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Editor's Note

The current issue of of Singularities journal explores the multiple dimensions of 'evil', the theme of Singularities International Conference 2025, through a rich mosaic of scholarly perspectives. The contributors traverse diverse intellectual landscapes—from cultural anthropology and psychoanalysis to literary criticism and film studies—demonstrating how complex and nuanced the concept of evil truly is. These articles challenge traditional binary understandings of good and evil, revealing how societal structures, psychological experiences, and cultural narratives shape our perceptions of transgression and moral ambiguity. By examining evil through lenses ranging from African traditional societies to posthuman dilemmas, from Gothic literature to contemporary cinema, the contributors illuminate the intricate ways evil emerges from systemic oppression, personal trauma, and cultural dynamics. From Kazeem H. Fola's exploration of traditional Yoruba conflict mediation to Anjali Vijayan's critical reading of crime fiction narratives, our authors demonstrate how evil is not a monolithic concept but a complex social and psychological construct. Psychoanalytic readings, posthuman perspectives, and cultural analyses converge to reveal the intricate mechanisms through which societies negotiate transgression and moral boundaries. Abijith P. S.'s psychoanalytic reading of "Stranger Things" and Anupama Maria K.'s posthuman analysis of "Klara and the Sun" exemplify how contemporary narrative forms can illuminate profound philosophical questions. The contributions by Aswini R on Gothic literature and Dr. Dinesh Panwar's examination of oppression in "The Color Purple" further underscore how interdisciplinary scholarship challenges established paradigms. These diverse scholarly interventions invite readers to reconsider simplistic moral dichotomies and embrace a more nuanced understanding of human complexity. Singularities journal continues to provide a critical platform for intellectual discourse that transcends traditional academic boundaries, encouraging rigorous, compassionate, and transformative scholarship. The issue invites readers to transcend simplistic moral judgments and engage with profound questions about human nature, identity, and the complex psychological and social mechanisms that generate what we perceive as evil.

P. K. Babu., Ph. D
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Kazeem, H. Fola, PhD

Culture, Peace and Conflict Mediation in Africa : The Example of the Traditional Yoruba Society

Abstract

This paper examined the means of maintenance and restoration of peace and stability among people, races and nations since that is the only basis for world security. The pursuit of peace as the central objective of this study is provoked by the precarious situation of the world today such that people and nations set aside unquantifiable monetary and material resources in preparation for war that is hardly in sight. All of these are done to the detriment of the constant and desperate human needs for food, healthcare, housing and clothing. This unbridled arm race trend is occasioned by the inability of mankind to effectively manage the various conflicts among people, nations, races, religions and ideologies.

The study revealed that the indigenous culture of the African people, as exemplified by that of Yoruba, has more than enough methods of conflict mediation that humanity can learn from. They are effective and have not been found to be counterproductive to the extent of engendering further conflicts than the original one being struggled to resolve.

The study concludes that recognizing individual local peculiarities while also appealing to the sentiments of parties to conflicts will go a long way to douse tension and thereby guarantee the restoration of a long-lasting peace.

Keywords: Peace, Conflict, Mediation, culture, Africa, Yoruba

Introduction

The notion "Peace and Conflict Mediation" encapsulates the strive by mankind to seek peaceful co-existence across races, languages philosophies, religions and cultures in a world peopled by diverse characters who are themselves characterized by multiplicity of interests. In its diverse complexities, the world constantly poses for man several challenges which are tasking enough to mock his resolutions. Amidst all the existential confusions, it becomes inevitable for man to move his society forward because all those highlighted challenges are, for him, part of the dynamics of living.

As a part of the dynamics of living, peace and conflict, as very delicate as they are, represents for him the two sides of his single coin which he must inevitably live and deal with. They are extremely sensitive to the extent that they are capable of rendering apart the human world in the event of mismanagement. Because the only viable tool available to man to manage these potentially precarious factors is through mutual understanding, and the search towards that very horizon continues.

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Since creation, the search for peace has been a continuous process. The more mankind seeks peace the more peace has eluded him. In the same vein also, conceptualizing peace has been as problematic as its acquisition and of course, its sustenance. The human comprehension has found it increasingly difficult to properly conceive of peace without beginning to understand it from the view-point of war and vice-versa. So, it is familiar to hear such statements as "peace is the absence of war" or "war is the absence of peace". These are rather commonsensical ways to define peace and they are short of telling us in a very clear term what 'peace' is. This same commonsensical approach attends such associative pairs as good/evil; white/black; master/slave, and such other binary pairs.

Peace can be described as the existence of tranquility, a situation which has to do with total absence of violence. In this regard, war as mentioned earlier, is classified as one amongst other existing forms of violence. There still exist a number of variants of violence, most of which have come to be classified as structural sub forms. These include poverty, exclusion, intimidation, oppression, hunger, want, fear, feeling of insecurity and other innumerable forms of psychological pressures. Peace can by no means be said to be in existence in any country, for example, where there is pervasive poverty, oppression of the poor by the rich, police brutality, intimidation of the ordinary man by those in positions of authority, oppression of women or monopolization of resources and power by some sections of the country. Indeed, one may want to maintain the position that there is no war going on in a place such as these, at the same time, one cannot claim that peace is in existence there (Gaya 2006:3)

Giving the above perspectives on peace, several definitions of the subject-matter have been advanced. From the philosophical, sociological to the political, its role as a functional category cannot be over-emphasized. It is a means to specific ends, and those ends have to do with progress and development. This is to the extent that except there is peace, progress and development will continue to elude mankind.

Philosophically, peace in its descriptive form involves, among other conditions, the cessation of violent conflict… state of quietness or tranquility, an absence of disturbance or agitation; and between people, it is characterized by respect, justice and goodwill. Peace is suggestive of calmness, serenity, and silence, and, according to Gaya (2006), it is,

> …a natural, original and God-given state of human existence. By extension therefore, it is the pre-corruption state of man in society; a state of perfection; an earthly expression of God's kingdom that is yet uncorrupted (6)

In its sociopolitical sub-form, peace addresses the social concerns such that justice is enabled. It refers, therefore, to a condition of intitutionalised social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms; a condition of total lack of social or political conflict

where individual and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations

Common to all of these descriptions cited is the existence of one condition in thought that is attributed as 'peace' just as there is another that is attributed as 'conflict'-both of which are dynamic socio-economic and political processes and which are capable of affecting progress and development.

The Necessity for Peace and Conflict Mediation

The world today faces increasingly multi-dimensional forms of conflict. From nations to nations, from communities to communities, it has been one form of conflict or another in which human lives and existence have been threatened. This is majorly because arms and other lethal weapons are freely in use. These are apart from the greater populations of women and children confronted by the realities of hunger and total lack of basic medical cares. The world has experienced the greatest cases of genocide in recent times to the extent that one almost begins to ask the question whether the perpetrators are not human beings. The efforts of the World Court at Hague to deal decisively with perpetrators of crimes against humanity have not really been an effective deterrent. Neither has the incidence of conflicts become reduced. In the same vein, several other means geared toward conflict resolution have yielded little or no results at all.

Today however, peace is no longer brokered; it is enforced on unwilling parties such that the former situation becomes the more fragile than the latter and renewed hostilities soon break out following any slight provocation. This means in effect that there are deficiencies in the modern means of conflict mediation and resolution in use today. These noticeable deficiencies have snowballed into a terrible and new form of grievance registration. This form of grievance registration has deadlier consequences giving the manner it is being perpetrated around the world. It has consequently confronted mankind with greater challenges than those posed by the initial conflicts themselves. Such challenges being posed include the feeling of lopsidedness in judgment in which one of the parties to a given conflict will remain implacable; some sense of difference by one of the parties to either the ideological or religious undertone(s) of the conflict resolution process; and sometimes, total lack of confidence in the agreements arising from the resolution of conflict. This last among the forms of challenges cited just above seem to be the most common. It is often caused by a seeming lack of sincerity on the part of those arbitrating in the conflict, thereby making one or all of the parties seek alternative but unconventional means of redress.

Terrorism has remained the most notorious among the known unconventional means of registering grievances and redressing injustice. In its naked dimension, it involves, according to Schmid (2023),

> …a systematic and organized use of violence and intimidation to force a government or community to accede to certain demands in some ways (?)

This has led to the death of innocent and unarmed citizens across the world. No one will forget the September 11, 2001 attack on America or that of London on 7th July, 2005. As we speak, attacks are on-going on the borders between Palestine and Israel while the ones in Iraq remain unabated.

