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# Abstract

The main focus of this project is to investigate the development of the characters of the TV-series *Breaking Bad*. This immensely successful series is revolving around a charismatic character, called Walter White, whose diagnosis of terminal lung cancer led to a series of decisions, which initiated his descent into moral decay. His initial endeavours to secure the well-being of his family for years to come end up having disastrous consequences for himself and the people closest to him.

To give a comprehensive understanding of narrative structure, genre, ethical theory and character analysis, a number of non-fictional texts have been used. These texts were used to provide a theoretical basis for the analysis part of the project in which these theories were applied to specific sequences of *Breaking Bad* in order to understand the characters and their development.

Over the course of the five seasons of the series, Walter is gradually transformed from the protagonist of *Breaking Bad* and into an antagonist. This is happening through a struggle within his personae between himself and his alter-ego, named Heisenberg. As Walter turns more susceptible to disregard moral values, Heisenberg becomes increasingly powerful until the point at which Walter can be regarded as an antagonist.

The narrative structure is used to provide the viewer with information as well as symbolic meanings, whereas *Breaking Bad* has been inspired by the western genre as well as the tragedy in regards to shaping the characters and the narrative. Traits of the western are apparent through values in characters such as Hank and Walter and traits of the tragedy are apparent through the tragic fate of Walter as well as the dramatic narrative that continuously enforces emotional outlets from the viewer in addition to an ending the leaves the viewer relieved rather than in distress.

The character of Jesse Pinkman serves as a contrast to Walter White despite both of them being categorised as anti-heroes. These two characters develop into different directions in terms of empathic improvement; Jesse grows more sympathetic as the series progresses whereas Walter’s level of empathy is decreasing.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction 1.1

Throughout its five seasons, *Breaking Bad* has proved to be an immense television success, winning numerous awards and nominations. AMC aired the first episode in 2008 and finished off the series in 2013. Most of the show is set in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and rotates around its main character Walter White and approximately two years of his life. Walter White resorts to desperate measures, as he starts manufacturing methamphetamine because of his and his family’s situation, which he describes as:

“[…] my wife is seven months pregnant with a baby we didn’t intend. My 15-year-old son has cerebral palsy. I am an extremely overqualified high school chemistry teacher. When I can work, I make $43,700 per year. I have watched all of my colleagues and friends surpass me in every way imaginable and within 18 months, I will be dead.” (*Bit by a dead Bee* 00:25:21 – 00:25:47)

The presumed death sentence of Walter White leads him to live a dangerous double life as his alter-ego Heisenberg. He partners up with Jesse Pinkman, whose experience and connections within the field of drug distribution proves helpful, in order for them to earn the needed money for Walter’s family pay for any expense that may come for many years ahead. He carefully calculates the amount of money he needs to earn before his death to the amount of $737.000. The objective is set but how far Walter White is willing to go in order to achieve the goal, is the very essence of this series.

Rather than emphasizing on the plot, the main focus of this Master Thesis will be on the characters of the show and their development throughout the five seasons of *Breaking Bad*. While Walter White turns himself from “Mr Chips into Scarface” (MacInness 2012) through a series of decisions, some of the shows other characters are transforming as well during the course of the show and all of these transformations will be investigated in this project. Walter’s decision-making, which ultimately makes him lose everything, is revolving around a number of ethical questions that emerge after he is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. His ethical code is interesting to the viewer, because it does not necessarily fit with the ethical code of modern society. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the ethical codes of the other characters would be interesting to engage, especially because his wife, Skyler White, is aware of the methamphetamine production relatively early on in the show. Therefore, it would be interesting to create a graph of the development of the characters. The x-axis will be showing the chronology of the show, whereas the y-axis describes the level of empathy that the common viewer would feel towards the character.

The notion of the anti-hero is particularly interested to measure as well, especially when it comes to Walter White. Why do we, as viewers, feel drawn to anti-heroes on TV-shows such as Walter White in *Breaking Bad*, Dexter Morgan in *Dexter* and Patrick Jane in *The Mentalist*? Are there any differences between such anti-hero characters as abovementioned? And to which degree do we feel empathy with Walter White? This thesis will account for the history of the anti-hero in an intertextual perspective with is roots in film noir and hardboiled fiction. Furthermore, a chapter of discussion will be added, debating whether other characters in *Breaking Bad* than Walter White can be regarded as anti-heroes through their actions and decisions.

The setting of *Breaking Bad* is primarily in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and the desert of New Mexico has a great symbolic significance to the show. Also, the masculinity and self-reliance, which traditionally is associated with the western genre, is radiant through some of the characters of *Breaking Bad.* Therefore, it is relevant to discuss theory of the western genre in this thesis. A number of other genres may be applicable to *Breaking Bad*, however one of the most interesting to discuss, besides the western, is the tragedy. The plot of the show is founded as Walter is diagnosed with lung cancer and his entire fate seems to be a tragic downfall which is why the tragedy, as a genre, is interesting to discuss.

Another interesting concept to deal regarding *Breaking Bad* is the narrative structure ofthe show. The narrative structure of a typical episode of *Breaking Bad* looks as following: every episode starts with either a flash-back or a flash-forward or some other chronologically misplaced scene serving as a teaser or an explanatory factor for the viewer’s understanding of the show. After this, the *Breaking Bad* intro and tune proceeds and then the show continues from where the last episode ended. These narrative tools serve a number of functions that will be analysed later on in this project.

The abovementioned points of discussions lead to the following problem formulation:

## Problem Formulation 1.1.a

How has Walter White been transformed from protagonist to antagonist in *Breaking Bad?* How has his decisions influenced the developments of other important characters of the show? How are the concepts of ethics and morality dealt with through the characters of *Breaking Bad?* Does the narrative structure of *Breaking Bad* help the viewer empathisewith the characters and if so, how?

# Theory and Method 1.2

## Genres in *Breaking Bad* 1.2.a

Trine Breum argues that all regular television watchers have a common knowledge of genre and therefore we build up expectations as the respective film or series progresses as to how it will end. Thus the genre becomes a committing promise to the audience (Breum 2004: 22). However one cannot consider this a restriction because the term ‘genre’ is a distorted concept to grasp in modern days; genres should be regarded as “[…] dynamic rather than static entities […] (Duff 2000: 232) and therefore they change over time, often merging with other genres as well as dividing into subgenres. However there are other factors to be considered in terms of the general television experience; for instance, a family man who has received a death sentence through a terminal illness would likely have different experience watching *Breaking Bad* than most other people because he would be able to relate to Walter’s situation and thus perhaps understand his desperate measures in a different manner than another audience would be able to. Derrida argues in his essay *The Law of Genre* (1980) that texts acts as agents within a frame of genre with a certain amount of freedom so they participate within the genre, rather than being appropriated to one. Other theorists claim that the term ‘genre’ is the creation of analysts, but ultimately ‘genre’ refers to a mode of categorisation and “[…] might thus be viewed as a rather loose means of lumping sometimes more of less diverse instances together.” (Edgar & Sedgwick 1999: 145).

Therefore one has to consider the possibility of several genres when creating a genre analysis. *Breaking Bad* might effectively be labelled with a number of genres and subgenres, however in terms of relevance to this project two genres will be accounted for in this chapter: the revisionist western of the 1960s and 1970s and the classic tragedy. Arguable, the tragedy may serve as a mode rather than a genre but the point of this chapter is to apply characteristics of the western and the tragedy to *Breaking Bad,* and therefore the distinguishing between mode and genre is irrelevant in this regard. The western genre, which Gilligan claims to be inspired by, is not only significant in terms of the physical frame in which *Breaking Bad* was filmed, but also regarding the conservative masculinity which is expressed frequently in the male characters of the show. Female characters in westerns are becoming increasingly important and powerful in terms of the narrative throughout the history of the western as a reflection to the social changes occurring in the United States (Heba & Murphy 2010) and this notion is also interesting to interpret regarding this particular TV-show. The tragic elements of *Breaking Bad* include the ill fortune of Walter White, leading to his hamartia and ultimately his downfall.

Starting by the western genre, there are quite a few identifiable qualities of the conventional western in *Breaking Bad*. As Gilligan states in the following quote, the setting of the series is one of them:

“[…] In fact I think of *Breaking Bad* as a Western in a great many senses. We shoot in beautiful Albuquerque, New Mexico. The enormous skies with the beautiful cumulus and the stark desert landscape make me think of ‘America’.” (Sullivan 2012)

Indeed, the westerns were often set in the deserts of America; however this is not the only similarity between *Breaking Bad* and a western. Also traits of the revisionist westerns of the 1960s and 1970s are present in the show; a genre in which the abusive and violent anti-hero, which will be accounted for later on in this project, flourished. This lone mysterious protagonist is symptomatic for the western genre and as Biderman states about the type of character;

“[…] we have no access to the character’s state of mind, unless he tells us how he feels. But it is important to note that, as the ‘silent type’, the hero is not the kind of individual to relate his feelings to other people.” (Biderman 2010: 16)

This sort of protagonist is a well-chosen character to lead the role of Walter White because of his emotional unavailability and selfishness. Furthermore, the male characters of a western are typically proud and self-sufficient and in many ways reflect the American consciousness, at least in the early stages of the genre. Self-sufficiency plays an enormous part in such character constructions as Walter White and Hank Schrader and it relates to the pride and the masculinity of the characters. For instance, neither of these characters are willing to accept the financial help of others: Walter White refuses to let his former business partners pay for his health insurance in regard to his lung cancer; he chooses to illegally manufacture methamphetamine instead. Marie Schrader declines on Hank’s behalf as Walter and Skyler offer financial help to cover his recovery treatment until she agrees that they cannot let Hank know.

The ‘Wild West’ depicted in the cinematic genre of the western is ‘wild’ in the logic that it is portrayed as an untamed land of lawlessness (Devlin 2010: 221) and many westerns are built around the narrative of conquering the wild west. This notion is very interesting in terms of *Breaking Bad* because of the way Mexico and Mexicans are portrayed. The vast majority of the antagonists in the series are represented by or have connections with the Mexican cartel and this fact sets the stage for a struggle between the ‘civilised’ people of the United States and the outlaws of the Mexican cartel. Devlin argues that characters in classical westerns are either good or bad; they are either villains or heroes but this does not apply to the main characters of *Breaking Bad*. The moral framework of a character like Jesse Pinkman is much more blurred in terms of good or bad because the narrative suggests that, despite being a manufacturer of drugs and – at times – an abuser of drugs, he contains various qualities of a typical heroic character. In continuance to this, Devlin argues in his paper that the morals of the classic western are in decay and concludes that:

“The country is ‘crazy’ in the sense that it is irrational. Those who were once seen as good and heroic are now old and feeble, unable to uphold the standards of morality and that were ingrained in the traditional western genre. Meanwhile, those who are lawless today have become more maniacal, more twisted, making the villains incomprehensible in their behavior. As such, the West is now a world where there is no rhyme or reason, and those within it are never held accountable.” (Devlin 2010: 237)

In short, there are no such characters as traditional villains and heroes in the modern western and from this development in the genre raised a subgenre in the 1960s and 1970s widely regarded as the revisionist western. An example of a typical revisionist western is Arthur Penn’s classic *Little Big Man* (1970) in which the noble life of a classic gunslinger is thoroughly challenged. The protagonist, Jack Crabb, is by no means the typical western cowboy; he was brought up – and befriended by – Native Americans, who are presented as a caring people, living in peace with nature as opposed to the so-called civilised white people whose xenophobic and violent behaviour towards the natives serve as a socially conscious reflection of the American military entering Vietnam during that period of time. Thus, this subgenre leaves some of the classic characteristics of the traditional western and gains a more critical stance towards the conquering of the wild.

The characters of a revisionist western are more like the characters of *Breaking Bad* in a number of ways. As this genre is a more realistic response to the former much romanticized western genre, the characters are typically more contentious in terms of being regarded as good or bad in addition to adding strong female characters and Native Americans, who were formerly portrayed as being ruthless barbarians, to the cast. *Breaking Bad* is certainly inspired by both the classical western in terms of the setting and the introvert masculine character as well as the revisionist anti-heroes and the strong female characters. The anti-hero character will be further accounted for in a later chapter, whereas the morality and the ethics of the western will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The other genre that will be analysed in this project is the tragedy and especially the tragic protagonist will be interesting to explore in terms of Walter White. The theories of the tragedy are usually traced back to Aristotle in the Ancient Greece however the genre has developed since then. At first, the tragedies were “[…]dramatic, representations of serious actions which eventuate in a disastrous conclusion for the protagonist” (Abrams 2009: 370) and often featured an admirable person from a myth or a fable. Obviously Walter White is no such person but he is admirable in the sense that he is extremely intelligent and is, at first, portrayed as a good family man and provider. It is essential for a tragedy to invoke a number of feelings within the viewer and as Abrams expresses about the typical protagonist of a tragedy:

“[…] the tragic hero will most effectively evoke both our pity and terror if he is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a mixture of both; and also that this tragic effect will be stronger if the hero is ‘better than we are,’ in the sense that he is of higher than ordinary moral worth.” (Abrams 2009: 371)

Indeed Walter White cannot be regarded as either good or bad because of his conscious choices and immoral qualities; on one side he is a father and husband whose highest priority is to provide for his family and on the other side, he is the drug lord whose addiction to his own success is only matched by his self-righteousness in his methods. So according to Abrams, *Breaking Bad* should evoke both or pity and terror effectively. Whether Walter White is ‘better than we are’ is evidently up for discussion because whereas he is gifted with a brilliant intelligence he also does have obvious flaws. Grodal points out that causal narratives under which the genres of melodramas, tragedies and horrors are categorized, have characters that respond to an extrinsic destiny (Grodal 2007: 145). This applies to *Breaking Bad* in the sense that the entire foundation of Walter’s decisions to enter the drug manufacturing is founded when he is diagnosed with cancer. Thus, the initial error is not Walt’s but as he is forced to respond to this threat, the aforementioned duality of his character shows. Furthermore, Grodal stresses the importance of autonomous outlets for the emotions such as frissons or weeping (Grodal 2007: 144). To summon such outlets, Gilligan uses several instruments of narrative. One example of such an achievement is in the episode called *Dead Freight* in which a young boy named Drew Sharp is shot solely because of having witnessed Walter, Todd, Mike and Jesse siphon methylamine from a train. That particular episode is built up with a small introduction of Drew faring innocently in the desert, capturing a tarantula only to end up with Todd’s bullet in him as the screen darkens at the end of the episode to the yells of protests from Jesse Pinkman. This devastating murder of an innocent kid serves both as an outlet of disgust and revulsion from the audience towards this new hire of Walt’s but also as a shocking outlet because of the meaningless and grotesque act.

