

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In literature, the idea of a hero has always played an important role. Traditionally, heroes are seen as brave, morally upright, and selfless characters who fight for justice and do the right thing no matter what. However, as literature continues to evolve, especially in modern times, not all main characters fit into that classic "hero" mold anymore. Nowadays, many stories feature more complex characters, people who make mistakes, have questionable morals, or act based on personal interests rather than noble causes. These characters are often referred to as anti-heroes.

According to Linda Hutcheon (2006), anti-heroes are central characters who subvert classical heroic ideals by embodying contradiction, ambiguity, and moral complexity, thus challenging readers' expectations of heroism. Anti-heroes are main characters who challenge traditional ideas of heroism by embodying contradictions, moral ambiguity, and complexity. Unlike classic heroes who typically display clear-cut virtues like courage and honor, anti-heroes are flawed and often struggle with internal conflicts and uncertain morals. This complexity forces readers to reconsider what it means to be a hero, as anti-heroes reflect the nuanced reality of human nature, where people are rarely purely good or evil. By subverting traditional heroic ideals, anti-heroes create a more realistic and relatable narrative that challenges audiences to think beyond simplistic notions of right and wrong.

One figure that really fits into the anti-hero category is Captain William Kidd. Historically, Kidd is mostly known as a pirate, and in popular culture, he's often portrayed as a dangerous outlaw who terrorized the seas. But in *The Pirate Hunter*, a historical novel by Richard Zacks, that image is questioned. Zacks dives into historical records and tells a different side of Kidd's story, one where he might not be the villain people think he is.

In the novel, Kidd comes across as a more complicated character. He is an anti-hero, a figure who does not fit the traditional mold of a flawless hero nor a completely evil villain, but someone caught between moral right and wrong. Instead, he's shown as someone who gets caught in political schemes and struggles to survive in a world that full of betrayal and corruption. This makes him a great example of an anti-hero, a character who is stuck in a morally gray area and trying to make the best of a bad situation.

The purpose of this research is to examine the characteristics of the anti-hero as reflected in the character of Captain William Kidd in Richard Zacks' *The Pirate Hunter*. This study aims to identify and analyze the traits that define Kidd as an anti-hero, such as moral ambiguity, internal conflict, and complexity, which challenge the traditional notion of a flawless hero. By investigating these characteristics, the research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how anti-heroes are portrayed in literature, especially in historical narratives that blur the lines between heroism and villainy. This is my reasons for choosing the topic.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1. What are specific characteristics and actions align Kidd with the literary archetype of the anti-hero?
2. How is Captain Kidd portrayed as an anti-hero in Richard Zacks' *The Pirate Hunter*?
3. How does Zacks' portrayal of Kidd challenge traditional depictions of piracy and heroism?

1.3 Objective of the Study

1. To identify the characteristics and actions that associate Kidd with the anti-hero archetype.
2. To examine the portrayal of Captain Kidd as an anti-hero in Richard Zacks' *The Pirate Hunter*.
3. To analyze how Zacks' depiction of Kidd challenges traditional representations of piracy and heroism.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is confined to a literary analysis of Captain William Kidd as portrayed in Richard Zacks' novel *The Pirate Hunter*. The primary focus is on understanding how Zacks constructs Kidd as an anti-hero, a figure who blurs the lines between heroism and villainy. The analysis centers on examining Kidd's character

development, motivations, and actions within the narrative to determine how these elements align with the archetypal traits of the anti-hero commonly found in literature.

In particular, the study explores three major areas in alignment with the stated problems: First, it investigates the textual portrayal of Captain Kidd to understand whether and how Zacks presents him as an anti-hero rather than a straightforward hero or villain. Second, it identifies specific character traits, decisions, and moral ambiguities that connect Kidd to the broader literary tradition of the anti-hero archetype. Third, the study evaluates how Zacks' representation of Kidd challenges established historical and fictional depictions of piracy and heroism, questioning traditional binaries such as good versus evil, lawful versus outlaw, and noble versus criminal.

The scope is limited to textual and thematic analysis based solely on *The Pirate Hunter* and does not include comparisons with other portrayals of Captain Kidd in popular culture, film, or alternative literary works. Additionally, while historical context is acknowledged where relevant, the focus remains on literary interpretation rather than historical fact-checking or biography.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance in several academic and literary contexts. By analyzing the portrayal of Captain Kidd as an anti-hero in Richard Zacks' *The Pirate Hunter*, it contributes to the broader discourse on character construction and moral complexity in historical narratives. The figure of the anti-hero, often positioned between traditional ideals of heroism and villainy, offers a rich field for critical inquiry

especially when examined through the lens of real historical figures such as Kidd, who has long been subject to mythologization and conflicting interpretations.

From a literary perspective, this study adds to the understanding of how contemporary historical nonfiction may employ narrative techniques traditionally associated with fiction to shape character perception. It highlights how Zacks uses these techniques to blur the boundaries between fact and interpretation, casting Kidd in a morally ambiguous light that invites readers to question the reliability of historical judgement.