In Africa, formation of rebel groups as an alternative means of seeking redress has been quite fashionable. Rebel groups are usually military-fashioned with the intention to unseat and take-over power from a subsisting government. Usually, rebel groups are organized and they run parallel governments wherever they are. They enforce their recognition both on the home government and the international communities. They are usually minority groups who take to arms in order to get attentions from governments or communities. Some of them in recent times have been found to violate civil communities and settlements thereby giving cause for the creation of refugees among the people of Africa.

The emergence of such rebel groups around Africa, as mentioned above, is not because Africa is lacking in traditional means of conflict resolution. It is because the processes to that end have long been bastardized through the process of hijacking and consequent modification by the West in order to boost its racial arrogance. One can only imagine the level of defamiliarization which the concept of peace and conflict has suffered. The defamiliarization has been so much that tracing its origin to Africa has become difficult if not totally impossible. The reason for this unfortunate development is succinctly registered by David J. Francis (2006). According to him,

> …peace and conflict research…has been exported to other regions of the world, largely underpinned by the Western hegemonic discourse… the discipline… has reflected Western intellectual traditions, worldview, expectations, values and rationality…[with universal application] Parenthesis mine (23-4)

Most of what have become towns and cities in Africa today began as settlements. It was the story of a people seeking a convenient place to settle down and incidentally allowed to be settled somewhere by one or more host community(ies). In this circumstance, it is natural that the settling community would be told the direction it could exercise its expansion, and possibly the direction it cannot encroach. But because of the basically uncontrollable characteristic of expansion, which is comparable to "a wild bush fire in harmattan ", there usually arise frequent conflicts between the host and settler communities. This has snowballed in(to) the several land and boundary disputes found across Africa. Wherever and whenever this happened, there were ways of resolving such conflicts.

From both intra and inter communal perspectives, the Yoruba people and their culture appreciate the value of peace. They have as a result evaluated it from the perspective of

conflict. The saying: *Adìyẹ bà lókùn, ara ò rọ okùn ara ò rọ adìyẹ* (when a fowl perches on a rope, there will be no peace for either the rope or the fowl), is instructive. It therefore behoves on any of the parties to a conflict to seek means of achieving peace. Indeed, there is also the acknowledgement of the repeated occurrence of conflict between societies and people, and which must be resolved soon as it occurs. The Yoruba saying that, *ọmọ àlè ní ń rínú tí kìí bí, ọmọ àlè ni a sì ń sọ fún pé ó tó tí kìí gbà* (it is legitimate for one to be aggrieved and like wise so to be pacified), is of serious relevance in this regard. This is because it shares the responsibilities of seeking peace between the two aggrieved parties.

The Yoruba society, apart from employing certain discourse patterns such as proverbs and sayings for the purpose of reinforcing the need for peace within and without, also institutionalizes certain apparatuses through which peaceful coexistence is galvanized and maintained. Just as the society is segmented, so also are there discriminations among conflicts depending on the seriousness. This seriousness of a conflict is majorly measured by the extent to which the conflict can undermine the existing peace in a given community or between communities.

The first sets of conflicts to be examined are those that are intra-communal in nature. Intra-communal conflicts could arise as consequences of actions, inactions or wrong actions that are capable of unsettling the society thereby making it insecure for people to go about their lawful duties. Even here, we are going to discriminate among petty conflicts and the serious ones. Petty conflicts arise from such actions as stealing, physical combat, flouting of taboos or guidelines of guilds or groups. On the other hand, serious conflicts could arise from such actions that are life-threatening such as murder or attempted murder, adultery, land disputes, undermining traditional authorities, suicide or attempted suicide etc.

The second sets of conflicts that would form part of our considerations here are the inter-communal ones. These arise as consequences of certain actions either by an individual, a group or as part of the policy decision adopted by another neighbouring or distant village entirely. Such actions spoken about here include murder, boundary encroachment and the likes.

Either at the inter-communal or the intra-communal levels, the interest is to look at how crises and conflicts may be resolved when they rear up their heads. The reason why we need to look at potential issues that could bring about conflict is because the reaction generated or sparked off by a giving conflict would depend on how serious such violation is considered. And that would also determine how the conflict so generated is resolved. For this reason, we will be doing several things, simultaneously: we will be looking at specific conflict, how it may be resolved and the institutional apparatus which would arbitrate between and, or, among the aggrieved parties.

The concept, *Àlàáfíà* among Yoruba emphasizes peace and tranquility but not without

the consciousness of crisis or conflict. The belief is that whenever there arises a conflict, it should be hastily resolved. Indeed, the co-existence as held by Yoruba people, between the two opposite concepts is validated by the saying that, *Bí àlafíà bá pọ̀ jù, ó lè di àlá fíafìà* (under-managed peace could lead to crises). This could occur if man, in enjoying peace, oversteps his bounds. There is a sense in which peace is a necessary consequence of conflict and vice-versa. Peace itself requires some management just as conflict does. Therefore, peace if well-managed could become near-permanent and this is seen in the saying that, *Bí ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ kò bá dun, baba tani yóò ròde ẹmu* (if the homestead is without peace, who will venture outsde to seek recreation). The sense in this is that people would resolve crisis in their domain before seeking to enjoy recreation elsewhere. Otherwise, one would be guilty of having his roof on fire while he goes to bed (*Ó finá sórí òrùlé sun).*

The Yoruba Example

Among Yoruba people, just like any other people elsewhere, there is the belief that conflict is part and parcel of human daily living and that whenever it occurs it must be addressed urgently. The urgency required in the address of conflict gives birth to such a proverb as, *Àgbà tí kò bá kẹnu sọ̀rọ̀ yóò kẹtan sáré* (an aged person who fails to vigorously address a conflict risks the discomfort of having to run when the situation degenerates). Therefore, whenever there arises a conflict that could tear the society apart, the first step towards its resolution is to enforce an immediate truce. This is achieved in the traditional society through the *Oro* cult.

Oro is the presence of the spirit of the dead that must sit decisively in judgment over the living. Its manifestation is the "bull-roarer"- a strong, windy and roaring voice- a guardian spirit over all secrets. Its emergence is preceded by a proclamation of *oo rò ò!* This alerts the people who will scamper for refuge safety before the roaring itself is heard. This is because the roaring signifies the presence of the spirit itself which a non-initiate, most especially women, must not see. That a woman is forbidden from sighting oro is captured in the saying that, *Bí obìnrin bá fojú di oro, oro á gbe* (A woman who dares oro would be consumed by *oro*). *Oro* is believed to be visiting from the netherworld and therefore cannot be traced anywhere on earth and therefore leaves no sign in its wake- *A kìí rí àjẹkù oro* (no one sees the remnant of what *oro* consumes). *Oro* is therefore, dreaded and respected and this makes its introduction an effective means of truce enforcement. Even where there is unexpected violence from external forces, the proclamation for the declaration of war and calling out warriors to go and stem the invasion would be released simultaneously with the imposition of *Oro*. This is usually done so that civil casualty consisting largely of women, children, the aged, and the vulnerable is reduced. Indeed, it is a kind of curfew.

Ọ̀sùgbó/Ọ̀yọ́mèsì: This is another body on whom the responsibility of conflict resolution is directly placed in the Yoruba traditional society. The name which this body could be referred is not limited to only the two above. The different names seen here only

emphasize the Ìjẹ̀bú/Ọ̀yọ́ dichotomy respectively. Among Ìkálẹ̀ in Ondo State, the body is known as the *Ìjámà.* It is responsible for adjudication in cases that are regarded as 'serious' breaches. Even in serious intra-communal conflicts, it is the members of *Ọ̀ṣùgbó* that are sent to either argue out a community's position or plead for peace as the case may be. The *Ọ̀ṣùgbó* cult is made up of very wise elderly men from among a given community. The group however has one woman membership. The members are usually non sentimental and non partisan because of the secret oaths they have sworn to. In the olden days, decision of the *Ọba* (King) over such a serious case as murder in a vassal community is based on the advice of the *Ọ̀ṣùgbó.*

***Baálẹ̀* and *Olórítún*:** In spite of the seeming difference in the appellation of offices here, the roles are fundamentally the same. They rule over specific domains within a kingdom and directly responsible to the king who installed and could have them removed if they abuse their offices. They preside, in conjunction with some lesser chiefs over non serious communal disputes. They must however report back to the *Ọba* their decision in respect of specific cases.