Furthermore, the association between guilt and destiny is an important notion in the tragedy. Walter’s guilt lies in his bad decisions ultimately leading to his downfall and death in the finale of the series. Despite the protagonist of *Breaking Bad* dying, Abrams argues through Aristotle that “[…] many tragic representations of suffering and defeat leave an audience feeling not depressed, but relieved, or even exalted.” (Abrams 2009: 371) The whole notion of turning the protagonist into a distasteful character causes that Walter White at this point of the show has reached his rock bottom and, despite trying to redeem himself, leaves the audience feeling relief rather than depression as he perishes.

In conclusion, genre is a relevant concept to analyse in terms of this series because there are several characteristics from both the western genre as well as the tragedy to be applied to *Breaking Bad*. These characteristics will be analysed with specific cases from the show in the respective chapter of this project.

## Ethics and Morality 1.2.b

Ethics and morality have to be considered as focal points in *Breaking Bad* when it comes to how the audience identify themselves with the likes of Walter White and the other characters. This identification is relevant because the narrative of the show repeatedly confronts the characters with ethical dilemmas. These ethical dilemmas are important for the series because of the fact that they leave the audience thinking about how they would have reacted if they have been in that particular situation. For something to cause the audience to deem an action unethical, something has to be ethically ‘normal’ and therefore the term ‘normal’ has to be defined. Arp and Watson define ‘normal’ in this regard as following:

“Normal is the way things tend to be or have been for some time – you may have heard the expression ‘That’s just how things are,’ or ‘That’s just how people are.” (Arp & Watson 2011: 4)

Thus, according to Arp and Watson, the term ‘normal’ is bound to traditional understandings and values and they stress the need to differentiate between ‘normal’ and normative which “[…]refers to the way things *ought to be* – the way people ought to act.” (Arp & Watson) Hence, the normative ethics are romanticized notions towards which people should strive in their actions.

Furthermore, Arp and Watson discuss moral value. This term is divided into three categories of acts: the obligatory act, the permissible act and the impermissible act. The first-mentioned is the act which should be performed, the second-mentioned refers to the act that may be performed and the latter refers to the act that should not be performed. (Arp & Watson 2011: 3) Interestingly, moral values are often expressed in polar terms such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ and ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’. Moral claims are obviously up for discussion and Arp and Watson warn the reader about overstating them. Using such descriptions as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ are often uninformative because the terms are too broad or because such descriptions are open to interpretation. Judging an act ‘just’ or ‘unjust’ is another subjective matter depending on a person’s cultural, historical and religious affiliations and therefore the moral values should only be expressed as ‘moral’ or ‘immoral’. But how does the audience decide whether an action is wrong? The terms moral or immoral are particularly interesting in terms of the anti-hero. The anti-hero often disregards the moral choice if it is interfering with the anti-hero’s agenda. An example of this could be Patrick Jane from the CBS series *The Mentalist* in which the protagonist faces his nemesis Red John, a mass murderer who killed Patrick’s wife and daughter in cold blood. Throughout the narrative, Patrick ensures his fellow investigators that once he confronts Red John, he will enjoy killing him as an act of revenge. Like in *Breaking Bad*, the protagonist is often finding himself caught in moral dilemmas and he repeatedly chooses that he cannot afford to endanger his own investigation. When he finally catches Red John, Patrick strangles him to death where the obligatory act would include handing him over to the proper authorities for punishment. Thus Patrick Jane disregards the moral action because it would interfere with his own agenda of killing his nemesis. This notion that a locally defined universe is able to contain a specific set of ethical rules when it comes to the behaviour of a character is interesting in regards to *Breaking Bad*. Time and time again, Walter White justifies his own actions by claiming that they were in the best interests of his family and thus Walt creates his own ethical agenda with which he can validate his own pretexts.

In a series like *Breaking Bad* it might be difficult for the audience to decide whether an action is moral or immoral and therefore a personal ethical theory is required. This ethical theory of ours is constructed through six steps, identified by Arp and Watson:

1. **Begin with an assumption**
2. **Clearly identify something that needs an explanation**
3. **We form a hypothesis based on our theory to explain the phenomenon**
4. **We test his hypothesis against contrary evidence**
5. **Given contrary evidence like these, we may need to alter our theories or switch theories altogether**
6. **If this revised theory or hypothesis explains a larger number of similar cases and faces less contrary evidence than competing hypotheses, this hypothesis is the best explanation**

These steps illustrate the process of constructing moral theories, however Arp and Watson state that step 3, 4 and 5 may have to be repeated several times before reaching a plausible conclusion (Arp & Watson 2011: 8). This approach is meant as a general tool to “[…] highlight some of the rough details” (Arp & Watson 2011: 7). Its strength is the ability to repeat hypotheses in order to close in on the best explanation, whereas its weakness is the fact that it might be too general and it could take an immense amount of time to reach an acceptable solution to the hypothesis.

To explain this process in terms of *Breaking Bad*, a specific example from the series will be provided: the assumption to be used in this instance is that Walter and Skyler, as man and wife, are obliged to live monogamously in their relationship. From a viewer’s point of view, it could be interesting to find out whether it is morally defensible for Skyler to have an affair with Ted Beneke whilst still married to Walter. During the third step, the viewer could generate a hypothesis trying to explain why Skyler would be unfaithful. One such point could be that Walt, at that point of the show, had neglected his family and embraced the life as a drug lord. Fourth, the abovementioned hypothesis needs to be tested with contrastive evidence and though the assumption made is difficult for the viewer to verify, the contrastive evidence could include a plain arrangement between Walter and Skyler, stating that they have no desire to have a monogamous relationship. This way it would not be immoral for her to have an affair with Ted Beneke. Is an alteration of our theory thus needed in Skyler’s case? One can argue that there is an ethical supposition that being unfaithful is morally wrong, whereas others would argue that the relationship between Walter and Skyler has suffered to the degree at which it is hardly a relationship. So if this hypothesis has less contrary evidence than other possible hypotheses in this regard, this hypothesis would be the best account.

Though morality may refer to a set of value within the individual, one can ask at which point of context the individual is willing to neglect the moral values. Or are morality and its values constructed by the individual, as moral nihilists would claim? While moral nihilism is interesting in terms of *Breaking Bad*, Arp and Watson dismisses the importance thereof because “[…]you are a member of a community of beings that can recognize moral reasons and your actions can be evaluated in terms of a moral theory” (Arp & Watson 2011: 9). Therefore, even if one disregards morality, one would still, as a member of a community, be judged by your lack of morality in one’s behaviour. The ethical code of society in which the morality of the individuals remains is an important and interesting discussion in terms of *Breaking Bad* and it will be elaborated on later in this project.

## Narrative Structure 1.2.c

The narrative structure of *Breaking Bad* is usually constructed with a flashforward or a flashback in the beginning of each episode as a teaser, followed by chronological narrative of the show and it is particularly interesting because of its usage of flashforwards and flashbacks as a narrative tool. Technically, a flashback is a scene in a text set in a time earlier than that of the main story, whereas a flashforward is a scene in a text, set during a later time than the main story. Thus, these tools alter the chronological experience for the viewer, rendering the viewer to reconstruct different perceptions and sequences in the show. Furthermore, the serial format of the show will be further investigated because there

The flashback, sometimes called analepsis, is commonly used as a means of communicating past events without a lengthy introduction to them. Fludernik describes flashbacks and the uses thereof as following:

“[…]*flashback,* also called analepsis, in which prior happenings are recounted, often as part of something the hero/heroine remembers; sometimes the purpose is to explain unexpected events which have just been related.[…]In film, past events and the memories of the protagonists can be marked by dissolves, or sometimes by a switch to black-and-white photography.” (Fludernik 2009: 34)

One of the most memorable flashbacks of *Breaking Bad* is presented in the 8th episode of the 4th season, called *Hermanos*. The setting of this flashback is at a pool site during Gustavo Fring and his business partner’s meeting with the Mexican cartel. Gus’ friend and business partner Maximino Arciniega is brutally murdered by Hector Salamanca in front of Gus. Thus it is revealed to the viewer that Gus is vengeful and is planning to not only discontinue the business partnership between the cartel and him, but also murder each member of the cartel. This way, the flashback is used to provide the viewer with Gus’ alibi for his offense towards the Mexican cartel. *Breaking Bad* is packed with flashbacks and they serve as tools to explain narrative questions or characteristics of the characters needed in order for the show to clarify the intentions behind some actions of the characters, as we see in the abovementioned example.

The phenomenon of a flashforward, also called a prolepsis, is not used to the same extend in *Breaking Bad* as the analepsis. The first episode of the 5th season of *Breaking Bad*, called *Live Free or Die* provides the viewer with a prolepsis. The viewer experiences Walter White at a diner on his 52nd birthday, chatting with the waitress while using a false identity. The viewer knows quite early during this scene, that they are experiencing a prolepsis because of two factors: Walt has grown a full beard and the fact that he has turned 52. Outside the diner, Walt meets up with his weapon dealer, who equips him with a van in which a massive weapon is installed. The license plates of the car are marked with the official motto of the state New Hampshire, stating: “Live free or die”. Hence this chronologically altered sequence serves both as a teaser as well as a means of communicating events without lengthy background introductions.

These analepses and prolepses will be investigated further later on in this project as it proceeds to the analysis chapters. In regards to serial format, one does typically distinguish between four different formats, according to Olsen and Schou in their literary work *Levende Billeder – Grundbog i Mediefag*:

* **Episodeserien**
* **Den korte føljeton**
* **Den lange føljeton**
* **Føljetonserien**

These different formats are used as templates to plot out some frames for the fictional television (Olsen & Schou 2012: 147). In the first mentioned, every episode of the series is concluded, resulting in a possibility for the viewer to watch most of the episodes independently. Usually, the characters of these types of series do not show any significant development from episode to episode and the setting of each episode is the same. The list of characters does not vary significantly either and the typical genres included in this format are such genres as the sitcom, the classic whodunits and television for children (Olsen & Schou 2012: 147). Specific example of series within this format could include *The Mentalist, Bones* and *CSI: Miami.* It would not be appropriate to mention *Breaking Bad* as a series of this format because of fact that one of the focal points of this particular series is changing Walter White from a protagonist to an antagonist. Additionally, the narrative structure of *Breaking Bad* suggests that each episode contributes to the overall plot of the show and thus each episode is not a plot in itself which this format requires.

‘Den korte føljeton’ describes the mini-series in which it requires 2-6 episodes to unfold and conclude the plot of the show (Olsen & Schou 2012: 147). Unlike in ‘episodeserien’, the characters of this format may experience significant change over the course of the episodes and it differs further because of the fact that this format is a causal narrative structure, rather than an additive narrative structure. Lars von Trier’s *Riget* and Ole Chritian Madsen’s *Edderkoppen* are Danish examples of series applying this format. While some traits of this format, such as the character development and the causal narrative structure, may be applicable to *Breaking Bad*, the span over which the series lasts exceeds 6 episodes.

‘Den lange føljeton’ is defined as containing 7 or more episode during which the plots of the series as well as the conclusion of the series are revealed. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that this type of format proceeds towards a definable and concluding climax (Olsen & Schou 2012: 148) and this is the main difference between ‘den lange føljeton’ and ‘føljetonserien’. The narration surrounds individuals or even families over a period of time during which they mature or change as characters. Furthermore, a large amount of secondary characters are staged around the main characters in a realistic setting. This is the format under which the narrative structure of *Breaking Bad* is present. This series contains 62 episodes and does constantly move toward a climax as the character of Walter White becomes increasingly corrupted. Furthermore, the amount of secondary characters in *Breaking Bad* is immense and they are developed alongside the main characters throughout the narrative.

Ib Bondebjerg simply defines the difference between the formats as following:

“Til serien knytter sig billedet af gentagelsen, klicheen og den evige variation af den samme formel, mens føljetonen ofte opleves mere som et enkeltstående værk, med alle dets træk af det fornyede, det kunstneriske og fordybelsen.” (Bondebjerg 1995: 146)

So, as stated above, the major difference lies between the repetitiveness of the ‘episodeserie’ and the rest of the formats, rather the distinguishing between all of the formats based on the minor changes that the feuilletons offer.

In comparison to such TV-series as *Lost*, *Breaking Bad*’s use of chronologically challenging sequences is rather limited. Fludernik claims that in some texts “[…]it is difficult to ascertain whether one event follows the other in chronological order; sometimes it is even impossible to determine if events are presented in any kind of chronological order at all”. (Fludernik 2009: 35) This is where the two series differ; in *Breaking Bad*, the viewer is always certain whether the narrative is chronologically altered or not, whereasit can be very difficult to determine the chronological order in *Lost.*

Ib Bondebjerg argues that the formats of the series are developing over time in this following quotation:

”Serieformerne har både æstetisk og indholdsmæssigt fornyet sig meget stærkt over tid, og de har evnet at afspejle og dynamisere udtrykket i den kultur, som har født dem, præcis som det gælder for al anden kunst. Der er ligheder, men også meget lang afstand mellem *Preston & Søn* og *L.A.-Law* og dog er de begge advokatserier, og der er en utrolig afstand og æstetisk udtryksforskel mellem *McCloud* og *Hill Street Blues,* skønt de begge er politi-serier” (Bondebjerg 1995: 144)

The notion that formats change over time to reflect the cultural expressions of the time in which the series is written is particularly interesting in terms of *Breaking Bad*. It is interesting because it leaves the viewer wondering what kind of cultural background that has inspired Vince Gilligan and his team to create this show. Given the fact that *Breaking Bad* was aired in 2008 during the global recession, the obvious explanation for the inspiration would be that desperate measures may be required during desperation times. The viewers see the financially struggling family who are even auctioning some of their property during the first episode to give the impression that sacrifices have to be made in order to maintain their basic livelihood when the new baby comes is born. So there is definitely a plot to this show regarding the consequences that a recession might have to a common family.

