai is quite similar to Lisbeth Salander. He operates in a gray area where good and bad aren't clear-cut. You can't really call him a hero or a villain; he's caught somewhere in between loyalty, ambition, and tough choices. His strong bond with his sister, Chen Lien pushes him to take certain actions, but his methods leave us guessing if we should root for him or be wary. At his core, Dawai sticks to his own rules. He's a skilled hacker, much like Salander, and has made a name for himself by outsmarting systems, avoiding the law, and playing the game with governments. He's really smart, but that intelligence often comes at the cost of ethics. Dawai knows that to get ahead, you sometimes have to bend the rules a bit, and he does it with careful planning. Dawai continuously blurs the boundaries between heroism and criminality, as demonstrated throughout Blackhat. His methods frequently involve illegal activities like hacking, deception, and even aiding criminals, even though his actions occasionally contribute to global security. Because of this, he is a classic example of a character whose decisions don't neatly fall into the good/evil category. Dawai's tale emphasizes on how heroes and villains aren't always obvious in a complex world; sometimes, they lurk in the background, where morality is ambiguous and ends justify means.

To sum up, Chen Dawai is more than just a law-abiding hero or an unjustified rebel. He represents the ambiguous area where ethics becomes a balancing act and motivations clash. His complexity challenges our ideas of what it means to be good or bad in a world that is becoming more complex. He is a character motivated by love, loyalty, and survival.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

The examination of grey characters in contemporary narrative offers a more complex view of heroism and villainy that is not limited to conventional dichotomies - one that captures the complexity of human nature. However this dissertation has sought to interrogate classical narrative frameworks which locate characters within binary structural paradigms as either hero or villain, through its analysis of Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and Chen Dawai in *Blackhat*. Both Salander and Dawai emerge as difficult to classify, classic grey characters, rendering the moral arcs of their respective tales more complicated. The last chapter summarizes the ideas outlined throughout the dissertation and stresses how the figures used are a reflection of the intricacies of contemporary society in which morality is often situational and ambiguous. This shift in character development not only signifies the evolution of storytelling in postmodern literature and media, as highlighted in the conclusion but also points to broader implications regarding the redefinition of heroism and villainy in modern-day narratives.

Focusing on adding evidence for making claim/analysis on the idea of how Salander and Dawai break the binary between good and evil through their multifaceted traits. A survivor of both trauma and abuse, Salander pursues justice in ways that run counter to moral and legal conventions. And although her actions are morally ambiguous, they stem from a basic desire for justice. In the same way, Chen Dawai, a former hacker-turned-government-informant, is faced with dubious moral choices that force the viewer to question what's right and wrong, existing in a moral gray area between personal loyalty and what's best for a greater good. An explicit tension between the presented social and historical circumstances that shape Salander and Dawai's actions is a key focus and has thus underlined the morally ambiguous nature of both characters throughout the dissertation. The lens of Salander's perspective has been heavily colored by her own victimization of sexual brutality, institutional misogyny, and corruption. Her very existence is an act of defiance against the authoritarian masculinity of the system, exposing its shortcomings and flaws with her talents and expertise. Her moral compass is individual justice rather than societal obligation, and her methods — while illegal and often violent — come from a desire to fix the many wrongs she's been a witness to. Chen Dawai, by contrast, is caught up in the globalized cybercrime milieu, in which the lines are

always blurry between what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. His moral position is also complicated by his hacktivism and history as a government informant and black-hat hacker. His decisions are influenced by geopolitical rivalry, personal loyalty and the imperative of being a living thing on a planet where trust is fragile. His morally ambiguous world mirrors the moral quandaries he faces in a world where security, power and technology are deeply entwined. The contextual study of the characters reaffirms the idea that morally ambiguous people are influenced by their situation instead of being fundamentally immoral. The complexity of their environment mirrors their ethical complexity, and to understand their behaviour, one must examine the various social, political and individual factors affecting them.

Chapter 5 Development of Villainy and Heroism in Postmodern Writing The great reversal of expectations and the adoption of cynical detachment from other characters are essential components of the villain and hero dynamic in our modern tales, and reflect a shift of ideas regarding villainy and heroism. Unlike the clear moral spectrum of classical and traditional heroes, postmodern heroes—or more accurately, anti-heroes—are typically portrayed as possessing qualities that undermine conventional heroism. Ambiguities of character such as Salander and Dawai are 어쩔 supposed to be: the postmodern approach is strongly orientated around relativism, ambiguity and the dismantling of ideals.

This shift in narrative interest derives from a cultural disillusionment with master narratives, coupled with the realization that human life is much more complicated than formerly imagined. In the postmodern era of storytelling, heroes are rarely all good or all bad. Instead, they are trapped in a liminal state where reasons, deeds and outcomes have to be viewed through a very complex prism. As discussed in the dissertation, Salander and Dawai are the ultimate representations of this liminality and forces the audiences to question their longstanding notions of justice, ethics and remonstrate. Postmodern narrative also has another trait towards greater awareness of the connections between identity, agency and power. While Dawai's hacker identity is situated in global patterns of power relations and in the age of digital computers, Salander's identities as woman, victim, and avenger-in-chief are at the intersection of gendered politics and legal power structures. It is precisely the outcrossing identities that produce their complexification, so that the hero/villain oppositions become difficult.

Dawai and Salander also fit the grey character type that plays so well in present-day narrative fiction or screen work. It is a sign of a widespread cultural hunger for stories that capture the bundling of different realities. To the audiences of today, characters who are morally ambiguous are more realistic and relatable, reflecting the moral complexities and struggles of everyday life. Second, ambiguous characters challenge the traditional narrative structures that utilize strict moral binary oppositions. Because they are forced to traverse a morally ambiguous landscape where right and wrong aren't always clear, audiences are being challenged to read narratives more thoroughly. This kind of interaction facilitates further exploration of themes like power, justice, and of course human agency. Finally, the role of morally complex protagonists in contemporary fiction indicates a departure from the classic hero's journey of righteous moral clarity and towards narratives of doubt and uncertainty. This not only further enriches the storytelling tradition, but sets up the structure for future exploration of the nature of human agency and moral quandaries in the more flexible world.

Thus, the representation of the heroes and villains like Salander and Chen Dawai indicates the tendency of their coexistence in the new age rhetoric of heroism. By existing in the grey area that straddles good and evil, the characters reveal the complexity of human impulses and the moral dilemmas of modern life. And while their acts are morally dubious, they challenge viewers to rethink the boundaries between hero and villain and imply that they are far more ambiguous than history has had a mind to believe. This dissertation has presented a conceptual model for how grey characters subvert traditional narrative structures, and how their moral ambiguity addresses the nuances surrounding these discourses of justice, power, and humanity.

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