***Pàràkòyí*:** This is a market leadership group responsible for keeping the peace and maintaining decorum between and among traders as they haggle over prices in the market. It determines when the market opens and closes as well as the location where sellers of specific items and wares would occupy. It is responsible to the king or the *Baálẹ̀* depending on who directly controls the community in which the market is located. When conflicts arise in the market, they are resolved based on the known regulations guiding the economic activities in the domain. The *Pàràkòyí* group also imposes market rates and levies.

Guild groups: Guild groups are the various professional groups located within a specific kingdom. There are as many guild groups as the number of professions through which people derive livelihood. These groups maintain strict disciplinary codes among members, and they as well regulate, through monitoring, how their members relate to the community in general, and by extension, members of other guild groups. During induction into these guild groups, members are made to swear oaths of allegiance and to uphold the integrity for which the groups are known. Every group is usually headed by a person who presides over meetings and who is usually recognized by the larger community in the profession in question. Preferably also, he is a title-holder within the kingdom. Some of these associations include hunters' guild, black-smiths' guild, builders' guild, fishers' guild, and so forth. For example, the head of the hunters' guild in a community is usually the *"Olu-ode"* (Chief hunter) and the diviners' head is a holder of the title *"Olu-awo"* (Chief diviner). Apart from a set of laid down codes of ethics to which members had already been made to swear oaths to protect, conflicts either within the guild or without it are resolved by the leadership. This they do by calling the conflicting parties to order and afterwards ask each of them to present his/her case. The cases are

listened to dispassionately and thereafter a verdict of guilt and or blamelessness, as the case may require, is given. Every one of the aggrieved parties is, before the trial, made to understand under what code or rules he is being tried and the processes accepted by all. After the judgment and acceptance of individual's fate, he is again made to swear oath so that none of them nurses malicious feeling towards the other, beyond the judgement.

Age-groups: They are traditionally recognized groups to which members enlist by virtue of age. Age groups' names are based on events which happened at a specific period in time. They hold codes of conduct for members. Their means of discipline of members also follow, almost what is seen in the case of the guild groups above.

There is, however, another very important group which will only be mentioned in passing here. This is because, rather than being traditional, they are socio-cultural groups, and they keep strict codes of conduct among their members. What they preach include love and society devoid of animosity. Their operations are comparable to what is seen under the guild groups. In fact, most members of the guild groups, especially their leadership, belong to one socio-cultural groups or another. These groups are ignorantly called "secret cults" by non-members and they include Ogboni, Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, Opa Fraternity, Orunmila Confraternity, and so on. Some of them could be passed as secret though, however in the modern times, non members are being allowed to attend their sessions.

The example of the processes in peace and conflict mediation, and, or resolution in the traditional Yoruba society as brought out above is instructive in more ways than one. The instructions are unmistaken and they include:

a. Trado-cultural specificity should be considered in peace processes, not only for the purpose of achieving peace but for its sustenance.

b. Even when aggrieved parties are to be made to come to the roundtable, the terms for doing so must be clear for the understanding of all parties.

c. The person(s) sitting in arbitration over conflict should be disinterested as much as humanly perceivable

d. The resolutions, consequent upon arbitration, should be acceptable to all parties. Such acceptability could be measured from the responses of the parties.

e. The sentiment(s) of the aggrieved parties must be put into consideration and a middle position reached so as to bring about lasting resolution of conflicts.

f. Conflict resolution should be geared more towards appreciation and accommodation of the positions of each of the aggrieved parties by the other instead of locating the guilty only for the purpose of punishment.

It may be necessary to quickly add, as a footnote of sort, that the above enumerated

recommendations towards peaceful conflicts resolution may sometimes suffer some setbacks. This could be seen in a situation where an individual or a group of persons, out of feeling of shame arising from a (fair) judgment received and to which oaths had already been sworn would be accepted, goes ahead to seek other (evil) means of redress such as bewitchment of, and, or, planting injurious charms for the purpose of harming his opponent. In a case such as this, the ancestral-spirits known in different names, such as, *Ogúngún, Oṣi, Òrìsà, Àwọn-Alálẹ̀, Ilẹ̀,* among others in Yoruba belief-system, will come to the rescue by afflicting the evildoer(s) with such strange disease that would force him/them to confess. The follow-up to the confession is usually atonement and forgiveness or ignominious death depending on the gravity of the evil-doing. It is most sympathetically shocking to note that sometimes the evildoer(s) would have accomplished the mission before nemesis catches up. This among Yoruba would be expressed: *Kílẹ̀ tó pa òṣìkà nǹkan gidi yíó ti bàjẹ́* (Before nemesis catches up with an evil-doer an irreparable damage would have been done). The consciousness and, or the fear of such consequences as stated above remain the means of ensuring compliance with the decisions after arbitration among Yoruba people. Even today, some of these practices are still in force in certain traditional societies across Yorubaland.

However, working around Nigeria alone, one would see how futile the modern efforts at brokering peace between and among aggrieved communities have been. Every peace process across the country, politically, socially, economically, culturally, has emphasized centrifugal considerations rather than centripetal ones. This explains why Ife and Modakeke environs was for a long time, a flashpoint; Umuleri and Aguleri communities knew know peace for a period close to twenty-five (25) years; the feeling of insecurity visits the mind of the Southern Nigerian person as he journeys Northwards; the Ijaw-Itshekiri crisis, while ongoing snowballed into arms-conflict and hostage taking; and, Sagamu, was for a long time, the nightmare of the Hausa man.

Conclusion

That human relationship will continue to generate conflicts due to existing shades of interest cannot be overemphasized. This is so because of the attempt by man to continue to modify his frontiers. However, such conflicts generated can be effectively managed and mankind experience more peace if peace processes, as enunciated above, are well managed rather than enforced.

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Evil in *Stranger Things* : A Psychoanalytic Reading

Abstract

Stranger Things is a series which streams on the OTT platform Netflix, which offers a rich narrative for examining the idea of evil by applying psychoanalytic theory. Through its supernatural components and character arcs, the series projects human fears, desires, and repressed traumas, drawing inspiration from Carl Jung's 'Shadow Archetype' and Sigmund Freud's 'The Uncanny'.'The Upside Down' represents the fictional place, Hawkins' repressed secrets and imperfections, acting as a metaphorical shadow of the supposed perfect town. Freud's concept of the 'eerie' is evoked by fictional demonic creatures which combine the familiar and the unfamiliar to produce a profound psychological terror. The demonic creatures represent a cosmic force of chaos and devastation that mirrors humanity's unconscious desire toward annihilation, which is another example of the series' embodiment of Freudian 'Thanatos'. The story also examines the consequences of trauma and repression, especially through theprotagonist. This study uses psychoanalytic theory to show how Stranger Things presents evil as an essential component of the human and societal psyche rather than just an external threat. In the end, the series offers a nuanced examination of the essence of evil in modern media and implies that bravery resides in facing these inner and outer shadows.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Evil, Supernatural, Trauma, Horror.

Introduction

The idea of evil, which has dominated human thought for ages, is the opposite of good and is frequently connected to cruelty, misery, and agony. It brings up important issues regarding human nature, morality, and the existence of higher forces.It is difficult to define 'evil' as Robert L. Simon says: “Evil is a thick rope of many complex, twisted, and intertwinedstrands. An effort to comprehensively define evil is an impossibletask, a fool's errand” (24).However,a standard definition of evil is that it is the'antithesis of good' (Harris 908).

Moral and natural evil are the two main categories of evil in philosophy. Moral evil describes deeds like murder, theft, or oppression that are committed by people and result in harm. It is based on people's free will and moral decisions. Natural evil, on the other hand, includes misery brought on by unintentional natural events like famines, illnesses, or earthquakes. In addition, evil assumes cultural and psychological forms that mirror human conduct and social conventions. Evil is frequently personified in literature and art

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to represent anxieties, hardships, and the darkest sides of human nature. Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov and Shakespeare's Macbeth are two examples of characters who highlight the moral quandaries and repercussions of giving in to evil.Theories of human behaviour can be used to investigate 'evil' from a psychological perspective.

The science fiction-horror television series *Stranger Things*, created by the Duffer Brothers, takes place in the made-up Indiana town of Hawkins in the 1980s. A young boy named Will Byers mysteriously vanishes at the start of the series, and a girl named Eleven, who possesses telekinetic abilities, appears at the same time. The program centres on a group of children, including Lucas, Dustin, Mike, and later Eleven, who discover government operations at Hawkins National Laboratory that have created a connection to the Upside Down, a shadowy parallel reality.Their community is threatened by frightful creatures from the Upside Down, such as the Mind Flayer and the Demogorgon. The group deals with friendship, family, love, and maturing while they battle these supernatural powers. Police chief Jim Hopper, Will's mother Joyce, and teenagers Nancy, Steve, and Jonathan join them in facing the human villains and the monsters that hide the lab's secrets.