Another focal point of narrative structure in television is the presentational modes: whether the plot is presented through narration or through actions; ‘showing or telling’. This notion will be discussed in the chapter regarding characterology.

## Anti-heroes and their roots 1.2.d

The notion of the anti-hero as opposed to the hero is of great importance in *Breaking Bad*. But how is the anti-hero defined? Is the viewer able to identify a particular sequence of the show in which Walter White turns into an anti-hero? Or is the given character an anti-hero throughout the entirety of the series or gradually turned into one? These questions will be investigated in chapter 5, whereas the focus in this chapter includes constructing a theoretical approach to the analysis of the anti-hero. A relevant study of the anti-hero in regards to this project is whether it occurs in the western genre and the tragedy genre respectively. First off, the definition of the anti-hero, according to Abrams, is:

”The chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that of the traditional protagonist, or *hero*, of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, clownish, or dishonest.” (Abrams 2009: 14)

Bear in mind that this definition primarily concerns literature or plays, but it has been added to this project because the modern anti-hero still contains some of these characteristics. In relevance to this project, it would seem appropriate to apply this definition to Walter White. First of all, it is important to emphasize that, even though the typical anti-hero is discrepant from the traditional protagonist, they are not polarities; the anti-hero does display some features of the traditional protagonist. For instance, by applying to abovementioned definition to Walter White, the term dignity comes to mind instantaneously. According to Abrams, dignity is a term used to describe the traditional protagonist but, as mentioned in the chapter about genres, Walter’s pride is serving as a hindrance for him and his family and thus becomes a catalyst to his change. Therefore, there are some terms, such as dignity, that can be used to describe both the traditional protagonist as well as the anti-hero. Even though some of the negative adjectives might be applicable to Walter White, the majority of them are, for the biggest part of the show, unrelated, such as clownish, petty and passive. The reasons why these terms are unrelated only for the majority of the show, it is due to the fact that Walter is a character experiencing constant change, and whereas he, at the start of the series, may have more characteristics of the traditional protagonist, the latter part of the show, the character manifests several traits of the anti-hero. In conclusion, this traditional anti-hero that Abrams describes does not offer a comprehensive assessment of the modern anti-hero. This may be explained by the fact that this character is appearing through other media or simply because the definition does not consider the developing character.

Some argue that the modern anti-hero materialized through the detective narratives of the hard-boiled fiction genre. This particular genre developed during the early 1920s and flourished during the 1930s and the 1940s during which period such novels as Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939) were written. These novels are all adapted into relatively successful films in the film noir genre. However the significant features of these novels in regard to this project are the protagonists in them. The typical protagonist of a hard-boiled novel lives in a corrupted setting and “[…] evokes the struggle of the twentieth-century working American to become or stay his own boss, a struggle that plays out as a conflict between the professional and personal lives of these novels’ protagonists.” (Irwin 2006: xi) These struggles often include temptation in the form of either a femme fatale or bribes and the novels often conclude in disastrous consequence. Gawelti states that:

“The beginning of the hard-boiled story usually represents both this marginal, rebellious aspect of the hero and his capacity to function effectively in a world of wealth, corruption, and violence.” (Gawelti 1973)

The rebellious aspect of the protagonist is essential to understanding the anti-hero in this context. There are often conflicts between the protagonist and the abusers, frequently pictured by the rich, the powerful and the beautiful who “[…]attempt to draw the detective into their world and to use him for their own corrupt purposes. He in turn finds that the process of solving the crimes involves him in the violence, deceit, and corruption that lies beneath the surface of the respectable world” (Gawelti 1973). In confronting this world beneath the respectable world, the protagonist finds that rules of law or morality do not always apply and may have to be bent in order for the detective to earn his reward. The code of this type of anti-hero is described in the following quotation:

“[…]the detective should be anonymous, eschew publicity, be close-mouthed, and secretive. He or she protects the good people from bad people, who do not live by the rules; thus, one may break the rules in dealing with them. The detective ignores rules and conventions of behavior, because the client pays for this. Loyalty to the client is very important, but may be superceded by a personal sense of justice or the rule of law.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

And through interpreting this detective’s code of the hard-boiled fiction, the modern anti-hero appears. Rather than being motivated by doing what is ethically right, he is motivated by greed and the prospect of earning money, and he is willing to elide the moral code of society in order to earn his reward. To demonstrate this, Sam Spade of *The Maltese Falcon* will be interpreted as an example; he is a private detective who is hired by a beautiful woman to investigate the disappearance of her sister. He is helping her, despite being able to identify her as ‘bad news’ and is soon entangled in a web of investigations, deceits and violence. Being restricted by the Hays code, the screenwriters of the time often soften up the characters in comparison to the novel and this is indeed the case with Sam Spade as well. Even with this softening up of the character in the film noir, Sam Spade is portrayed as a mysterious character and being nearly as greedy, amoral and brutal as the villain in *The Maltese Falcon*. It is a customary concept in hard-boiled fiction that the roles of victim, murderer and detective get indistinct. Using *The Maltese Falcon* as an example again, Sam Spade, who is the detective, is for example victimized and accused of being a murderer when his partner Archer is killed, as the police were investigating him for that murder, a crime of which he was innocent. The notion that roles get blurry is immensely interesting in terms of *Breaking Bad* as well. Walter White is victimized by his lung cancer diagnosis; he is guilty of murder on several occasions in addition to being the protagonist of the show. It is evident that the abovementioned definition of the anti-hero in the hard-boiled genre fits the like of Walter White more than Abrams’ definition of the classic anti-hero. Walter White is indeed secretive, protective of his family, willing to compromise in terms of ethical code in order to achieve his goals, despite his best efforts to convince himself of otherwise, his primary objective and motivation is money and he has a personal sense of justice by claiming that his actions are for the good of his family. Furthermore, the anti-heroes of the hard-boiled genre create a new ethical code to live by in order to justify their actions to themselves, much like it is evident in Walter White, too. However one has to remember that the anti-hero has to contain several aspects of a traditional protagonist in order for the viewer to sympathize with the given character. This is an important point to emphasise; given the flaws in the anti-hero, it is more human and the viewer relates to it because of its flaws, rather than relating to the hero whose perfection makes it superhuman.

What remains to be investigated in this chapter is whether the anti-hero is existent in the western genre and the tragedy respectively. According to Abrams, the anti-hero is immensely noticeable in the tragedy because it serves as a contrast to the traditional protagonist, as stated in the following quotation:

“The antihero is especially conspicuous in dramatic tragedy, in which the traditional protagonist had usually been of high estate, possessing dignity and courage.”(Abrams 2009: 14)

That being said, there is often a distinction between the anti-hero and the tragic hero in the tragedy. The tragic hero was described during the chapter regarding genre and, to sum it up, endures some resemblances with the anti-hero but cannot be considered one entirely. The main difference is that the tragic hero is mainly heroic but must suffer a tragic flaw, whereas the flaws of the anti-hero overshadow its heroic qualities. It can be difficult to differentiate between the two when it comes to identifying whether a character should be identified as a tragic hero or an anti-hero because they do have some traits in common, as Abrams stated in the earlier quotation. Whether one can go as far as to call the anti-hero a modern tragic hero might be over exaggerating the case, but as the anti-hero character’s population increases during the 20th century, it is appearing in an assortment of genres and in a variety of media.

The anti-hero character is, as mentioned earlier in the example of Jack Crabb, very much present in the revisionist western genre. To use another example to prove the rise of the anti-hero in the revisionist western than *Little Big Man* (1970), one could mention *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). The protagonists of this film are Butch Cassidy and “Sundance Kid” who are outlaws but still sympathetic characters because of their wit, their affability and their general pleasantness. Throughout the narrative, the viewer hopes that they will escape the posse tracking them. Thus these characters contain ambiguity in the sense that both traits of the likeable hero and the twisted ethical code of the anti-hero are present. These are just two out of several examples of how the anti-hero flourishing during the cultural rebellion of the 1960s and 1970s revisionist westerns.

Having established a theoretical foundation for the analysis and appearance of the anti-hero along with accounting for its roots, both the classic and the modern variation, the next point of this project is to discuss characterology theories after which the analysis section of this project will commence.

## Characterology 1.2.e

In order to achieve a satisfying analysis of the characters of *Breaking Bad*, it is important to create a foundation of theory within the field of characterology, given the fact that this thesis deals with character development. To create this theoretical foundation, a number of approaches will be applied. Per Krogh Hansen discusses the meaning of a character and characterology in his work *Karakterens rolle* from 2000. It is worth mentioning that *Karakterens rolle* primarily deals with the characters in literature, however some of Hansen’s arguments are applicable to characters on television. First of all, he differentiates between *being a character* and *having character*; to be a character is to act a role in universe of a given text, whereas having character refers to the notion of having a defined and limited personality for the given character within the text (Hansen 2000: 70). A show on television, like *Breaking Bad*, provides a solid foundation for a number of characters to explicitly radiate character because of the sheer amount of hours which the seasons last. Through this amount of time, the viewers have greater chances of identifying themselves with the characters and the characters are given more time to show complexity and depth, which are essential to show in order to provide a character with character. For instance, the character of Skyler White has a great amount of character and it is shown through the emotional depth of the character and her devotion for her children. She is willing to compromise the safety of herself in order to keep her children safe and this is an example of the character having defined limitations, proving to the viewer that this character is not just a role. Dealing with changing characters in *Breaking Bad*, Abrams is worth discussing, as he defines the realistic character as following:

“Whether a character remains stable or changes, the reader of a traditional and realistic work expects ‘consistency’ - the character should not suddenly break off and act in a way not plausibly grounded in his or her temperament as we have already come to know it.” (Abrams 2009: 42)

So in continuance of this statement from Abrams, should the viewer consider a character like Walter White unrealistic through his drastic changes? There certainly are some scenes of *Breaking Bad* in which Walter acts outside the frame of what the viewer would expect from a fifty-year-old high-school teacher. Later on in this project, a few of these scenes will be analysed in terms of whether these actions make the character less credible. In these cases, Hansen argues that in the construction of a character, actions based on routine and repetition are elementary to the viewer’s understanding of the character, but also the isolated and distinctive actions help in providing the character with depth and integrity, thus giving a character more character. (Hansen 2010: 159) This may indeed help explain why the viewer accepts Walter White as a character.

Unlike such TV-series as *Dexter* and *Sex and the City*, *Breaking Bad* has no voice-over narration or other variations of narration to imply the thoughts of the characters; thus the viewers have to analyse the characters based on their actions and interactions with other characters. This is possible because:

“I litteraturen er det nemlig mere end normalt, at vi allerede i en persons ydre, dvs. tektens fremstilling af det kropslige, kan finde elementer, der forklarer og definerer, hvilket indre personen har” (Hansen 2010: 90).

The secrecy of *Breaking Bad* in conjunction with the pace of the actions force the viewer to evaluate the show through actions, rather than through words. As mentioned earlier, Gilligan also applies specific narrative structures in order to highlight the motivations and desires of some of the characters’ actions and these narrative structures will be investigated later on in this project.

Actions provide one foundation of decoding characters but they do not necessarily account for the entire depth of the character. Certain character traits of Walter White are eluded through the actions of his character but are expressed through narrative structure of the show. An example of this is shown during the fourth season of the series as Andrea’s son Brock is rushed to the hospital with symptoms suggesting that he was poisoned. Jesse immediately blames Walter because his cigarette with ricin is missing and Walter was the only one who knew about it, but the chemist manages to reflect Jesse’s rage upon Gustavo Fring. Later on, Jesse is informed that Brock was not poisoned with ricin but with a plant called Lily of the Valley and as the episode *Face Off* and fourth season of *Breaking Bad* is concluded the frame shows Walter’s familiar garden in which a Lily of the Valley plant is presented as the picture is fading out. Not only does this undeniably suggest that Walter White poisoned Brock but it also demonstrates that he is willing to resort to such desperate measures as to poison a child in order to turn Jesse against Gustavo. So without suggestions from his direct actions, the viewer is able to decipher characteristics of Walter White. Hence it is proven that character traits are not only available for decoding through actions but also through narrative structure.

As established earlier, the isolated and distinctive actions are important in defining characters. Hansen divides the isolated action into three groups:

1. **Act of commission;**
2. **Act of omission;**
3. **Contemplated act.**

The first-mentioned is the conscious or unconscious completed action of a character. The act of omission refers to an action that should have been completed but is somehow neglected by the character. The latter one represents the act, which is incomplete but intended or a plan which has yet to be realised. These three categories are all of importance in terms of character analysis in *Breaking Bad*, however some more than others. The acts of omission and the contemplated acts are particularly interesting when it comes to this television show because they cover the questions of acts that *could* have happened and acts that *should* have happened, and thus deal with ethics and morality of the particular characters, which is a central point of this project.

In addition to actions, Hansen also argues that messages and language are important factors in character analysis. He distinguishes between the two and debates that where *language* is perceived as the stylistic relations in, for instance, the dialogues, direct speeches and in streams of consciousness, *messages* are plainly that which is expressed through words. While these terms may seem complementary, they can be applied contradictorily. These two terms help found a characterisation of characters although one has to distinguish between direct and indirect characterisation. The direct characterisation emerges when other characters describe the character or through the character growing a realisation of itself and expresses the description through, for instance, inner monologue. However, the indirect characterisation of a character is becoming apparent as the depth of the character is clarified through language, actions and accessible thoughts. In conclusion, the viewer is able to read a character through other characters’ descriptions and judgements of said character, in addition to gaining information through such factors as dialect and language from which hints of intelligence, social status, cultural and historical background are placed. Although, Hansen has some excellent points, one always has to consider the possibility of an unreliable narrator. A series, such as *Breaking Bad*, that entices the viewer through a web of deceits and manipulation, the direct characterisation of a character is an approach that might not prove to be accurate because the characterisation can be constructed the descriptions of an unreliable character. Therefore, creating a character through actions and from analysing the paradigm over which the character is constructed should be one of the most precise and efficient character approaches when it comes to characterising characters through language and messages.