Furthermore, this research provides insights into how anti-heroic portrayals can reshape the reader's understanding of piracy, challenging the conventional binary of pirates as either romanticized rebels or brutal criminals. By focusing on Zacks' depiction, the study explores how literature can influence public perceptions of historical figures, thereby playing a role in cultural memory and historiography.

For scholars of literature, history, and cultural studies, the study offers a case-specific analysis that can be extended to other works exploring similar themes. For general readers and educators, it encourages a more nuanced approach to reading historical narratives, recognizing the complexity and subjectivity embedded in retelling the past.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing Captain Kidd as an anti-hero in Richard Zacks' *The Pirate Hunter*. The discussion is divided into three main sections. The first explores the literary concept of the anti-hero, including definitions and characteristics. The second discusses how historical figures are constructed in narrative nonfiction.

2.1 Definition of the Anti-Hero

The anti-hero is a protagonist who lacks traditional heroic traits such as bravery, morality, or idealism. Unlike the classic hero, who generally embodies noble values and follows a righteous path, the anti-hero tends to be self-interested, flawed, or morally conflicted. According to Abrams (1999), the anti-hero is the chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest. This statement emphasizes that the anti-hero diverges significantly from heroic ideals by presenting the more troubled and imperfect dimensions of human behavior.

In his broader discussion, Abrams (1999) explains that the rise of the anti-hero is closely related to modern authors' desire to portray characters who reflect real human complexity rather than idealized heroism. Instead of presenting a protagonist who is

consistently virtuous or admirable, modern literature often focuses on individuals who struggle with internal conflicts, questionable decisions, and personal flaws. Abrams emphasizes that such characters function as a critique of traditional heroic models, demonstrating that contemporary narratives prioritize psychological depth, realism, and moral ambiguity over classical ideals.

2.2 Characteristics of the Anti-Hero

An anti-hero is distinguished by traits that diverge significantly from those of the traditional hero. Rather than displaying moral integrity, courage, and idealism, the anti-hero often embodies human weaknesses such as doubt, selfish motivations, internal conflict, and moral ambiguity. These characteristics make the anti-hero more realistic and psychologically complex, as their actions are not driven by noble principles but are instead shaped by personal struggles, emotional instability, or past trauma. Consequently, the anti-hero presents a form of protagonism that aligns more closely with the complexities of human experience.

According to Abrams (1999), the anti-hero is often petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest, and therefore markedly different from the traditional protagonist who typically exhibits moral strength and dignity. He emphasizes that the anti-hero is not merely a flawed hero but a character who fundamentally departs from the classical standards of heroism.

Similarly, Bennett and Royle (2016) explain that the anti-hero is a character who does not operate according to conventional moral principles but instead displays behaviors shaped by ethical ambiguity and internal conflict. They argue that anti-

heroes tend to question or subvert moral norms, frequently making choices that cannot be classified as wholly right or entirely wrong.

Abrams's statement highlights that the defining characteristics of the anti-hero lie in their deviation from traditional heroic expectations. Traits such as passivity, dishonesty, or ineffectiveness illustrate that an anti-hero is not intended to represent moral grandeur or heroic virtue. Instead, these characteristics allow the anti-hero to represent a more authentic depiction of humanity, acknowledging that individuals often struggle with shortcomings, uncertainty, and moral conflict.

Bennett and Royle's perspective complements this by stressing the role of moral ambiguity in shaping anti-heroic behavior. They point out that anti-heroes typically navigate ethical gray areas, with decisions influenced by internal tensions or personal desires. This perspective adds depth to the understanding of anti-heroic figures by showing that the complexity of their moral reasoning contributes significantly to their narrative function. Together, the views of Abrams and Bennett & Royle demonstrate that anti-heroes challenge traditional heroic ideals by offering more nuanced and psychologically rich portrayals of character.

1. Moral Ambiguity

Bennett & Royle (2016) describe literary characters as sites of ethical uncertainty, where readers encounter: contradictions in behaviour, blurring between good and evil and destabilised moral expectations. They argue that literature forces us into ethical hesitation, where meaning is undecidable. Anti-heroes emerge as characters who trouble our moral judgments, resist clear "good" or "bad" categories, and evoke empathy and discomfort simultaneously.

2. Personal Flaws

Bennett & Royle (2016) emphasise that characters are fractured, constructed through gaps, absences, and contradictions, and products of narrative and language, not fixed identities. This aligns with the anti-hero as a character who is psychologically fragmented, driven by impulses, trauma, desire, and not noble or exemplary. They show that flaws reveal how characters: challenge norms, expose the instability of identity, and reflect the complex nature of human subjectivity.

3. Alienation

Bennett & Royle (2016) also highlight the importance of estrangement the pirate as characters feel “at odds with the world”, they inhabit liminal or outsider spaces, and they resist ideological norms. The anti-hero fits this model because they often reject societal laws or expectations, they are outsiders (criminals, pirates, rebels, wanderers), and their identity is shaped through displacement or exclusion.