Stranger Things examines the conflict between light and darkness, both internal and external, compellingly and poignantly with its nostalgic 1980s backdrop, compelling mysteries, and emotional depth.In *Stranger Things*, evil assumes the form of institutional, personal, and supernatural manifestations that combine intense psychological tensions with outside threats. Evil in the series can be understood as both a literal force and a symbolic investigation of suppressed fears, trauma, and the darker facets of the human psyche using psychoanalytic theory, especially the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. This reading looks at how 'evil' is portrayed in *Stranger Things*as a complicated interaction between internal and external factors.

Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung provide different but complementary frameworks in psychoanalytic theory to comprehend 'evil' as a social construct as well as a psychological phenomenon, which is used to analyse the representation of 'evil' in *Stranger Things* in this study. Sigmund Freud, who can be called the pioneer of psychoanalysis, as Alford says, did not “write very much about evil, or at least he does not call it that” (27). However, he addressed it indirectly through the ideas of the unconscious mind, human instincts, and the nature of human conflict. On the contrary, Carl Jung had a clear understanding of the idea of eviland placed man as the origin of all evil. He said:

> We need more understanding of human nature because the only real danger that exists is man himself. He is the great danger, and we are pitifully unaware of it. We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil. (Jung speaking 436)

Where Freud highlights the unconscious mind, repression, and the innate urge toward destruction, Jung concentrates on the archetypes and the shadow self, viewing evil as an essential component of human development. According to Freud, evil arises when these repressed elements uncontrollably emerge and interfere with a person's conscious existence. Repression is a defensive strategy that pushes undesirable ideas, feelings, or painful memories into the unconscious. Repression is not a flawless system, though; these suppressed aspects may reappear in distorted forms and result in actions that are damaging, illogical, or even destructive. In this context, evil is the expression of unsolved psychological issues rather than a supernatural force.

Carl Jung extended psychoanalytic theory to incorporate a more symbolic and spiritual view of the psyche. According to Jung, evil, which has its roots in the shadow self and collective archetypes, is an essential component of the human experience. According to Jung, the shadow is the darker, repressed part of the self that people suppress or reject, including their impulses and traits. Collective shadow is the darker, unconscious parts of the psyche that society or civilisations repress because they go against their conscious self-image or social norms. This shadow turns into a storehouse of characteristics, anxieties, and inclinations that are suppressed or neglected in a community or society.As difficult as individual shadow integration, collective shadow demands addressing social inequities and biases. Jung believed that evil is an essential part of human growth, in contrast to Freud, who believed that the death drive was fundamentally harmful.

The representation of evil in *Stranger Things* is multi-faceted and is made through various layers. One tool which the creators use is the representation of the 'Upside Down'. The Upside Down, as the collective shadow, contributes to the series' portrayal of evil as a psychological, societal, and existential phenomenon. Created as “the Nether”, the Upside Down “is a region that exists outside of space and time, a terrifying, colourless underworld overrun by death and decay and populated by faceless monsters” (McIntyre 131). The Upside Down is a dark, parallel dimension that mirrors the town of Hawkins in *Stranger Things*. This eerie, decayed world is a physical manifestation of the concept of the collective shadow.

The Upside Down is also a place filled with frightening creatures and an eerie atmosphere fits the idea of evil places in horror films, frequently called 'terrible places.' Clover explains:

> The Terrible Place, most often a house or [the killer's lair], in which victims sooner or later find themselves is a venerable element of horror ... [The Terrible Place] may at first seem a haven, but the same walls that promise to keep the killer out quickly become, once the killer penetrates them, the walls that hold the victim in. (30-31).

An apt description of the opening scene of the first season of *Stranger Things* was

made by Mollet. He says:

> We are introduced to the sinister atmosphere of the Hawkins Laboratory through an eerie Kubrickian symmetry to the lab's corridor and unsettling flickering lights. We see a scientist running for his life, away from an (as yet) unseen foe. The scientist reaches apparent safety in the elevator, however, a point-of-view shot and a monster's 'chittering' alert us to the fact that the scientist is being preyed upon. (61)

The initial scene transmits the notion of fear in the audience and reveals the possibility of an impending horror.

In *Stranger Things*, the Upside Down represents evil in a variety of ways. From the repercussions of immoral scientific experimentation to the susceptibility of everyday life to uncontrollable forces, The Upside Down reflects the community's unspoken worries. For example, Will's kidnapping into the Upside Down exposes the town's fragile façade of safety and demonstrates its incapacity to safeguard its most vulnerable citizens. The existence of the Upside Down forces the characters to face their fears and shortcomings; it is a place where the collective and personal unconscious becomes tangible; for Eleven, the Upside Down symbolises the fallout from the misuse of her powers; for the town, it symbolizes the darker realities it tries to ignore, like systematic neglect and power abuse; and it transcends both personal and societal evils, representing an existential threat to life itself. Its desolate, poisonous surroundings suggest a world engulfed by the shadow, where the equilibrium between creation (Eros) and destruction (Thanatos) is lost.The line separating the conscious and unconscious minds is represented by the gate that separates Hawkins and the Upside Down. The community's suppressed evils and concerns come to the surface when the lab crosses this line. This intrusion emphasises the negative effects of repression: what is suppressed does not go away; rather, it aggravates and intensifies before exploding into the world in disastrous ways.

According to psychoanalysis, monsters are frequently viewed as projections of suppressed facets of the self, standing in for the desires, anxieties, and characteristics that oneis unable to admit. The monsters that arise from the Upside Down in *Stranger Things* are tangible representations of the characters' personal and societal anxieties. The first creature of significance in *Stranger Things*, the Demogorgon, is a terrifying predator that can hunt and kill with lethal accuracy.The appearance of the Demogorgon represents the horror that results when one's suppressed anxieties, fears of violence, death, and vulnerability emerge from the unconscious and start to materialise in one's environment. The Mind Flayer is a much more complicated and harmful force that symbolises a more abstract kind of evil, which is the fear of losing one's individuality and autonomy. The Mind Flayer's capacity to control other people's minds reflects a fear of being absorbed into something more massive and malevolent, which is in line with Jung's idea of the

shadow as a force that aims to engulf and destroy the conscious self. In contrast to the Demogorgon, which symbolises a more primitive, externalised fear, the Mind Flayer appeals to more profound psychological fears related to identity, independence, and self-loss. In this way, it can be interpreted as an expression of the Freudian death drive.

In *Stranger Things*, psychological evil is a subtle yet ubiquitous kind of evil that shows up as emotional upheaval, internal strife, and outside mental manipulation of characters. This type of evil involves the distortion of the mind, emotions, and identity rather than overt physical harm. It demonstrates how evil forces can take advantage of trauma, fear, and mental instability. In the first season, the Demogorgon kidnaps Will Byers and transports him to the Upside Down, where he is imprisoned for several days. His ordeal leaves him with severe psychological wounds when he eventually returns. In later seasons, the Mindflayer manipulates Will and haunts him with visions. This type of psychological evil is pernicious as it aims to manipulate a person's thoughts, feelings, and even identity in addition to physical imprisonment, which distorts Will's sense of self and agency.

One of *Stranger Things*' main characters, Eleven, struggles with her dark side in a way that reflects many of the concepts of Freudian and Jungian psychology. Eleven is a girl born in the lab of Dr. Brenner and was taken away from her mother at birth while convincing her mother, Teresa "Terry" Ives, of having a miscarriage. Initially, Eleven is presented as the most ignorant and innocent of all the kids in the series since she doesn't have any prior knowledge of the outside world. The child motif of Carl Jung can be applied here to examine Eleven. Jung says, "...The child motif represents the preconscious, childhood aspect of the collective psyche" (Jung, Archetypes 161). As Gronowski puts it, "Eleven is indeed a felicitous representation of this universal archetype, as she is perhaps the most innocent child of the party of four children in search of Will Byers during the first season, where she was introduced"(14). As she is subject to all of the mental and physical torture in the lab, she doesn't understand the difference between good and evil since she is not familiar with good. Dr. Brenner manipulates her into believing that the evil she sees and is trained to do is her purpose.