Furthermore, the importance of environmental, physical and nominal appearance is immense in characterising characters, according to Hansen. He describes it as the connection between the characters and their surroundings, be they environmental, physical or nominal and seeks to account for the relationship between character and environment. Two causal relations are mentioned in this regard: either the character has been shaped as a result of the environment in which it has been brought up, or the form of the physical environment is the product of the character. Additionally, Hansen differentiates between the metonymic relations and the analogy relations. The first-mentioned is defined by the character being closely connected to the environment in terms of juxtaposition. The latter is explained as characterisation through analogy between environment and character (Hansen 2010: 168).

Having established the theoretical approach to characterology, the next step of this thesis is to proceed to the analysis section in which the abovementioned theories will be applied to *Breaking Bad.*

# 2. Genre analysis

Given the fact that *Breaking Bad* is a text in which elements of the tragedy and the western, especially the revisionist western, are participating, a genre analysis of these genres with detailed examples from the series would enrich the entity of this project in terms of analytical depth.

## 2.1 Breaking Bad as a western

Interpreting *Breaking Bad* as a western, the following points will be accounted for:

* The context of *Breaking Bad*;
* Traditional masculine characteristics;
* The desert setting and the symbolism thereof;
* The notion of the civilised versus the outlaws.

The anti-hero of the revisionist western will be accounted for in the chapter regarding the anti-hero and therefore it has been excluded from this section, despite having relevance.

As mentioned earlier, the revisionist westerns emerged as protests against various tendencies within American society, for instance human rights issues or the war in Vietnam. Through various works of art, such as the revisionist westerns, artists questioned the core American values by opposing the traditional cowboy, granting him characteristics of the anti-hero. So constructing *Breaking Bad* as a text in which elements of the revisionist western are applied may be a reflection of tendencies in American society from around 2008 when the show was aired. The American economy was paralyzed by a global recession which “[…] officially lasted from December 2007 to June 2009”[[2]](#footnote-2). The results of this recession are summed up neatly in the following quotation:

“The job loss during the Great Recession has meant that family incomes have dropped, poverty has risen, and adults as well as children have lost health insurance. The bursting of the housing bubble and the drop in the stock market has meant that family wealth has dropped dramatically, as well.” [[3]](#footnote-3)

There are a few points to this citation that are interesting in terms of *Breaking Bad* and how the recession is portrayed in the series. The fact that family incomes decreased affected the White residence immensely. In addition to being forced to work a second and humiliating job at a car wash, Walter and his family are selling personal property through auctions to prepare financially for their unplanned second child. This contributes to the notion that this middle-class family has little to no money stored in case of unanticipated expenses. Furthermore, the lack of health insurance forces Walt to spend his methamphetamine money on his own treatment rather than providing for his family, which he had initially intended in addition to indirectly forcing him to continue producing which ultimately got him addicted. Therefore, the recession of the early 21st century is essential to how the plot of the show develops and it inspires the desperate means which Walt embraces as his moral decay accelerates.

As previously stated, the traditional western genre praises the male ideal of masculinity and this approach is very much present in *Breaking Bad,* however it is questioned. Hank Schrader, Walter White and, to a certain degree, Jesse Pinkman are characters within which a strong desire to protect, being self-reliant and provide for their families is embodied. The following sequence is set in Gus’ laboratory beneath his cleaning factory:

“Walt: I have made a series of bad decisions and I cannot make another one.  
Gus: Why did you make these decisions?  
Walt: For the good of my family.  
Gus: Then they weren’t bad decisions. What does a man do, Walter? A man provides for his family.  
Walt: This cost me my family.  
Gus: When you have children, you always have family. They will always be your priority, your responsibility. And a man… a man provides. And he does it even when he’s not appreciated or respected or even loved. He simply bears up, and he does it because he’s a man.” (*Más* 00:24:44 - 00:25:48)

Despite the fact that Gus is obviously manipulating Walt into restarting his career as a drug manufacturer at this point, he appeals to core values inside Walt to do so. The notion that a man is emasculated when he is unable to provide for his family is visibly devastating to Walt and he does end up continuing to produce methamphetamine after this conversation. The phrasing by Gus is interesting to interpret as well. His usage of the word ‘man’ suggests that if Walt refuses to accept his offer, Walt would be unable to consider himself a man. Gus does this by transferring a set of meaning to the term, such as: a man has responsibilities and duties towards his family, and highlights that if he is unable to fulfil his duty as a man, he cannot be measured as one. Having identified him as a man who is containing some characteristics of the traditional protagonist in westerns, Walt’s choice to go back to producing drugs seemed nearly inevitable.

An example of how Hank’s profile fits that of a traditional western character is displayed when his boss, George Merkert, promotes Hank in the following sequence of the show:

“George: Know why sharks are at the top of the food chain, Hank?  
Hank: Because they have three sets of teeth and will take a bite out of anything?  
George: Some of those suckers travel thousands of miles in pursuit of their prey.  
Hank: Yeah, I think I heard that.  
George: You, my friend, are a great white. How does Albuquerque liaison Tri-state Border Interdiction Task Force sound?   
Hank: Like one hell of a promotion.” (*Breakage* 00:09:07 - 00:09:37)

Hank shows his determination and dedication to the cause of justice through tirelessly and, arguably, obsessively hunting Heisenberg and members of the Mexican cartel throughout the series. In addition to being the closest character that this show has to a hero, Hank is extremely introverted in the sense that he only rarely talks about his feelings. This notion is connected to traditional masculinity and is thus relevant to this analysis of the character. As Biderman stated, the hero of a western is a silent type without the intentions of relating to emotional aspects of the characters surrounding him and this is very accurately applicable to Hank. However, shortly after he accepted his promotion, Gilligan is presenting a very different Hank than what the viewer is accustomed to. Hank enters the elevator and suddenly has a panic attack. To stress this, the sequence, in which the cuts are added swiftly, include the camera lens switching from being clear to being blurred, the camera being hand-held, the sound of the sequence emphasizing on the rapid breathing and the decelerated sounds of the elevator mechanisms. The panic attack ends as his exits the elevator and thus the elevator becomes a symbol the emotional repressiveness of Hank. This particular sequence of *Breaking Bad* is the first time that the viewer is able to penetrate Hank’s emotional barrier. Therefore, the actions of Hank suggest that he indeed possesses the characteristics of a silent hero, but Gilligan has deliberately chosen to show the viewer what is behind the façade of the character which is unusual in the western genre.

As opposed to Hank, Jesse is extremely emotionally extroverted. His actions are often based on temporary emotional instability and therefore his decision-making is typically rash and hasty. These features are uncommon to a traditional western protagonist, but one detail he does have in common with that protagonist; despite having ended his relationship with Andrea, Jesse provides for them and continuously making sure that they are safe. However, this is scarcely enough to identify with Jesse as a western protagonist. Jesse serves as a contradiction to Walter and Hank in terms of emotional outlet. While Walter is the overly rational character whose ability to justify his means to himself is astonishing, Jesse is devastated with guilt when he is forced to commit or bear witness to acts of controversy. Hank has the capability of suppressing his traumatic experiences to uphold his façade to the people around him, whereas Jesse usually reacts to traumatic experiences with acts of either revenge or justice. An example of this is expressed through the final sequence of the episode called *Half Measures*. Jesse is set for revenge as he abuses their product just before walks towards the drug dealers that used Tomas to kill Combo. The music of the scene is building up towards a climax, the lens of the camera is shifted towards an orange colour, the sequence includes a close-up on his feet in slow-motion to reflect the mental state of anxiety which Jesse is experiencing, the cuts are frequent and the frames often blurred. This particular scene also includes over the shoulder shots and switching back and forth between Jesse and the drug dealers. This is interesting in terms of the western genre because it redirects the viewer’s thoughts to classic western showdown scenes in which the protagonist is duelling the antagonist in a combat of speed and cunning to the death. Before the characters shoots, Walt manages to intercept by driving into the drug dealers and subsequently orders Jesse to run.

In conclusion, traditional masculinity is displayed through Hank and Walter whereas Jesse serves as an emotional contradiction to these characters. Furthermore, the desert setting plays a significant part of *Breaking Bad*. The American desert is an essential setting for the western genre as well as for the series. Alford argues that

“The Western desert resonates within the American cultural imagination as the home of the mythical frontier with its masculine values of rugged individualism, self-reliance and freedom. *Breaking Bad* uses this archetypal imagery to reflect Walt’s single minded pursuit of these ideals throughout the series. But as his actions lead only to unthinkable depths of depravity and desperation, the desert also emerges as a visual embodiment of Walt’s barren moral landscape.” (Alford 2013)

Having already established the set of masculine values that Walter both possesses and strives towards, Alford’s other point of the desert being a symbol of Walt’s moral incapability is worth investigating. To demonstrate this, it is important to look at the duality of Walt’s character. Walt is trying to keep his business and his private life separated for the first few seasons of the show and he invents his alias Heisenberg. Interestingly, the desert seems to be the preferred location of the businesses of Walt; he exchanges his product with Tuco at a dumping ground in the desert in season one; during the second season, Walt and Jesse are manufacturing methamphetamine in the desert; Gus’ cleaning factory under which Walt’s new laboratory is installed is in the desert; in season four, Walter is dragged out in the desert by Gus and his men to threaten him; and in the fifth season, the location of Todd’s uncles farm is set in the desert. These are but a few examples of the distinction that should be drawn between Albuquerque and the desert outside of Albuquerque. In the city, Walt attempts to act as the suburban husband whereas the desert is the turf of his Heisenberg alter ego. So Hansen would argue that there is an analogical relationship between Walter and the desert. As the show progresses, the dangers of the desert invade the privacy of the city and Walt has to act accordingly. Thus the battle between the desert and the city can be interpreted as the inner struggle of Walter versus Heisenberg, a struggle that increasingly tips in the favour of Heisenberg, as Walt fails to maintain his identity as a father and a husband. Hence the desert comes to symbolise the moral landscape of his character.

The notion of the civilised versus the outlaws is also essential to the western genre. In *Breaking Bad*, however, one can question whether the protagonist is the civilised or the outlaw, but nonetheless there is a skirmish between the Mexican cartel and the drug lords of America. Rather than it being a traditional skirmish between the good and the bad, it is a skirmish between two groups of outlaws, fighting to maintain influence on the drug market. This idea that there is no ‘good-versus-evil’-scheme is typical for the revisionist western, in which the characters were more blurred in terms of obligation to their cause.

Hence there are plenty of features from both the traditional western and the revisionist western of the 1960s and 1970s in *Breaking Bad*. The concept of highlighting the imperfections of the characters will be elaborated on further in the analysis of the anti-hero.

## 2.2 Breaking Bad as a tragedy

Despite not having as many features of the tragedy genre as the western, *Breaking Bad* still contains some of the most common ones. These features include:

* The protagonist evokes both pity and terror in the viewer
* Autonomous outlets of emotion
* The series has a disastrous conclusion

Both pity and terror are frequently induced by the two protagonists of *Breaking Bad*. Starting with Walter White, the viewer is both drawn to him while simultaneously repelled by him. He evokes pity when he, as a providing and dedicated father, is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. But, as will be accounted for later in the analysis, Walter’s progression as a character is not entirely moral decay; he regularly acts as a sympathetic character, thus inducing pity when he repeatedly relapses into his alter ego, Heisenberg. The most dominant episode in which Walter evokes terror to the viewer happens in the 12th episode of the second season, called *Phoenix*. In Walter’s attempts to wake up Jesse, Jane is pushed onto her back. They have been abusing heroin and as Jane starts choking on her own vomit, Walter stands idly by. The feeling of terror is provoked by the calm, soothing music and the slow frequency of cuts, with close-ups on Walter’s face, emphasising his hesitation to escalate the sense of terror that the viewer feels in this particular situation. Furthermore, this underlines the fact that saving Jane was an act of omission to Walt, rather than a contemplated act, meaning that he deliberately chose not to save Jane.

Through being manipulated and through being made a victim, Jesse is a character for whom the viewer feels sympathy. The victimisation of Jesse will be interpreted in the section about character analysis because it is crucial in terms of how the character is constructed and developed. Jesse rarely induces the feeling of terror on the viewer, but one particular sequence does come into mind; Jesse has been beaten up by Hank and sent to the hospital after which he swears vengeance in a monologue:

“Jesse: What happens now? I’ll tell you what happens now. Your scumbag brother-in-law is finished. Done. You understand? I will own him when this is over. Every cent he earns, every cent his wife earns is mine. Any place he goes, anywhere he turns, I’m gonna be there, grabbing my share. He’ll be scrubbing toilets in Tijuana for pennies and I’ll be standing over him to get my cut. He’ll see me when he wakes up in the morning, and when he crawls back to sleep in whatever rat hole is left for him after I shred his house down. I will haunt his crusty ass forever, until the day he sticks a gun up his mouth and pulls the trigger just to get me out of his head. That’s what happens next.” (*One Minute* 00:08.30 – 00:09:48)

This haunting monologue gets intensified further as the camera slowly zooms in on Jesse’s devastated face, with no other sound than Jesse’s rasping voice. This is the first and only time during the entirety of the series that Jesse, consumed by hatred, genuinely appears dangerous.

The autonomous outlets of emotions of the viewer or reader of a tragedy are usually interconnected with the evocation of emotion from the characters, but this is not always the case. These emotional outlets are not necessarily caused by characters; there are narrative features in *Breaking Bad* that cause autonomous reactions. As mentioned before in this project, Brock was poisoned by a New Mexican wild plant called Lily of the Valley, however the viewer does not know that Walt deliberately poisoned Brock until the final scene of the fourth season. The camera pans past Walt’s garden and zooms in on a specimen of Lily of the Valley and thus presenting to the viewer that he was definitely the poisoner, leaving the audience astonished. The song that is played during this particular scene is also interesting; it includes a verse stating:

“Fooled them hoping to seem  
Like a sleight of evil, but deprived of greed and  
It’s not a mass so be honest with me  
We can’t afford to ignore that I’m the disease”[[4]](#footnote-4)

These lyrics are immensely appropriate to use to describe the case of Walter White and especially at this particular stage of his development of a character. Having just executed the plan to kill Gus and also avoided the accusations of having poisoned Brock, Walter proclaims to Skyler that: “I won”. In the meantime, he fails to grasp that he poisoned an innocent child and blew up a nursing home in the process. Despite having committed a great amount of monstrosities, Walter is unable to see himself as being the disease.