Eleven's trauma and the manipulation she endured at Hawkins Lab are the causes of her abilities. Under the pretence of scientific advancement, the experiments carried out on her and other kids are an example of institutional evil, a misuse of authority. Although Eleven has exceptional abilities, they are also linked to the organisation that made her and its inhuman activities and cruelty. In this way, her abilities are presented as curses that link her to the very evil that gave birth to them rather than merely being gifts. She initially fears her powers because she identifies them with suffering and devastation, mirroring the shadow's capacity for harm if resisted. Eleven starts to integrate her shadow as she faces her past and comes to terms with her skills, turning them from a source of fear into strength. Her experience reflects Jung's view that evolution requires facing one's shadow.

Jung's idea of the shadow is best illustrated by her relationship with her abilities. Eleven's telekinetic powers represent her link to the conscious and unconscious worlds. Her mental connection to the Upside Down emphasises how her strength is associated with the darkness and evil, and her confrontation with the destructive parts of her shadow is reflected at times when she uses her powers for violent ends for instance, when she battles or confronts Dr. Brenner.

In *Stranger Things*, the Hawkins National Laboratory serves as a centre for institutional evil. This lab, headed by Dr. Brenner,is an example of the 'banality of evil', a theory made popular by philosopher Hannah Arendt. The theory of Banality of Evil states that "ghastly crimes like the Holocaust are not necessarily committed by psychopaths and sadists, but, often, by normal, sane and ordinary human beings who perform their tasks with a bureaucratic diligence"(Mannathukkaren).Likewise, although the lab's experiments, headed by people like Dr. Brenner, are justifiable in the interest of national security and scientific advancement, they injure people and the community irreversibly. A systematic, widespread, and institutionalised type of evil is shown in the lab's disdain for ethics and willingness to use minors for experimental objectives.Brenner exemplifies the denial of humanity because, instead of facing his acts' moral and ethical ramifications, he views his experiments as a necessary evil to accomplish his objectives.

Another example of institutionalised evil in *Stranger Things* is the moral panic and cultural terror that characterised the 1980s, especially about the so-called 'Satanic Panic.' As the New York Times reported about 'Satanic Panic',

> Early in the 1980s, baseless conspiracy theories about cults committing mass child abuse spread around the country. Talk shows and news programs fanned fears, and the authorities investigated hundreds of allegations. Even as cases slowly collapsed and scepticism prevailed, defendants went to prison, families were traumatised, and millions of dollars were spent on prosecutions. The phenomenon was so sprawling that, in its aftermath, it took on several names, like the ritual abuse scare or the daycare panic. But one name has increasingly stuck: the satanic panic.

Characters in the series, such as Eddie Munson and his position in the Hellfire Club, are first viewed through the prism of this panic, in which playing Dungeons and Dragons (D&D), being different, or partaking in any other countercultural activity were viewed as harmful or malevolent. "From the opening scenes of *Stranger Things*, the lore and monsters of D&Dbecome essential tools by which the Gothic horrors that beset the small town of Hawkins,Indiana is understood by the characters and the viewers" (Kavanagh 135). The presentation of such games which was considered evil in the social scenario of the 1980s gives a notion of an unknown, inexplicable evil that lies there.This social norm contributes to institutional evil by causing discrimination, persecution, and harm as a

result of the community's fear. Injustice is sustained when the concept of 'evil' is linked to moral and cultural concerns rather than real suffering.

At a higher level, the government's engagement in the *Stranger Things* events, specifically, its concealment of the paranormal happenings and its contribution to the development of the Upside-Down portal,represents institutional evil. To keep things under control and prevent public panic, the authorities in Hawkins deny, ignore, or deliberately conceal the bizarre happenings. The government puts its interests first, preserving power, secrecy, and control over municipal events rather than safeguarding the general population. A bureaucracy that functions with little consideration for the effects on people's lives is more likely to be the source of evil in this situation than individuals with bad intentions.

Conclusion

The psychoanalytic reading of *Stranger Things* reveals that the representation of evil in the series is an expression of the unconscious mind, repressed trauma, and shared phobias rather than just an outside supernatural entity. According to Freudian and Jungian theory, the monsters represent the repressed parts of the psyche, the Upside Down represents the unconscious realm, and the characters' conflicts reveal a deeper fight with their desires and fears. The character Eleven's journey, the breakdown of Hawkins' social order, and the appearance of hideous monsters all allude to the intricate psychological mechanisms at work, including individuation, projection, and suppression. A psychoanalytic reading reveals the complex, symbolic meanings woven throughout *Stranger Things*' story and visual components.

The series' complexity is increased by the way several forms of evil, supernatural, human, and psychological, intertwine to produce a sense of terror, tension, and emotional depth in *Stranger Things*. These types of evil are interdependent because human depravity frequently acts as the trigger for the release of otherworldly threats, while supernatural fear intensifies the characters' internal struggles. By combining dread, moral ambiguity, and empathy, they combine to form a complex story that captivates audiences and reinforces the series' unique and eerie ambience. Psychoanalysis, which aims to comprehend the suppressed and unconscious forces that influence human behaviour, is strongly aligned with the series' themes of trauma, identity, and the struggle between light and dark. Furthermore, the series' broad appeal shows how well it speaks to common psychological experiences, which makes it an effective tool for examining embedded desires and anxieties.

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Evil Detectives : Representation of Evil and Transgression in Select Crime Fiction Narratives

Abstract

An act of evil is always at the centre of crime fiction narrative. A quintessential crime fiction account revolves around the good detectives or investigators bringing the evil culprits to justice by virtue of their intellect. In the process of finding the perpetrator, the genre of crime fiction delves deep into the darkest corners of the psyche of mankind, from where evil emanates. With the development and changes the genre of crime fiction underwent, it now showcases the thin boundaries between morality and immorality, legal and illegal,order and chaos, and evil and goodness.

The term evil refers to actions, qualities or intentions that are considered harmful and malevolent that could cause serious negative impact on an individual or society when perpetrated. Usually in a narrative it will be the culprit who will be the source of evil. The duty invested in a detective is to stop the evil and bring peace and harmony back. Of late, there are a slew of detectives who cross the boundaries of being good and guardian to justice to committing acts of crime and becoming the source of evil. These deviant detectives clearly shows that evil is much more complex and is present in every human being. The narratives featuring deviant detectives provoke critical thought about the cost of justice, the nature of truth, and the fine line between heroism and villainy.

This paper will look into two movies –Insomnia(2002) and Kooman (2022) – featuring detectives who in the course of investigations indulge in acts of crime. The aim of this paper is to understand how the genre of crime fiction portrays and delineates such transgressing detectives. This paper also seeks to understand how crime fiction engages with the concept of evil, its representation, and its implications for the broader understanding of human nature and societal structures.The paper will also look into the ways in which genre of crime fiction gets subverted with the entrance of deviant detectives.

Keywords: Crime fiction, transgression, abjection

Introduction

A quintessential crime fiction narrative involves a crime, its detection, and most important of all the culprit being captured and brought to justice. In such a narrative the perpetrator, the source of the evil act, will be captured and an order is established. Contemporary crime fiction narratives now tend subvert such presuppositions by

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resorting to many ways such as having an open ending, criminals going scot-free, blurring of boundaries between good and evil, narratives told from the perspective of the criminal, portrayal of a deeply flawed protagonist, etc. These innovative techniques symbolise the complex nature of human psyche and the postmodern ways of dynamic thinking. This paper will look into the narratives that have detectives or protagonists who are supposed to be the guardians of justice indulge in acts of evil knowingly or unknowingly, thereby deviating from the duties invested in them by the symbolic societyand becoming an object or evil or an abject. Through this paper, I will look more closely into the concept of abjection put forward by renowned theorist Julia Kristeva. By applying the concept of abjection to the movies *Insomnia* and *Kooman*, I would like to demonstrate the dark, liminal spaces that exist in a human being and in the society that he/she is a part of.

Defining Evil

Marcus G. Singer defines evil as "worst possible term of opprobrium imaginable." (Singer)He also opines that it is difficult to give an aptly define evil. Daniel Haybron propose that evil is not properly defined, it will be difficult to understand the reasons behind such acts. Renowned German philosopher Hannah Arendt says that evil shows what humans are really capable of. Arendt, through her multiple works, delineated how evil as practices perpetrated by people who has visible upper handedness or power against people beneath their stature. The result of such acts will be the systematic disrobing of identity and subjectivity of a section of the people. She says that this systemic perpetuation of evil renders people "superfluous." (Burin)Though she defines evil on the basis of totalitarian regimes, this definition defines evil in all its complexities. The capability of committing evil exists in every human being. Needless to say, about a scenario in which people wielding any kind of power is capable of committing acts of evil. A detective who is evil is a suitable scenario to examine this proposition.

Transgression, Deviations, and Abject

The concepts of transgression and evil are interlinked, as both of theseconcepts dwell on breaking and going beyond accepted social and cultural barriers. An act of transgression in all possibilities could lead to an act of evil.Chris Jenks is of the opinion that transgression is an indispensable part of contemporary life. Transgression is an act that is liberation on one hand, and has severe consequences in the other. O'Neill and Seal in their work *Transgressive Imaginations: Crime, Deviance and Culture*identifies methods to transgress societal norms and values. These include Stephen Lyng's notion of 'edgework', Bakhtin's concept of 'carnivalesque' and Julia Kristeva's concept of 'abjection. The concept of abjection will be looked into in detail in the next section. Edgework refers to the voluntary act of indulging in risky activities to test the limits of the body and mind. Carnivalesque refers to deliberate acts of that are intended to usurp existing hierarchies. When an event of transgression or evil is completed, there emerges

two distinct sides. One is the side of accepted social and cultural norms. On the other, the transgressed side which is stands in complete opposition to the other side, replete with anarchy and lawlessness. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjectionrefers to any situations that'disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.' The end result of an act of abjection is the complete collapse of the subject and the object.

A close inspection of evil, transgression, and the ways in which these are achieved leads us to the conclusion that in an act of evil or transgression there is always a conscious, deliberate effort on the part of the transgressor. The reasons that he/she might do the act might be unknown to them, but not the act. This conscious input or effort is conspicuously absent in abjection. Abjection in innate and unconscious. So, the absence of agency makes abjection more important and even dangerous at times than the other categories. This article will focus on this aspect of transgression, that is present and invisible at the same time.

Kristeva and Abjection

Julia Kristeva introduced the concept of abject/abjection in her seminal work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980). In simpler terms, abject refers to anything that induces disgust or repulsiveness in a human being. It could also be something that is fearful. Kristeva draws an analogy between bodily fluids like vomit, blood, etc to abject. to The intention of the abject is to disrupt the order and hierarchy of the symbolic order. There exists such a never-ending conflict between the subject and the abject. In order to have a peaceful existence, the abject should be forced out of the self. This exclusionary process cannot be done effectively or completely. The abject will always remain at the periphery of the consciousness of the self.

The continuous conflict with the abject results in the formation of two different attitudes towards the abject, namely a disgust to stay away from it and also a desire to get to understand it. On a psychological level, abjection is the basis of identity formation in an infant. Kristeva likens the mother-infant bond to abject. When a child enters the symbolic or the patriarchal world, it is compelled to tear away from the mother. Even though, this separation happens, the child will always be caught up in the liminal space between these two worlds. This could create a perpetual anxiety in the unconscious of the child.

From a social perspective, abject refers to forbidden practices, subcultures, countercultures, taboos, etc that goes in direct contrast to the established practices of society, law or culture. A society will always come up with mechanisms to counter the abject. But it should be reminded that certain laws or objections cannot completely control the impulsive nature of the abject. Kristeva makes this clear be saying that:

> But what is primal repression? Let us call it the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other, to divide, reject, repeat.

> Without one division, one separation, one subject/object having been constituted (not yet, or no longer yet)...The abject confronts us...with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling. (Kristeva, 12-13)

A close examination of Kristeva's words reveal that she is not completely against the concept of abjection. She tries to find certain desirable aspects of abject like the part it plays in the constitution of the identity of the subject as well as the ways in which it heightens the sensory awareness of the individual. (Arya 32)Abject could also be considered as way to critique a society or a culture by analysing how it responds to it. The laws that a society create, the marginalisations that comes as a result of it, etc could be considered as pointers to critique a society.

Films are replete with images of abject like death,decay, dead bodies, the supernatural, blood, vomit, other body fluids, horror, grotesque, etc. visually representing these forms of abjection allows the audience to understand how human beings understand something that frightens them as well as how people respond to them. If the abjection enters the consciousness there will be an utter collapse of the subject and the object from which a return is next to impossible. Visually seeing how people respond to abject lucidly portrays the many complexities that lurk behind the psyche of an individual and also the society or culture that the individual is part of.

Analysis

The movies selected for analysis are *Insomnia* (2002) directed by Christopher Nolan and a Malayalam movie *Kooman* (2022) directed by Jeethu Joseph. Both of the movies portray social or psychological abjection rather than bodily abjection. The movies portray the detectives who has to be subsumed in abjection and how their predicament becomes after this and how do they deal with it.

Insomnia (2002)

Insomnia tells the story of Detective Will Dormer who accidently kills his partner while on a pursuit to catch an unscrupulous killer named Finch. Unfortunately, Finch becomes the sole witness of the murder. With committing the murder, Dormer has crossed the threshold. Now abject, death, has entered the psyche of the detective. According to Kristeva, death is the ultimate form of abjection. Once an individual encounters death, his/her life will never be the same. Despite being an honest police officer, Dormer tries everything in his capacity to hide his crime. As a result, the symbolic world of the detective crumbles. He becomes sleep deprived, as is suggested in the title. Had he properly informed the law officials about his crime, he wouldn't have suffered psychologically to this extent. The act of concealment seals his fate. He is seduced by the

abject. He has become an object of the abject. In due process, he finds himself similar to the other killer. Though the murder was committed unknowingly, it shatters his psyche. Dormer finally escapes his abject at his death. Through his death, he brings Finch to justice and also asks his assistant to tell to the world of the crime he committed. Thus, he reclaims his identity and escapes the abjection. This is a clear pointer towards the fact that it is probably only death that could save an individual from abjection. The stifling setting of the movie only adds to the tension of Detective Dormer.

Kooman (2002)

Kooman says the story of Giri, a low-ranking police officer who is very astute when it comes to criminal investigation. When he is humiliated by a senior police officer, he resorts to stealing to get revenge and challenge the system which humiliated him. From this juncture onwards, the downward spiral of Giri starts. He who should have been the protector of the law has now degenerated into a petty criminal. He is shown to thoroughly enjoying the process of stealing, which clearly shows his mental degradation. This becomes a great paradox as in the initial part of the movie Giri is shown to be identifying a criminal who stole jewellery from his own wife. In this instance, Giri is shown to be proud of his achievement and he becomes the protector of the law. This act of stealing causes him mental turmoil and faulters in his job. As a means to overcome his psychological guilt and turmoil, he decides to take up more challenging cases. There also his past catches up. It is not something he can get over with. His existence becomes a poignant example of moral abjection. Though Giri finds the culprit in the case that he was investigating, the habit of stealing never leaves him. This is made very clear at the end of the movie. In this movie, the abjection could also be used as a tool to criticise the discriminative hierarchy that exists in a system.

Conclusion

The two movies clearly portray how abject shatters the individuality of a human being and what causes such a descent to happen. Reading abjection in the backdrop of a crime narrative clearly shows as how abject influences an individual because crime is one of the major transgressions and one of the primary reasons that lead to the pathway of abject. The primary texts also clearly depict how abject is not just psychological in nature, but also very much social and political. Movies that portray abject helps the audience to understand the repercussions of moral, ethical, and psychological transgressions.

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Anupama Maria K.

The Evolution of Evil : The Posthuman Dilemma in *Klara and the Sun*

Abstract

The innate human tendency to approach technological advents with apprehension and negation is inevitable in its acclimatisation. Its acceptance and incorporation into everyday lives occur when this fear is subjugated. The quality of evilness is often initially attributed to unscalable ideas and manifestations. This attribution of evil is also a part of the posthuman debate which deals with the moral scrutinies and ethical dilemmas associated with newer forms of embodiment and embeddedness. The ontological changes, the evolution of synthetic intelligence, and the latest perceptions of the mind-body configurations urge actions to reconsider the connotations of evil. The 'emergence' of capitalistic, moralistic, and political permutations in the posthuman condition challenges the prevalent notions of 'evil'. The 2021 novel, Klara and the Sun by Kazuo Ishiguro participates in the nuances of this debate. Through an examination of this speculative narrative, the paper aims to comprehend how evil is conceptualised in the posthuman environment. The study aspires to contribute to the ongoing discussions on the posthuman condition and ethical divergences.