Whether the series has a disastrous conclusion is obviously up for discussion. The protagonist, Walter White, does end up perishing in the end, but given the fact that he has grown into a character whose moral decay has led him to lead a role as the antagonist, his death might be a relief to the viewer rather than a disaster. Later on in this project, it is argued whether Walter redeems himself by the end of the show and thus making the conclusion more tragic, but nonetheless the ending does provide the viewer with an emotional outlet, be it relief or sadness.

The characters of *Breaking Bad* have certain features of the western genre given the fact that this specific genre, in many ways, has defined and established American culture. Such traits as masculinity and self-reliance are major factors in character development as well as in the character structure of such key characters as Jesse, Walter and Hank. Where the setting and the characters resemble the western genre to a certain degree, the narrative structure and the way that Gilligan wants the viewer to understand the characters are interconnected with tragic stylistic manner in which evoking and outlet of emotions are important in deciding which of the characters for whom the viewer feels sympathy.

# 3. Ethics and morality in *Breaking Bad*

Given the fact that the characters of *Breaking Bad* often are facing ethical dilemmas in which their moral values are tested. As established earlier, for acts to be unethical there has to be a standardised notion of what is normal and therefore Arp and Watson distinguished between the normal and the normative; the normative being how things *ought* to be, rather than how they are.

In this section, the following concepts will be discussed in regards to *Breaking Bad*:

* The “normal” of *Breaking Bad*
* The obligatory, permissible and impermissible acts
* Moral nihilism

To concept of “normal” is relative to the space in which the series takes place and therefore the term has to be investigated in the context of *Breaking Bad*. In this regard, the corrupt lawyer Saul Goodman and his office are interesting to analyse. Saul is introduced in *Better Call Saul* as he is hired to defend Badger after he sold methamphetamine to an undercover officer. In front of his office, Walter is sceptical after seeing a balloon in the shape of the Statue of Liberty, soaring over a building that could easily be confused with a regular convenience store:

“Walt: How about we get him a real attorney? What the hell is this? This is who he hires? (gesturing at the office)

Jesse: What? Are you kidding me? This is the guy you want. This is the guy I’d hire.

Walt: Ah, this is the guy you’d hire. (Ironically)

Jesse: Look, you remember Emilio? Okay, this dude got Emilio off, like, twice. Okay? Both times, they had him dead to rights, yo. And then, poof. Dude is like Houdini. Seriously, when the going gets though, you don’t want a criminal lawyer; you want a “criminal” lawyer. You know what I’m saying?” (*Better Call Saul* 00:22:29 – 00:22: 58)

Although Walt’s first comment states that ’real’ attorneys do exist in this space, Saul is portrayed as a legitimate solution to represent one as a lawyer. For instance, his commercials are widely recognized; there are for instance at least two sequences in which the viewer is presented with absurd televised advertisements, in addition to several billboards, benches and stands on which adverts are placed. The waiting-room and Saul’s office are interesting spaces to analyse in order to grasp what Saul Goodman represents. The waiting-room, as presented in the abovementioned episode, is overcrowded, children are screaming, the types of people present would likely be categorised as lower-class people with a mix of gang members and truckers. Stylistically, the hand-held camera is shaking as it is panning across the room to emphasise the suffocating atmosphere. Upon entering his office, Saul’s desk is placed in a half-circled shaped of columns with the text of the American constitution in-between. The columns come to resemble those of the building of the U.S. Government, and thus making Saul Goodman represent the highest instance of authority, it is safe to assume that Gilligan constructs an ironic embodiment of the governing of society through Saul. This suggests that moral values of the society in which *Breaking Bad* is constructed are somewhat distorted, however there are other implications suggesting that the values of resembles the one of the ordinary world. An example of this is the high school in which Walter formerly worked. J.P. Wynne High School expresses moral values through firing Hugo Archuleta for the possession of marijuana in addition to firing Walt for inappropriately trying to kiss the principal Carmen Molina. Despite none of these actions are illegal, they are still morally questionable and therefore the board of the high school decided to fire them. These are but a few examples of the ethical structure in *Breaking Bad*, but considering the entire series, there is no great gap between what seems to be the ethical set of value for the society in *Breaking Bad* and the society of the real world.

Arp and Watson’s theories on the acts that ethically should, maybe should and should not be performed are of immense interest in regards to *Breaking Bad* and in particular in regards to Walter White. This character undergoes a development throughout the narrative and analysing his actions in terms of whether they are ethically justifiable is specifically interesting. With these three categories in mind, one is able to interpret Walter White in regards to these three classifications. Despite the fact that Walter’s moral decay is chronological, there are no suggestions in the series that imply Walter as preferring to act in according to the obligatory act. This proposes that Walter does not necessarily adopt his own moral values after the diagnosis of lung cancer, but that he may have had it before as well. As early as the pilot episode of *Breaking Bad*, Walter partners up with Jesse and the following conversation takes place:

“Jesse: Cooking is art and the shit I cook is the bomb, so don’t be telling me.

Walt: Shit you cook is shit. I saw your setup. Ridiculous. You and I will not make garbage. We will produce a chemically pure and stable product that performs as advertised. No adulterants. No baby formula. No chili powder.” (*Breaking Bad* 00:32:10 – 00:32:30)

This is a great example of how Walt continuously tries to justify his impermissible actions by convincing himself that they are permissible actions and thus acceptable under the right circumstances. As if making the product more pure than Jesse’s former product would somehow make this act less despicable. The best example of this is when Walt, time and time again, claims that he commits all of his morally controversial actions for the good of his family. The fact that he is lying to himself is further emphasized when Walter surpasses the amount of money needed to provide for his family in many years to come. By continuing to produce methamphetamine despite having the money he needs, he thereby proves that he has been transforming impermissible acts into what he perceives as permissible acts.

This ability to construct one’s own moral values leads to the next subject of this chapter: moral nihilism. Moral nihilists state that nothing are inherently moral or immoral, and morality is a concept constructed by individuals, but Arp and Watson challenges this by claiming that even though the individual constructs a personal set of moral values in conflict with the ethical code of the community, the individual is still a member of a community in which the individual will be judged when that person opposes the ethical norms. At this point, it is important to distinguish between what is morally wrong but legal and what is morally wrong and illegal. Walter is wanted by the authorities because he illegally manufactures methamphetamine and not because of his personal moral code, but Arp and Watson refer to immoral individuals, not to immoral criminals and therefore their theory is slightly out of context. Given the fact that Walter is massively secretive about his double-life and a skilled deceiver and manipulator, the immorality of his character is limited to his alter-ego Heisenberg and when he acts as Heisenberg, he is typically associating with other criminals and hence Walter is not judged in the same manner as he would have been by displaying immoral values in an open community. Moral nihilists would claim that need to create his own moral code is to provide him with a financial, social or psychological advantage, but considering Bourdieu’s[[5]](#footnote-5) approach to capital is perhaps more relevant in this context. Sure, he gains a significant financial advantage by being able to construct his own moral code and subsequently justify his actions, but this comes at a cost and this is where Bourdieu is interesting. The argument is that Walter exchanges social capital for economic capital and as his wealth grows, his social assets decrease. This is portrayed perfectly in the following frame in the fourth episode of the fifth season (*Fifty-One* 00:09:23). In the focus of the camera is four stacks of money, each containing 5000 dollars, whereas Skyler’s face is numbly starring at the stacks through a mirror which angle is crooked. Skyler’s face, which is reflected through the mirror, is blurred as opposed to the stacks of money. This frame comes to reflect how Walter has neglected his family in his search for wealth and how Skyler becomes a blurred memory of the background when he has to choose between money and her. Later on in this episode, Skyler states that:

“Skyler: I would count every minute that the kids are away from here, away from you, as a victory. But you’re right. It’s a bad plan. I don’t have any of your magic, Walt. I don’t know what to do. I’m a coward. I... I can’t go to the police. I can’t stop laundering your money. I can’t keep you out of this house. I can’t even keep you out of my bed. All I can do is wait. That’s it. That’s the only good option. Hold on, bide my time and wait.

Walt: Wait for what? What are you waiting for?

Skyler: For the cancer to come back.” (*Fifty-One* 00:36:41 – 00:37:34)

The fact that Skyler hopes that the cancer will return comes to show how Walter has lost the entirety of his social capital in his home in exchange for his wealth which is a direct result of illegal and immoral decisions. So it seems that Bourdieu’s theory of capital is appropriate to apply to *Breaking Bad*.

In conclusion, the society in which *Breaking Bad* is staged does not differ significantly from reality in terms of morality and therefore it is safe to assume that the same moral code can be applied *Breaking Bad*. Furthermore, Walter creates his own code of ethics to justify his actions; such explanations as self-defence and doing it for the family are frequently used. Lastly, Walter exchanges social capital for economic capital, rather than just earning economical capital.

4. Narrative Structure analysis

The narrative structure of *Breaking Bad* is interesting in several regards to the understanding of the characters and their development. As established in the theoretic approach to the narrative structure, most of the episodes are constructed the same way: a teaser followed by the *Breaking Bad* tune and intro and then the chronological narrative of the series continues. The following narrative tools will be investigated in regards to the series:

* The usage of analepsis
* The usage of prolepsis
* Reoccurring patterns in the narrative

As mentioned earlier, there is a frequent usage of analepsis during the teasers of the show. There are different reasons why these are used and therefore these analepses shall be categorized into two classifications: the explanatory and the comparative analepsis. The explanatory analepsis is the one used most frequently in this show. It provides the viewer with an explanatory background of the given characters. One example was already given about Gustavo and his associate during their audience at the house of the Mexican cartel and this provided the viewer with information about Gus, the members of the Mexican cartel in addition to explaining Gustavo’s feud and lust for vengeance against the cartel. Another example of an explanatory analepsis is presented. These chronologically misplaced sequences are always presented with relevance to the main narrative. This particular example is given as a teaser by the end of episode 8 in season 4, whereas Gustavo prepares and executes his plan to eliminate the Mexican cartel over the next two episodes. Thus the analepsis provided the viewer with Gus’ reasons for entering a war with the cartel. Another example of an explanatory analepsis is given in the opening sequence of *One Minute* in which Hector Salamanca and his two nephews are portrayed years before the main narrative. During this scene, Hector almost drowns Marco to brutally teach the brothers that “la familia es todo”. This scene offers the viewer background information of the mysterious two Mexicans who hunt Heisenberg and Hank, but it also emphasizes that their motivation is to avenge their cousin Tuco who was killed by Hank. This sequence serves as the teaser analepsis at the beginning of *One Minute* in which Marco and Leonel attack Hank with murderous intentions and thus this explanatory analepsis has relevance in terms of the main narrative. These scenes are important to the series because they add depth and credibility to the characters of the show.

The comparative analepsis is staged only two times during the course of *Breaking Bad* and it is used to highlight just how much the particular character has changed throughout the series. The contexts, in which these analepses are presented, show the given characters in almost contradictory states in comparison to how those characters are portrayed during the main narrative. The first example of the comparative analepsis is set during the fifth episode of the third season, called *Más*. Having received all of Walter’s savings to purchase a recreational vehicle, Jesse spends most of it in a strip club with Skinny Pete and Badger.

“Jesse: Hey, yo, yo. Yo, you got champagne? None of that cheap stuff. I want the expensive shit. Don Pérignon.

Waitress: It’s 400 a bottle.

Jesse: Oh, well, in that case, I’ll only have two. Oh, and I want the tall, skinny glasses. I like those skinny glasses. I like those skinny glasses. That’s what James Bond drinks. Mofos, I’m all about that.

Combo: Yo, Jesse, man. I gotta ask. Where did you get all the cheddar?

Skinny Pete: Must be moving mad volume.

Jesse: It’s totally funny. You wanna know what’s funny?

Skinny Pete: What’s funny?

Jesse: This old dude, he gave it to me. Be gave it to me. It’s like his entire life savings.

Skinny Pete: What? Why?

Jesse: Because he’s a dumb-ass. That’s why. Oh God, yes!”

(*Más* 00:01:12 – 00:01:57)

After this sequence, Combo steals the keys to his parents’ RV and sells it to Jesse for the rest of the money. In comparison to the Jesse from the current narrative with whom the viewer has grown relatively fond at this point, this analepsis shows the massive development under which Jesse has been over since having been under the influence of Walter White. In the approximated time of a year, Jesse has developed from an immature, careless man, whose only agenda was to make money through cooking low-quality methamphetamine and spend it to party with his friends, to a more mature adult and sympathetic character. This contrast between the two stages of the same character that the analepsis delivers is an extremely effective tool to underline the emphasis on character development. The context in which the sequence is narrated is in the fallout of Jane’s death and Jesse’s distressing mourning as he listens to Jane’s voice-mail repeatedly grants the ultimate contrast to the analepsis. Jesse’s development will be further analysed in the section about character analysis.

The second example of the comparative analepsis is set much later in the series and is featuring Walter White. Walt and Jesse are preparing their first load of methamphetamine and, during a break, Walt rehearses lying to Skyler:

“Walter: Bogdan. Bogdan says I’m not doing the receipts right. Well, he’s got a bug up his butt. He’s got a stick up his butt? He’s got a bug up his butt about the receipts, anyways. So anyway, he’s insisting that I… He’s demanding that I stay and look over his system and I cannot get out of it.Yeah. (Walter calls Skyler)” (*Ozymandias* 00:01:41 – 00:02:09)

Like the other example of the comparative analepsis, Walt’s portrayals in the analepsis and in the main narrative seem like perfect contrasts to one another. Lying comes easily to Walt during this point of the main narrative and the loving and playful tone between him and Skyler has been replaced by a fearful and threatening tone; by the end of this episode, Walter even kidnaps Holly after having been threatened by Skyler with a knife. Narratively, this contrast provides the viewer with a stunning observation of the degree over which Walt’s moral decay has covered. This moral decay will be further elaborated in the section about character analysis.