Keywords: Posthuman ethics, artificial intelligence, evil, transhumanism

Introduction

Transhumanism comes under the canopy of posthumanism and has an immense amount of stigma and misconceptions associated with it. The American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama's comment in 2004 that transhumanism is the "world's most dangerous idea" (qtd. in Thomsen and Wamberg 35) in a way sums up the innate and initial human tendency towards technology's intervention in human lives. Stefan Lorenz Sorgner in his article, "Transhumanism", traces the ethical and philosophical shifts that have been associated with the concepts of posthumanism and transhumanism in the past decades. He remarks that any intervention into the natural life span of homo sapiens is essentially posthumanistic and arguably a 'twisted' continuation of the humanistic aspiration from the Enlightenment times. Humans have an inexhaustible desire to enhance life or rather the health span of life and the various technical aspirations and innovations are simply a part of it. The vaccinations, linguistic skills, etc are similar to the genetic modifications and bio uploadings that happen or are plausible. He makes a comparison to judge this as what is good in life and what is good for life. The evilness associated with cyborgs, robotic machines and transhumans can be taken into consideration in this ethical debate. Is there any evilness or badness associated with such transhumanist technologies? If yes,

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what arguments nullify this evilness and make us accept it as good? If technology makes human and non-human life better than the Anthropocenic existence, can that be counter-evil? This Posthuman dilemma is addressed and discussed in this paper.

This paper tries to be part of the discussions on the posthuman dilemma through an interlocution of the speculative narrative of Kazhuo Ishiguro, titled Klara *and the Sun*. The novel is set in a futuristic time with plausible circumstances. He portrays a population that depends on technological aids like gene enhancement and robotics, to enhance their and posterity's life span. Children and youth from upper economic classes are owners of 'Artificial friends, AFs' who act as their constant companions and aids. These AFs are gendered and come in various and improved models. Klara is a girl AF purchased by Josie and has remarkable organic capabilities in observation and learning, unlike the other AFs. Klara is an unprecedented and unrecognised piece in the evolution of artificial intelligence. Unlike the other AFs, Klara is keen on observing the emotions and bodily behaviours of the humans around her. She acts according to her rationale on her perceptions and is in a constant struggle to enhance herself.

The Prejudiced Evil

The novel presents two perspectives on the notion of evil. One stems from the shifting and fading demarcations between humans and non-humans. Throughout the narrative, there is an invisible dichotomy of how humans and the non-human AF, Klara, perceive and understand the world and environment. According to American philosopher Daryl Koehn, evilness is stimulated out of the unstable identity crisis that humans go through, here in the presence of the AF (151).The other notion of evil is a classic fight between good and evil. In the narrative, it is fought between Klara and the pollution-creating "Cootings machine".

Something that perturbates posthuman philosophy is the definition of humanity. The philosophical and ontological notion of humanity changes as the categorical standards between humans, non-humans, and robots are rendered obsolete. This calls for a magnanimous change in humans' sociological and cultural perspectives. The common individual who is lagging in this fast-paced shift may fall into evils similar to racism and speciesism.

In his 2010 book, *On Evil,* Terry Eagleton undertakes a philosophical exploration of the concept of evil in association with human imagination. He suggests that "evil is a transitional state of being— a domain wedged between life and death, which is why we associate it with ghosts, mummies, and vampires. Anything which is neither quite dead nor quite alive can become an image of it." (123). An aspect of the posthuman dilemma can be understood from this perspective. From the vantage point of speciesism, humans place themselves in the supreme position and also create a hierarchy for non-humans and machines. The traditional definition of life and living enables humans to place machines

and transhuman into the category of evil. In her discussion on various shades of evil, Daryl Koehn comments that evil arises from instability; an instability when an identity is not formed (151). The case is relevant in the posthuman dilemma as well. Humans believe that transhuman and related non-human entities lack identity as the humans have created for themselves. The false identification of technological manifestations such as cyborgs and hybrid beings by humans assigns it an evil shade. They are approached with paranoia and fear. The transhumanthus becomes the posthuman age's demons and ghosts. The multitude of films and novels that warn about the insurgencies by the robots and cyborgs are just evidence of it.

Paranoia and prejudice are scattered subtly throughout the novel. In the store selling AFs, the manager regularly interacts with the AFs in an amicable tone, yet she cautiously observes the developmental qualities these machines express. At Josie's home, the housekeeper, Melania often expresses her discomfort and annoyance towards the AF in various instances. She seems unable to accommodate an intelligent yet programmed machine in her workspace. Even Rick's mother, Helen is unsure about the ontological placement of Klara. On Klara's visit to Rick's home, we find a visibly disturbed Helen trying to accommodate her: “One never knows how to greet a guest like you. After all, are you a guest at all? Or do I treat you like a vacuum cleaner?” (162). The first meeting between Josie's Father and Klara is no different. When he is forced to greet Klara, he mocks Mother and asks, “Part of family. Is that what you're saying?” (211).

It should also be noted that the prejudiced approach slowly recedes as the novel proceeds and Klara acquires an elevated sense of emotions and rationale.The actual cause of Father's apathy is later revealed to be not directed at Klara but at the purpose Klara is purchased and trained for. The Mother, unknown to Josie, harbours the desire to prolong the cognitive life span of her daughter. The father fails to comprehend the idea that an AF can be a replacement for his daughter. He directly announces his concern to Klara and asks her, “Do you believe in the human heart? I don't mean simply the organ, obviously… Something that makes each of us special and individual?” (242). Father's concernsrepresent one of the key questions that trouble posthuman logic.

Although posthumanism tries to be independent and discursive from the constraints of anthropocentric thought, the departure from it becomes a slow and steady process for the common individual. For them, any entity, especially the 'machine' becomes a source of problems as they think it cannot completely comprehend innate human emotions and rationale. The Father wavers between trust and mistrust when Klara reveals her secret plan to Josie.

Mother regularly takes Josie to get her portrait done at Mr. Capaldi's. It is later revealed that Mr. Capaldi is not a painter but a sculpturer who specialises in creating life-like bodies of AFs. The Mother hopes to create a “continuation' of Josie” (230) with the

help of Klara. Klara was specifically chosen for her unique qualities as she believed Klara "to be the one best equipped to learn Josie. Not just superficially, but deeply and entirely. Learn her till there's no difference between the first Josie and the second" (232).

The novel portrays a plausible futuristic period, where it is common for a young child or an adult to have an 'Artificial friend', an AF. AFs are brought with various purposes and the capacity to perform as 'companions' and 'friends' is being enhanced with each series of productions. Josie's parents belong to the upper-middle class who can afford an AF for their child. Beyond the trend, Josie's mother harbours the idea of prolonging Josie, not her physical body but her mind and presence. Klara, for her, is an intelligent vessel to contain her daughter. The author gives subtle clues that her elder daughter Sal might have also been "transferred" to an earlier model AF and failed.

Evil is often defined as the absence of goodness. In humanistic thinking, emotions like compassion and kindness are usually associated with marks of goodness. In the novel, the interactions of the "lifted children" drive our thoughts in a different direction. "Lifted children" is a connotation to differentiate the genetically- enhanced generation of children. Josie is a lifted child, yet suffers from a life-threatening health condition as a side effect andthat probably might have been the cause of her elder sister's death. These children are taken care of as delicate beings by the parents and often cautiously allowed to socialise in the parties specially organised for them. One such party at Josie's organised to introduce her AF, Klara evidences the lack of compassion that these children have developed. Although AFs of these children belong to advanced editions of technology, the children treat them as mere machines purchased for their entertainment. The children ask a variety of questions to get a display of her features and at an instance, they propose that Klara should be thrown in the air to check her balance skills:

"Throwing AFs across the room. That's evil."

"What's evil about it? They're designed to deal with it.'

'That's not the point,' the girl's voice said. 'It's just nasty.'

'You're being soft,' Danny said. 'Phil, take her arms. I'll get the legs." (90)

Although the children are products of advanced eugenics, they lack compassion and an acceptance of the non-human entity at their service.

Evil and the Transhuman

Klara is a believer. She develops a relationship with the Sun as a devotee has with her deity. She believes that like solar power "nourishes" her, sunlight can save Josie's life as well. Like a fanatic in search to please her god, Klara promises the Sun that she will find and destroy the "Cootings Machine". Klara believes that it is the pollution-creating 'Cootings machine' is the only thing that troubles the Sun and all those who depend on the Sun. Her determination is based on her desire to save Josie and this desire she follows like

a programmed command becomes her purpose of 'life'. She thinks that she must destroy this evil and please the supreme goodness. Her perseverance escalates to the context where she sacrifices her senses to destroy the evil. She acts with the sole purpose of spreading goodness by bringing Josie back to health and life.