Prolepses have marginally different usages than analepses. Rather than comparing altered states of a character or explaining the motives of characters, prolepses serve as stylistic teasers that usually are staged out of context to the main narrative to arouse the curiosity of the viewer. One example was already mentioned earlier in this project and was regarding Walter White on his 52nd birthday on which he ordered an automatic weapon and a new car. This prolepsis was aired during the first episode of the fifth season, called *Live Free or Die*. The context, in which this prolepsis was staged, was entirely out of context in terms of the main narrative, but the ability to provoke questions and interest from the viewers is the primary outcome of the prolepses. A frequent example of prolepsis in *Breaking Bad* is the reoccurring image of the crash site at the terrace of Walter and Skyler’s house. The story behind the debris and the body parts slowly unfolds in the teasers as the second season progresses. These prolepses are very artistic and dramatic to emphasise the mystery and to maintain the interest of the viewer despite seeming to appear out of context. An example of this is presented in the episode called *Over* which is the tenth episode of the second season: the prolepsis is opened with a close-up shot at the pink one-eyed teddy bear, the sound of inhaling and exhaling begins as the image of the teddy bear is fading out and the image of forensic scientists wearing masks through the reflection of a swimming pool appears. The only object of colour in this sequence is the teddy bear which is transferred to an evidence bag, establishing that this is a crime scene. Dramatic music intensifies as the forensic scientists carry the evidence bags to their vehicle. By the end of the prolepsis, the camera travels across Walter’s damaged car to find two body bags in the shade of it, as the music intensity peaks and the *Breaking Bad* intro takes over. Hence it is established that there appears to have been committed a crime around the terrace of Walter and Skyler’s house; a crime with two fatalities at least. The fact that Gilligan uses four prolepses, each explaining more than the last, might seem a provocative notion, but it keeps the viewer on the edge, wanting more and asking questions like: “what has happened here?” and “who have died?”. This is a very effective narrative tool which is used to intensify the series as well as abusing the curiosity of the viewer.

Finally, reoccurring patterns is a narrative tool used frequently *Breaking Bad*. Reoccurring patterns usually stress symbolic meanings. For example, the earlier mentioned elevator-scene with Hank is reoccurring and, as already established, Hank’s solidity inside the elevator is a symbol of his fears which he hides behind a façade. A great example for a reoccurring pattern to have symbolic meaning is Walter lighting when Walter lights matches and throws them into the swimming pool. This sequence occurs twice in the series; the first time in the pilot and the second time during the first episode of season three, called *No Más*. During the first of these two sequences, Walt sits at alone by the swimming pool at dusk, lighting matches and subsequently throwing them into the swimming pool. The music played is calm and disheartening. By the end of the scene, Walt calls Hank and accepts his offer to tag along on a drug raid. He performs this ritual the evening after he has received his diagnosis. *No Más* is contextually surrounding the plane crashes for which Walt obviously feels guilt. The scene is staged during bright daylight and after he lit the matches and thrown them into the swimming pool, he lights a large amount of money on the grill, but briefly after, he throws it into the pool to extinguish the fire. There is no music, only the clean sound of the scene. During the first sequence, after having been diagnosed, the matches are symbols of Walt’s life; throughout his life, he has been confined by the frame of his life. He has been overly qualified for his job in addition to feeling restricted by the purchase of their house, as it is established in an analepsis in *Full Measure* that he feels the family should aim higher and that the qualities of their lives could only improve from that point. In that particular analepsis, Walt states confidently that they will have three children so there are many factors throughout his life that have not been realised, which leads back to the sequence with the matches. He, like the matches, have been confined in a box and, having been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, he wants to make something happen before he dies, as the fire burns before it is extinguished by the water and this is why he wants to be introduced to the drug market by Hank. During the second sequence, Walt realised just what the cost of his attempt to burn bright before dying has cost him and he tries to burn the blood money only to realise that he is unable to complete the act. Walter being restrained by this conscience is discreetly showing in another reoccurring pattern in *Breaking Bad*. An entire episode of *Breaking Bad* is situated around a fly and this episode is simply called *Fly*. The symbol of the fly is used three times during *Breaking Bad*, in two sequences during this episode and once in *Gliding Over All*. Contextually, the fly is making appearances after Walt has caused irreversible damage and in *Fly* it symbolises the suppressed guilt that Walt feels after having allowed Jane to die. During this episode, Walter becomes so irrationally obsessed with catching the fly that he is willing to let Jesse risk his health by trying to kill the fly. In Walt’s explanation of why killing the fly is important, he stutters which is very uncharacteristic of Walt, which underlines the fact that he is in distress:

“Walter: This fly… No, any fly cannot be in our lab. It’s… It’s a problem. It’s a contamination. And that is in no way a misuse of the word. Okay? So in terms of keeping our cook clean and our product unadulterated we need to take the very seriously. Now do you understand?” (*Fly* 00:12:39 – 00:12:59)

His obsessive quest to kill the fly in their laboratory is Walter’s attempt to suppress his guilt and it proves unsuccessful as another fly appears at his house, after having killed the one in the laboratory. After having completed some deliberation of thoughts and guilts with Jesse during their hunt for the fly, Walter believes that he can move on, but in the last sequence of this episode Walt is awakened by the buzzing sound of a fly. He gazes at the fire alarm, blinking red, on the ceiling and during one of the flashes the silhouette of a fly appears. At this point, the camera zooms into Walt’s face which has a terrified expression. Thus, despite his best efforts to reconcile with Jesse over the death of Jane, Walt is still haunted by the damage that he has inflicted to so many lives since he starting to break bad. When the fly reappears in *Gliding Over All*, Walter’s stance towards the fly is all but obsessive. Having just killed Mike, the symbol of guilt was bound to return, but he is calm this time; he acknowledges the presence of the fly, but he does not actively try to dispose of it. This can be interpreted as Walt having realised that fighting against guilt is a struggle that he cannot win and thus he has to live with his guilt.

Other interesting reoccurring patterns are the scenes from the classroom of Walter’s high school. Two sequences are particularly interesting: the first one is from the pilot episode whereas the second example is from *The Cat’s in the Bag*: the first and second episodes of the first season. If interpreted as Walter being a representation of the chemistry about which he is teaching, these scenes serve as teasers as to what Walt’s character is becoming over the course of the next seasons. The first sequence, Walt teaches his students about the basics of chemistry:

“Walter: Chemistry is… Well, technically, chemistry is the study of matter. But I prefer to see it as the study of change. Now, just… Just think about this: Electrons. They change their energy levels. Molecules. Molecules change their bonds. Elements. They combine and change into compounds. Well, that’s… That’s all of life, right? I mean, it’s just… It’s the constant, it’s the cycle. It’s solution, dissolution, just over and over and over. It is growth, then decay, then transformation. It is fascinating, really.”(*Breaking Bad* 00:07:15 – 00:08:03)

Interpreting these scenes as subtle teaser as to what is going to happen further along in the narrative, Walter is obviously going to change. Furthermore, he argues that the change that is happening is natural and that it is fascinating more than anything else. At this point of the show, the viewer does not know about Walter changing into an antagonist by the end of it, and therefore these sequences can only be regarded as subtle teaser which the viewer can look back upon curiously. The second sequence does also take place in the classroom and he is teaching about chiral chemistry:

“Walter: So the term “chiral” derives from the Greek word “hand”. Now, the concept here being that just as your left hand and your right hand are mirrors of one another, right, identical and yet opposite. Well, so, too, organic compounds can exist as mirror-image forms of one another all the way down to molecular level. But although they may look the same, they don’t always behave the same. For instance… For instance… I’m sorry. For instance, thalidomide. The right-handed isomer of the drug thalidomide is a perfectly fine, good medicine to give to a pregnant woman to prevent morning sickness. But the mistake of giving that same pregnant woman the left-handed isomer of the drug thalidomide and her child will be born with horrible birth defects.” (*The Cat’s in the Bag* 00:09:14 - 00:10:20)

Whereas Walter talked about change during the first sequence, he talks about the duality of his character in this one. Interestingly enough, he describes different chiral matter as perfect contradictions to one another despite having the same appearance. What he describes is the relation between Walter White and Heisenberg; they have the same appearance but do not behave the same and thus serve as contrary factors.

In conclusion, there are two different uses of analepsis in *Breaking Bad*: the explanatory analepsis and the comparative analepsis. The first mentioned provides the viewer with background information and thus the motives behind some key characters and their actions. The comparative analepsis serves as a comparing factor used in relevant contexts to emphasise the massive change in Walter and Jesse. Prolepses are used as stylistic teasers and are staged out of context in terms of the main narrative. They tend to awaken the curiosity of the viewer as well as the interest. Reoccurring patterns are important scenes with great symbolic significance.

# 5. Analysing the anti-heroes of *Breaking Bad*

During this chapter, an account of the three anti-heroes of *Breaking Bad* and the differences between them will be given. All three of these characters have the traits of an anti-hero, but the three of them are immensely different and therefore this account will be interesting. Thus the points to be discussed during this chapter look as following:

* Walter as an anti-hero
* Jesse as an anti-hero
* Hank as an anti-hero

After having established that the notion of the anti-hero has changed over time, each of the characters in *Breaking Bad* that can be considered anti-heroes will be investigated as such. Walter White, whose resemblance to the anti-heroes of the revisionist westerns as well as the anti-heroes of the tragedy is stunning, will be the first of these characters to be analysed in terms of being an anti-hero. One of the most distinctive characteristics of an anti-hero is the fact that they have a blurred sense of morality, which is also present in Walter. As already established during the analysis of the ethics and morality of *Breaking Bad*, Walt implements his own pretexts in order to justify his actions to himself and his relatives, and this is obviously a breach to the ethical code of the society because these actions that he commits are highly immoral. The anti-hero of the revisionist western serves as a twisted parody of the hero of the western to question the traditional American values of the western, and therefore Walter contains characteristics of both. Walter becomes an antagonist through indirect choices, but he never tries to redeem himself before it is too late, because he enjoys being a powerful leader and a frontrunner within his field. Throughout the series, Walter is confronted with his own regrets from earlier in his life, previous to the narrative. An example of this is given in *Buyout*:

“Walter: Jesse, have you heard of a company called Gray Matter?

Jesse: No.

Walter: Well, I co-founded it in grad school with a couple of friends of mine. Actually, I was the one who named it. And back then it was just… Oh, it was just small-time. We had a couple of patents pending. But nothing earth-shattering. Course, we all knew the potential. Yeah, we were gonna take the world by storm. And then this… Well, something happened between the three of us. And I’m not going into detail. But for personal reasons I decided to leave the company. And I sold my share to my two partners. I took a buyout for $5000. Now, at the time, that was a lot of money for me. Care to guess what the company is worth now?

Jesse: Millions?

Walter: Billions, with a “B”. Two-point-one-six billion as of last Friday. I look it up every week and I sold my share, my potential, for $5000.” (*Buyout* 00:28:53 – 00:30:08)

Having faced a number of these personal disappointments previously to the narrative in which *Breaking Bad* take place, Walt comes to the conclusion in the end of the series that he likes being the powerful leader of an organisation, rather than doing it for the family. By doing so, the duality of Walter White is distinguished because he cannot justify his actions anymore by convincing himself that it is for the good of his family and thus the transformation to the antagonist is complete.

Jesse is another character that has to be considered an anti-hero, but he also serves as a contrast to Walt despite both of the characters are immoral anti-heroes. As will be argued for in the upcoming section about character analysis, Jesse is the victim of Walter and therefore the empathy which the viewer feels towards Jesse is steadily increasing as the narrative progresses. But does this mean that Jesse is not an anti-hero? No, he still possesses the characteristics of an anti-hero: he is a frequent abuser of drugs, he thrives at the wrong side of the law and his actions are often immoral, but nonetheless the viewer is continuously reminded of how Jesse is victimised by Walt. One of the most emotionally devastating sequences in the entire series reminds the viewer of this: in *Full Measure,* Jesse shoots Gale Boetticher because he believes that it is the only way that he can avert Walter’s death. The scene, which is the final scene of the third season, is shot at the doorstep of Gale’s house. Gale opens the door to find Jesse emotionally distressed with a gun pointed to his face. Gale is an odd character but a character with whom the viewer has grown fond through his weird humour, behaviour and respectfulness towards the people around him. Standing face to face with Jesse with a gun pointed to his head, he starts begging for his life; crosscuts between him and Jesse show how both of them are emotionally anxious and the scene ends with a camera pan from Jesse’s right into the direction directly in front of the barrel of the gun, the focus shifts from the shaking Jesse on the brink of tears to the gun, a shot is fired and the screen turns black. This devastating scene is a turning point for Jesse character and from this point he starts turning rebellious towards the manipulation coming from Walt; this is explained further in the chapter about character analysis. Jesse is indirectly forced to shoot Gale to save Walter’s life and is therefore victimised by having to choose which of these people to die. By Jesse being victimised time and time again by the decisions of Walt, ensures a growth in the level of empathy felt towards Jesse by the viewer as opposed to the growing feeling of disgust felt towards Walt and this is the primary difference between the two characters in terms of them being anti-heroes.

The last, and most controversial, of the characters that can be considered anti-heroes is DEA agent Hank Schrader. At first, he comes across as the strain of humour in the show, but Hank is a far more diverse character than that, as already established in the analysis of the elevator scenes. His obsessive quest for righteousness and justice leaves Hank on the brink and beyond the borders of morality. An example of this is evident when he is lured away from the RV while he awaits warrants for searching the vehicle by receiving a fake phone-call claiming that Marie is injured and has been rushed to the hospital. Hank hurries to the hospital only to learn that the phone-call indeed was a fake and subsequently he finds Jesse, who had then escaped the RV, and beat him unconsciously (in *One Minute*). The violent anti-hero is a creation of the hard-boiled fiction and film noir and Hank suffers other similarities to this type of characters; he has the capacity to function in a world of corruption and leaks in the system. Another example of him breaking the laws of morality is his usage of GPS systems on the cars of whoever he suspects to be a criminal. He tries to illegally generate evidence to arrest certain persons and this and the abovementioned characteristics are sufficient indications of Hank being a flawed anti-hero. However, as opposed to Walter, Hank’s intentions are pure as he always acts in the best interest of the law, despite having to break it from time to time. Thus, the acts completed by Hank are acts impermissible acts in terms of the law, but ethically defendable and thus permissible in terms of morality and this is the difference between Hank and Walt; Walt transforms his own impermissible acts into permissible acts by creating his own sense of moral justification whilst Hank’s moral justification of committing his acts seems legitimate.

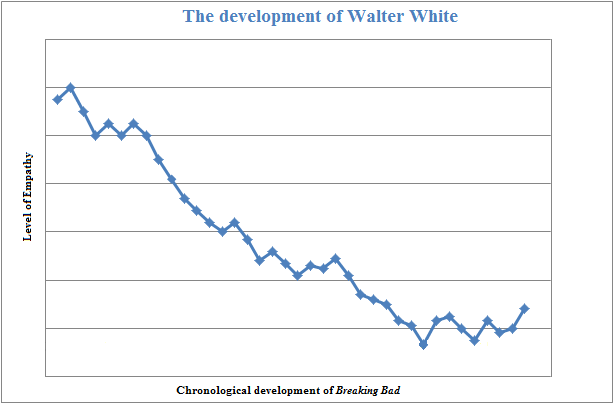
Thus, all of the abovementioned characters can be categorised as anti-heroes, but there are significant differences between them nonetheless in regards to how their justify their moral choices; Walter convinces to himself that he does it for the right reasons, Jesse does it for, what he thinks, is the right reasons whereas Hank completes his immoral choices for the right reasons.

# 6. Analysis of characters

To create a comprehensive analysis of the characters of *Breaking Bad,* each of the relevant characters will be interpreted in a subchapter. The choice behind choosing these particular characters and thus excluding the likes of Marie Schrader and Saul Goodman is based on how they revolve around the development of Walter White. The problem formulation of this project asks how the development of Walter influences the characters around him, and while Marie and Saul do get influenced by him, they don’t develop massively as a result thereof.

## 6.1 Development of Walter White

A focal point in terms of Walter White is to which degree the viewer empathises with him. To illustrate this, I have created the following graph. Stated on the Y-axis is the level of empathy one, as a viewer, feels towards Walter, whereas the X-axis represents the chronology of the series. The value of the level of empathy is ranging from 0 to 100, where 100 is a value at which the viewer feels an extremely high sense of empathy towards Walter. The points drawn on the graph are specific points of the narrative during which the perception of Walter is altered by the viewer as a result of an action. This graph is based on values and opinions by the author of this project and therefore some of the points might be disagreed upon. That being said, certain sequences of the series have been excluded because of the fact that values differ from person to person. An example of this is Skyler’s affair with Ted Beneke; some would argue that Walter is victimized by Skyler in this situation whilst others would argue that Skyler acts as the victim. The graph is providing the reader with an overview of how this particular character develops over the course of the series. The specific points will be explained and analysed below the graph.



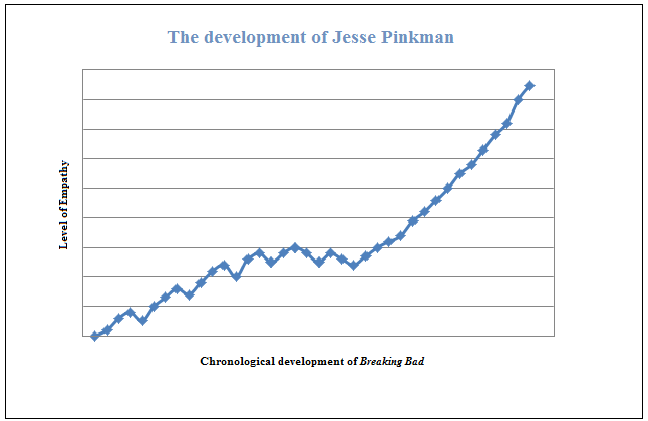
1. The first point on the graph represents Walter as he is introduced to the viewer and established to the show: a friendly 50-year old high-school teacher who is working a humiliating part-time job at a carwash and whose wife is pregnant with his second child and whose first son is suffering from cerebral palsy. Despite having no reason to dislike Walt at this point, the level of empathy cannot be at the maximal level. The reason why the empathy level is not at the maximal level during this sequence of the show is because he has yet to receive his lung cancer diagnosis, which brings us to the next point on the graph:
2. During the first episode of *Breaking Bad*, Walter is diagnosed with cancer and it raises the level of empathy to the highest level.
3. He steals chemistry equipment at his workplace and offers Jesse a partnership and they start manufacturing methamphetamine. In the eyes of the viewer, Walt is still respectable because his desire is to make some easy money for his family before he dies, despite breaking the law relatively mildly.
4. Walter deliberately poisons Emilio and Krazy-8 in desperation as they threaten to kill himself and Jesse. There are a few factors to reduce the judgement of the viewer here: firstly, Emilio and Crazy-8 are criminal drug lords and secondly, he is remorseful to the degree at which he nearly shoots himself and therefore his penalty is not as strong as manslaughter would have been.
5. Being unwilling to leave the family in debt for his treatments, he refuses to use their common money to pay for it. This is arguably a selfish notion but this sacrifice of his help clarifying his devotion to the family.
6. Walt continuously lies to Skyler; this time about how his treatment is being paid.
7. Having brought Jesse in a dangerous situation in which he gets beaten up by Tuco, Walter – in his Heisenberg hat and shades - decides to avenge Jesse. One could argue that his motivation to do this was the money he lost but since he gave it to Jesse, this act will serve as an act of vengeance.
8. Through several sequences of the show, Walter is clearly aroused when danger comes too close; e.g. when the DEA are questioning the teachers at the high school or when Tuco threatens him and his family.
9. Walter creates ricin with the intention of killing Tuco, showing that Walt is willing to commit murder in order to keep himself safe.
10. He creates a massive lie to deceive not only his family, but the entire community in which they live, thus showing his willingness to go great lengths in order to sustain his lie.
11. In desperation, Walter starts attending the family as well as maintaining the house, but it all seems superficial and it has the opposite effect of what he had hoped. He lets his anger out on Jesse and, after a fight, begs Jesse to kill him.
12. Walter presses Jesse on to expand to other dealers’ territories, resulting in the death of Combo, one of Jesse’s closest friends, whom Walter just shrugs off to Jesse’s regrets.
13. Whereas he earlier would have preferred the moral solution, Walter favours having Badger killed after he is caught by the DEA as he was dealing their drugs, thus against showing his willingness to kill for his cause.
14. Having briefly flirted with the idea of leaving the drug business, Walter challenges Hank and forces his under-aged son to drink a vast amount of alcohol, resulting in junior throwing up in the pool.
15. After his act-out, he sincerely apologizes to his son.
16. Walter prioritises picking up his earning over the birth of his daughter, displaying his commitment to making money over reconciling with his family.
17. After breaking in at Jesse’s domicile, Walter actively lets Jane die from choking on her own vomit, rather than risking being caught whilst breaking in.
18. After the death of Jane and the airplane catastrophe, Walter stops manufacturing methamphetamine despite a terrific offer from Gustavo.
19. Walter returns to his manufacturing after being offered a relatively safe job.
20. Being in a life-threatening situation, Walter manipulates Jesse to kill Gale for him to survive.
21. In a desperate moment, Walt narrates a voice-mail to Skyler in which he declares his feelings for her and his family, resulting in them having sex.
22. Walter installs a tracker on Jesse’s car and thus destroys the last trust between the former partners.
23. Walter Junior tracks down a beaten and exhausted Walt who collapses into an emotional state, apologizing for everything to his son.
24. Walt poisons Brock, an innocent child, to secure his own survival and manipulates Jesse to think it was Gustavo.
25. After having promised Tio his vengeance against Gustavo, Walt installs a bomb to explode a section of a retirement home to kill Gustavo. Hence, rather than being the victim of a source of danger, Walt becomes the danger himself.
26. Sheer arrogance is showing, as Walter proclaims to Skyler that he forgives her for having an affair.
27. Just as the relationship between Walter and Jesse seems to be repaired, Walter manipulates Jesse to leave Andrea and Brock.
28. In the end of the siphoning of the freight, Walter seems to be willing to compromise Jesse’s health for the last few drops of methylamine. After the siphoning, Walter stands idly by as Todd kills an innocent child who watched the operation.
29. Walter realizes that all he has left is his business and he tries to steal the methylamine from his partners and when Jesse and Mike wishes to quit the production, Walt intercepts.
30. He partners up with Todd’s uncles to make them murder Mike’s friends within the prison walls to destroy the liabilities of his business.
31. Having killed off the liabilities, he tells Skyler that he is quitting after which she smiles again and the family seems at peace for the first time in a very long time.
32. Walter is willing to turn himself in to the police if Skyler is willing to take the money and thus he is returning to his fundamental premise regarding doing everything for his family.
33. He creates a false confession on a videotape, bringing Hank and Marie in danger. At this point, Walt turns against his family to keep himself safe which is a crucial point of the show.
34. Walter orders the assassination of Jesse and thus breaking the threshold of his paternal relationship to Jesse because of the fact that he too has become a liability.
35. Despite his begging proves unsuccessful, Walter is willing to trade all of his money for Hank’s life. At this point, Walter is prepared to sacrifice his money for Hank, who has been tirelessly hunting him with the intention of punishing his crimes.
36. After unsuccessfully having kidnapped his own daughter, Walter is at his lowest ebb and vanishes.
37. He bribes his contact person to stay with him for a few hours only to provide him with company. At this point of the narrative, the viewer sympathises with Walt because he is a broken man who has lost everything: his family, his business and his money.
38. In a last attempt to redeem himself, he executes his final plan which includes telling Skyler that he committed his actions for selfish reasons. He destroys the syndicate of criminals who has captured Jesse, he refused to spare Todd’s uncle despite being offered all of his money back and he poisons Lydia with ricin in addition to offering Jesse the satisfaction of shooting him.

The first objective of the graph is that it is showing that the level of empathy is steadily dropping as the narrative of the series developments indicating that Walter grows less likeable as the show moves on. Furthermore, despite generally decreasing, the level of empathy has several sequences of increase and as a consequence of this, the viewer endures Walter’s actions given the fact that brief indications of his former amiable self is showing. One last point to be made from the graph is the discussion whether Walter White selflessly redeems himself by the end of the series. According to the graph, the empathy level of the protagonist does increase a significant amount during the last five points. However, despite his best efforts to correct his mistakes, Walter is unable to complete his redemption and throughout the series, he and his family ended up breaking bad due to his poor judgement and decision-making. Looking at the facts of how the show ends, Skyler and the children live in an unappealing apartment, Walter Junior has a tainted image of his father, his brother-in-law is dead, and leaving Marie a widow; Jesse will have to rearrange his life or face trials after being connected to the murders of Hank and Steve. In addition, several people of different backgrounds have been murdered and Walter is also indirectly responsible for the plane crashes over Albuquerque. These are among the fates that have been influenced by the decision-making of Walter White and therefore his own sacrifice is not enough to redeem himself after the last episode. The relationship between Walter and Jesse is a focal point to the viewer’s relative acceptance of Walt’s moral decay; despite submerging into his moral decay, his relationship with Jesse develops to the degree at which he acts as a father to Jesse, rather than a partner or an authoritative mentor. Walt’s relationship to Jesse, a character for whom the viewer’s affection increases throughout the series, thus helps establish a sense of affection for Walt himself.

In conclusion, the changes happening to Walter is occurring over the entirety of the series, and this notion is important for the viewer to keep sympathising with the character for a stretched amount of time, rather than just changing over the course of one episode.

## 6. 2 Development of Jesse Pinkman

As a comparison to the development of Walter White, it would be appropriate to create a graph over the development of the other protagonist of *Breaking Bad*: Jesse Pinkman. The same rules and descriptions as Walter’s graph apply to this one and, once again, the development is based on the author of this project’s opinion. The specific points will be explained and analysed below the graph.



1. During the first Pilot-episode of *Breaking Bad*, Jesse appears with his street name “Cap’n Cook’. He is portrayed as a renowned methamphetamine manufacturer and a former chemistry student of Walt’s in addition to being wanted by the DEA.
2. Jesse is being blackmailed by Walt to conduct business with him.
3. Being forced to find a new distributor, Walt makes the involuntary Jesse seek out Tuco, who beats him up at their first encounter. This is the first time that Jesse is punished by the actions of Walter.
4. Along with Walt, Jesse is kidnapped by Tuco and held at a farm in the desert again their wills.
5. Jesse ruins the attempt to manipulate Tuco into consuming ricin because he claims that the mix includes chili, which he formerly used as a trademark in his own methamphetamine.
6. Jesse’s money is taken by the DEA and stricken by poverty, he seeks out his family with which he has an appalling relationship and after taking the blame for his smaller brother’s stocking of marihuana, he is evicted.
7. After being forced to manufacture methamphetamine in the basement of his own property because of his financial situation, Jesse is dispossessed of the house by his parents after they found out.
8. Rendered homeless and having his motorcycle stolen, he seeks to sleep on the floor of the RV. Being at his lowest ebb, Jesse cries himself to sleep that night.
9. Walt forces Jesse to demand respect from the junkies who stole their product from Skinny Pete. He seeks them out with a pistol in his hands.
10. The viewer learns about Jesse’s affection for children and he urges the drug-abusing parents to take better care of their child whilst he threatens them. Jesse takes care of the child before he has to escape the crime scene.
11. Jesse speaks about his loving relationship with his aunt whom he took care of before she died from cancer.
12. Jesse’s friend and dealer Combo is shot and Jesse feels responsible for his murder.
13. After having started abusing drugs again, Jesse and Jane are becoming involved in a romantic relationship. In his weak state, she introduces him to heroin.
14. Promising to themselves that they stop abusing drugs, they seek one last high from which she never awakens because of Walter’s interference. Jesse is devastated by the death of Jane.
15. Being sent to an institution to provide him with serenity, Jesse learns to accept himself as the villain and feels responsible for the plane crashes.
16. Jesse blackmails his parents to sell his former house to him for a relatively limited amount of money.
17. Being unable to surrender Jane, Jesse continuously calls her phone to hear her voice through her voice-mail. And as her phone number is finally erased, he resigns in tears.
18. Once again, Jesse is victimized by Walt’s idea when Hank shows up in his house and beats him up.
19. After Hank is shot by the Mexican cartel, Jesse smiles.
20. During a rehabilitation support meeting, Jesse seeks to tempt the other members with his product.
21. He charms Andrea with the intention of selling methamphetamine to her but when he meets her son, Brock, he discontinues his efforts.
22. Jesse, showing the traits of an anti-hero, seeks to kill the murderers of Combo to avenge his death, but Walter intercepts.
23. To save Walt’s life, Jesse shoots Gale Boetticher and is struck by guilt as a consequence.
24. Deeply traumatized, Jesse desires to drown the silence by having company constantly and acquiring an enormous stereo. His house turns into a home for the homeless drug addicts of the streets.
25. Despite having had to end his relationship with Andrea, he still provides for her and Brock, leaving a stack of money in their mailbox.
26. At this point of the plot, Jesse does not seem to care about money; he shrugs off a burglar’s attempt to steal his bag of money.
27. Gus manipulates Jesse to think that is an important factor in Gus’ and Mike’s business as they stage an attempt to make him feel act like a hero.
28. Jesse rejoins the rehabilitation support meeting at which he explains his former intentions of selling methamphetamine and explains that he is unwilling to stand idly by and let his outcome be decided by other people.
29. In Walt’s desperation, he exploits Jesse’s trust in him and installs a tracker under his car, thus abolishing the final bond between them.
30. Once again, Jesse is being manipulated by Walter as he convinces Jesse that Gus poisoned Brock. Jesse’s love for and devotion to Brock is apparent whenever he is featured and his relief when Brock is cured is appealing to the viewer.
31. Walter plants the ricin cigarette in Jesse’s apartment providing Jesse with even more guilt.
32. Another exploitation of Jesse is apparent when Walt indirectly urges Jesse to end his relationship with Andrea and Brock in *Hazard Play*.
33. Jesse’s massive objections in regards to the murder of Drew Sharp stand as a contradiction to Walt’s reaction.
34. Walter tries to force Jesse to stay in the drug manufacturing business by disallowing him his money but Jesse walks away without the money.
35. Jessie donates a massive amount of his money to Drew’s parents and Mike’s grandchild.
36. When Jesse finds out that Walt poisoned Brock, he deserts his plans of leaving for Alaska and seeks to retaliate. He partners up with Hank and the DEA to arrest Walt and they trick him by exploiting his greed.
37. Once again, Jesse is victimized and beaten up by Todd and his uncle. They force him to cook methamphetamine and when he arrests, they shoot Andrea in front of his eyes.
38. As the show ends, Jesse is driving away from the ruins of the farm, laughing maniacally.

Over the course of the series, Jesse is manipulated, physically abused and being deceived repeatedly and the graph shows how that affects the level of empathy towards Jesse Pinkman. The level steadily increases as the show progresses and seems to accelerate after he shoots Gale Boetticher. This particular point of the series is indeed very crucial for Jesse’s development and it will be analysed further later on in this project. Up until this point, the graph was fluctuating back and forth but generally increasing. The points at which the graph is decreasing are mainly due to bad decision-making subsequent to either being manipulated or having had a traumatic experience. He, for instance, usually abuses drugs as a consequence of being in a distressed state of mind; he is introduced to cocaine after the death of Combo and he abuses their own product after he shoots Gale. Arguably, despite losing empathy from the viewer, Jesse is the victim in several of these cases and this is one of the reasons why the curve is steadily increasing. Furthermore, the fact that, when comparing Walt and Jesse, Walt appears to be the superior force and even the authority of Jesse, given their former relationship as student and teacher, and Walt often uses that power over Jesse to ridicule him. An example of this is given in the episode called *4 Days Out*. After having produced an immense amount of methamphetamine, the partners realise that the car battery has been drained because Jesse left the keys in the ignition.

“Walt: Jesse, back when I asked you to put the keys in a safe place. Where did you put them?  
Jesse: I left them right here in the ignition.  
Walt: Son of a bitch.  
Jesse: Whoa, whoa, no, this is not my fault, all right? The buzzer didn’t buzz.  
Walt: The what?!  
Jesse: [apologetic] The buzzer that buzzes when you put the keys in to let you know that the battery’s on. I know that. It didn’t buzz. Look, I didn’t turn the key or anything, all right? I’m not stupid. Did you hear the buzzer buzz? I did not. It’s faulty. It’s a faulty mechanism.   
Walt: [mocking] Is this a genetic thing with you? Is it congenital? Did your mother drop you on your head when you were a baby?  
Jesse: The buzzer did not buzz! And you were the one that made me move the keys in the first place, remember?  
Walt: [ironically] Yes, I see your point. Your imbecility being what it is, I should’ve known to say: ‘Jesse, don’t leave the keys in the ignition the entire two days.’  
Jesse: I wanted to leave them on the counter, bitch. Oh, I’m sorry, oh, the workstation.” (*4 Days Out* 00:18:53 - 00:19:42)

Despite arguing for the contrary, Jesse’s gestures and tone of voice are very apologetic and the relationship between Walter and Jesse at this point is of inequality. Additionally, this is an example of Walt’s continuous mockery of Jesse which is another factor in the increasing sympathy for Jesse. Furthermore, Mark A. Powell argues in his book *What is Narrative Criticism* (1990) that there is an interconnection between the reader or viewer’s sympathy for a character and the protagonist’s view on that given character; if the protagonist finds the character likeable, so will the viewer. Despite the fact that Walter is dislikeable for the majority of the series, he is portrayed as friendly character at first. Even though Walter develops embraced his moral decay, his affection for Jesse remains the same for the majority of the show and hence the viewer finds Jesse likeable. Additionally, the language of Jesse differs enormously from the language of Walt, as can be interpreted from the abovementioned quotation. This difference is used to emphasise the social and cultural deficit between the characters which, once again, leaves Walt superior to Jesse.

Having identified the abovementioned crucial point in Jesse’s development, it would be relevant, in regards to this project, to compare the character before and after the shooting of Gale Boetticher. Before the killing of Gale Boetticher, those factors that were typical as the sympathy towards Jesse increased were the same as after, but his own carelessness often became his own worst enemy and this carelessness seems to have subsided slightly and thus there are little to none factors to decrease the level of empathy for Jesse.

## 6. 3 Skyler White

A massive point to this project is how Walt’s transformation influences the people around him and therefore Walt’s influence on his spouse, Skyler, is interesting to look at. As Walter’s lies and manipulations eventually affected everyday life of the family to a degree at which Skyler resorted to threaten him to turn him in if he would not sign the divorce papers. This makes Skyler an accomplice in Walt’s crimes and the viewer comes to experience a decay of Skyler’s own ethical code over the next seasons. This decay of morality includes Skyler sleeping with her boss, laundering Walter’s drug money, lying about using dirty money to pay for Hank’s expensive recovery treatments, hiring Goodman’s agents to trick Bogdan to sell his carwash for a minimal amount of what it is worth and to blackmail Ted which eventually sends him to the hospital with irreversible trauma. Her ethical downfall is thus directly caused by Walt’s decision to let her know about his business and her unwillingness to make the right call to turn her husband in to the police. She argues that she was unable to tell Walter junior about his father being a drug manufacturer, but she starts to adopt the same patterns as her husband as the show progresses. She upholds lies to her sister with whom she used to share everything and the reason why she hired Goodman’s agents to threaten Ted was because she refused to let his inability to pay the fine for being a tax fraud drag her down with him. Thus Walt’s immorality influenced Skyler to the degree at which she adopts his immoral measures to cover up her own agenda which, allegedly is to protect her children.

## 6. 4 Hank Schrader

Walter’s need to be in control and having power are the two main factors of his that influence Hank. The obsession to catch Heisenberg sets off Hank and he is willing to cross the barrier of morality in order to catch him. As an example, he implants a GPS-system on Gus’ car to try to confirm his suspicion about Gus being Heisenberg in the episode called *Bug.* Interestingly enough, Walter seems to have a weakness for teasing Hank and encourage him to keep searching for Heisenberg and this weakness ends up being Walter’s own downfall. Several times throughout the series, Walter claims to be Heisenberg, but Hank disregards as a joke. When Hank finally learns about his brother-in-law being he risks his job in his obsessive pursuit to find evidence to arrest Walt. With the help of Jesse who knows greed to be the weakness of Walt, Hank is finally able to arrest Walt, but subsequently to this, Todd’s uncle and his friends appear to kill off Hank and Steven Gomes. Thus, Hank’s obsessive pursuit ends up costing him and his partner their lives and this is all a consequence of Walter’s influence on Hank.

## 6.5 Walter White Junior

Throughout the narrative of *Breaking Bad*, Walter Junior is going through different stages in regards to his relationship with his father and this is expressed through when he wants to be called Flynn or when he wants to be called Walter Junior. During the second season, Walter Junior disregards his birth name, which inevitably connects him with his father, and by doing so, he makes a personal rebellion against his father and his conscious choice not to receive treatment, but as their parents are going through the divorce, Junior takes his father’s allegiance and insists that he should be called Walter Junior. Worth mentioning is the fact that Junior does not learn about the truth of his father until the last season of *Breaking Bad* and at this point he reverts back to using Flynn and takes on the role as the protector of the family as he protects his mother against his father in a knife struggle. Having been kept in the shadows, Walter Junior despises his father after learning the truth and as Walt contacts him in *Granite State*, Junior expresses his wish that Walt would ‘just die already’. Due to the influence of Walter White, Junior has lost his father, his father figure in Hank and his good relationship to his mother whom he claims as equally bad because she lied to him. So if he had known the truth through the entire narrative, chances are that he would have kept using Flynn as his name.

# 7 Conclusion

When analysing *Breaking Bad*, one has to deal with an enormous corpus of text and completing a comprehensive analysis of the entire series and all of its aspects would require more than space a one-man master’s thesis would be allowed and therefore the delimitations of this project have been necessary.

Through the abovementioned analysis, the transformations of the characters of *Breaking Bad* have been revealed. The problem formulation stated as following:

“How has Walter White been transformed from protagonist to antagonist in *Breaking Bad?* How has his decisions influenced the developments of other important characters of the show? How are the concepts of ethics and morality dealt with through the characters of *Breaking Bad?* Does the narrative structure of *Breaking Bad* help the viewer empathisewith the characters and if so, how?”

Walter White was transformed from protagonist to antagonist through a series of objectives. His transformation had to be completed throughout the entire series, rather than from one episode to the next, because Gilligan wanted the viewer to maintain some amount of sympathy for the character. From the graph showcasing Walter’s development, one can read that the level of empathy is steadily decreasing throughout the series with only a few points of increase. However, these points of increase are essential for the viewer to retain sympathy for Walt. Despite suffering from a decreasing level of empathy from the viewer, Walt creates his own ethical code in order for him to justify his actions and when this ethical code breaks, he is forced to live with the guilt, symbolised by the fly.

Walter’s bad decision-making during his development results in dire consequences for his family and other important characters of the show. Skyler ends up resembling the morality of Walter in a number of ways, Hank ends up adopting anti-heroic methods in his obsessive search for Heisenberg and ends up dying, Jesse seems emotionally numb by the end of the series after having lost his girlfriend in addition to indirectly been forced to murder a sympathetic character. Walter Junior ends us losing his father, the image of his father and his father figure, rendering him deeply scarred. So Walter’s journey to becoming an antagonist has disastrous consequences to himself as well as the people around him.

Ethics and morality are important concepts in the series. Characters such as Walter, Skyler and Hank seem to construct their own morality in order justify their actions. Walter makes his impermissible acts permissible by convincing himself and his surroundings that they are for the good of his family. Skyler shows the same tendency after having been included in Walter’s indiscretions. Hank breaks the codes of morality in order to continue his obsessive hunt for Heisenberg.

Having drawn elements of the western genre and the tragedy into *Breaking Bad* and these elements are crucial to the construction of the characters. Walt and Hank are, for example, characters shaped by the ideal of the American western hero with the self-reliance and being able to provide for their families, however both of them have adopted some flaws of the anti-heroes of revisionist westerns.

The narrative structure serves several purposes in *Breaking Bad*. Analepses and prolepses are used frequently. There are two different uses of analepsis in *Breaking Bad*: the explanatory analepsis and the comparative analepsis. The first mentioned provides the viewer with background information and thus the motives behind some key characters and their actions. The comparative analepsis serves as a comparing factor used in relevant contexts to emphasise the massive change in Walter and Jesse. The use of prolepsis is limited to stylistic teasers which are staged out of context to create the biggest effect of curiosity from the viewer. The last mode of narrative structure that was analysed in this project was the reoccurring patterns. These are simply important scenes with symbolic significance.

The two protagonists of *Breaking Bad* underwent the most significant amount of change throughout the narrative of the series. As the graphs explain their developments in terms of empathic appeal progresses in the opposite direction; the level of empathy with Jesse increases, whereas it decreases with Walt. Gilligan thus successfully turn Walter from a protagonist into an antagonist, but does he turn Jesse from a potential antagonist into a protagonist? I think final encounter between Jesse and Walt answers this question. In *Felina*, after having executed his plan to redeem himself, Walt offers a woeful Jesse the opportunity to shoot him. As Jesse refuses with a cold ‘do it yourself’, he abdicates his need for vengeance and for one last act of immorality and thus completes the final step of his transformation: becoming a protagonist.

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1. Definition available online at <http://www.detnovel.com/DetectiveCode.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Quotations from this section are borrowed from the following website: [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://stateofworkingamerica.org/great-recession/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lyrics at: <http://www.songlyrics.com/danger-mouse-daniele-luppi/black-lyrics/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) was a French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher. In his book *The Forms of Capital* (1986), Bourdieu states that a person of high capital within a certain field is able to exchange capital of that particular field in order to gain capital within a different field. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)