Although the narrative does not delve into the depths of the Anthropocene, the subtle presence of the issue must be addressed. Klara is the only one who directly acknowledges the prevalence of a polluted environment. The humans might have got used to it, so that they venture into newer methods of enhancing life as it is. On their trip to the Morgan Falls, Mother asks Klara not to worry about the factory and says "It's a good place. Clean energy in, clean energy out" (112) which puts her at ease of mind. The humans carefully mask the ecological disturbances whereas Klara is swung into a trip of anxiety and annoyance at the sight of the smoke-filled surroundings.

From a perspective, Klara is the only one who searches for the root cause of the issue, which she identifies as pollution. In the limited knowledge that the robot has gained, she equates pollution to the Cootings machine. It is only after she succeeds in destroying the machine that Klara learns that the cause of pollution is not from a single machine. Klara identifies the Sun as the ultimate nourisher and slayer of evil. For her, the Sun is the supreme energy source and solution to issues beyond her limit. Klara had believed that it was the Sun's "special nourishment" that had saved the beggar at the roadside opposite her store. She had observed him being weak and unconscious for many days till the sunshine spread over him. She thinks "[t]he Cootings Machine had been making its awful Pollution, obliging even the Sun to retreat for a time, and it had been during the fresh era after the dreadful machine had away that the Sun, relieved and full of happiness, had given his special help" (131).

In a way, the obsession that Klara develops to fight—a war between machine and machine. Klara fails to identify herself as a machine at times. She sacrifices her and her abilities to destroy the Cootings machine. The mission is completed by Klara and the father. The common cause and emotions bring them together and help each complete her intended task. Klara makes the greatest sacrifice to destroy the visible and imminent evil because it limits her most cherished qualities and aspirations. Klara almost undergoes an emotional breakdown when she discovers that there are many more 'Cootings machines', not just the one she destroyed.

An Ethical Shift

Ishiguro portrays Klara as a distinguished piece in the evolution of artificial intelligence. He envisions a holistic evolution, not just the technical and technological aspects of it. Like Donna Harraway technologically, culturally, and socially fragmented feminist cyborg, Klara occupies a unique place in the posthuman evolution. The AF forces a reversal in the role and perspective of the human subjects. Here Klara represents a

spiritual and philosophical evolution of artificial intelligence. Like the ancient human beings who began their spiritual and epistemological journey through the worship of the unknown and powerful, the artificial intelligence is forming its understanding of the world. Klara created her gods, and mythologies and fought evil.

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Ashish Manohar

Ethics, Systemic Failures, and Cultural Narratives of 'Evil' in the film A Mistake : The Critical Competence in A Mistake (2024)

Abstract

This article explores the interplay of ethics, systemic failure and cultural narratives of "evil" in the 2024 film A Mistake, through the lens of Rebecca J. Heste's Culture in Medicine: An Argument Against Competence. The movie, which centres on the fallout from a surgical error made by Dr. Elizabeth Taylor, offers a rich environment for analysing how healthcare organisations conceal systemic shortcomings while framing personal responsibility. Hester's critique of traditional competency-based frameworks in medicine forms the foundation for this analysis, revealing how the cultural expectations placed on medical professionals contribute to moral ambiguity and ethical tensions. The article interrogates the film's portrayal of institutional hierarchies, examining how the hospital's prioritisation of reputation over transparency reflects broader cultural tendencies to scapegoat individuals for collective failures. Central to this discussion is Hester's argument that narratives of "evil" in medicine often obscure the relational and systemic pressures shaping human error. In A Mistake, Elizabeth's actions are scrutinised not as isolated moral failings but as part of a complex interplay between empathy, professional duty and the fragility of trust. The article further addresses the limitations of the competence paradigm, as highlighted by Hester, advocating for a shift toward ethical frameworks that embrace empathy, cultural awareness and shared accountability. This analysis highlights the universal relevance of these themes in addressing systemic failings in professional environments and provides insight into the need for cultural reform in medicine by tying the ethical quandaries in A Mistake to Heste's larger critique.

Keywords: Ethics, Medical Ethics, Negligence, Evil, Administration

Introduction

The ethical complexities of medical practice are often shaped by systemic hierarchies and cultural expectations, which influence how mistakes are perceived and addressed. *A Mistake* (2024), directed by Christine Jeffs and based on Carl Shuker's novel, delves into this intricate landscape by presenting the story of Dr. Elizabeth Taylor, as urge on whose decision to delegate critical procedure leads to a devastating outcome. The film not only raises questions about individual account ability but also examines the broader institutional and cultural forces at play in constructing narratives of "evil" and incompetence. This makes it an ideal text for exploring ethical dilemmas in medicine.

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Rebecca J. Hester's *Culture in Medicine: An Argument Against Competence* provides a theoretical frame work for interrogating the themes of *A Mistake*. Hester critiques the traditional emphasis on competence in medical ethics, arguing that it often obscures the relational and systemic dimensions of professional practice. Her work challenges the tendency to individualize blame, proposing instead a cultural and empathetic approach to ethics that acknowledges the complexities of human error within institutional frameworks. These ideas are particularly relevant to Elizabeth's plight in the film, as she navigates the fall out of her mistake within a system that prioritises reputation over transparency and trust.

Ethics and the Individual

The roots of medical ethics trace back to the Hippocratic Oath, a foundational text originating from ancient Greece. Attributed to Hippocrates, the father of scientific medicine, the Oath encapsulated ideals of ethical medical practice such as "non-maleficence, confidentiality, and professional humility" (Berdine 28). While it remains emblematic of the medical profession's historical lineage and traditions, its original form is often deemed insufficient foraddressing the complexities of contemporary medicine. Modern ethical codes, developed by international and national medical bodies, have expanded upon these foundational principles, incorporating nuanced guidelines for navigating the diverse and dynamic challenges of medical practice today.

As explored in the film *A Mistake*, these ethical codes often intersect with systemic pressures, creating tensions between maintaining professional integrity and responding to institutional demands. The dialogue around publicising surgical outcomes, for instance, underscores a modern reinterpretation of Hippocratic ideals such as "first, do no harm" (Askitopoulou 3). Here, harm is not limited to patient care but extends to the professional and systemic consequences of transparency. In modern medical education, particularly in countries like Australia, symbolic gestures such as swearing modernised Hippocratic oaths at graduation have been supplemented by integrated curricula emphasising legal, ethical, and professional development. This shift reflects an acknowledgement of the evolving ethical landscape, where the ancient ethos of medicine is recontextualised to include considerations of equity, systemic accountability, and patient-centred care. Yet, the emphasis on systemic metrics, as critiqued in both the film and Hester's theoretical work, reveals the ongoing struggle to reconcile the moral imperatives of the Hippocratic tradition with the neoliberal realities of contemporary healthcare.

The film underscores the moral ambiguity inherent in professional ethics, while also invitingadeeperexplorationofsystemicevilwithinmedicalpractice.Elizabeth'sdecisionto trust her junior colleague stems from a desire to mentor and empower, yet it results in catastrophic consequences. This tension between intention and outcome echoes Banja's analysis: "Indeed, it seems unrealistic for individuals to recognise and do something

about their reasoning flaws when they have to use that very cognitive and emotional equipment to detect and grapplewith them" (Banja 92). This system, which punishes failure while inadequately preparing practitioners to navigate errors, creates a culture where even well-meaning decisions can lead to devastating harm. Elizabeth's vulnerability as a professional constrained by these systemic pressures reveals how institutional norms themselves can perpetuate harm, rendering her both a participant in and a victim of a flawed ethical framework:

> -
>
> Well...itisaboutpublishingresults.That'sournewreality.Oursurgicalresults are going to be published in the paper. Mortality, complications.
>
> - "My" results, you mean.
> - True, your results. Everything under your watch. But Idon't think it's, uh...Idon't think it's necessarily a bad idea. It will incentivize us to avoid very sick patients. (*A Mistake* 00:20:16 - 00:20:42)

The emphasis on publishing surgical outcomes reflects the pervasive influence of performance metrics and public scrutiny, but it also illuminates Berlinger dictates:

> As Carol Bayley writes concerning this process: "because [CHW's] values of dignity, collaboration, stewardship, justice and excellence are the foundational reasons the system was formed, its behaviour as system must be shaped by them or it risks forsaking its identity. 'Values' that do not affect actions are hardly worthy of the name. Disclosure was the bloom, not the root."(Berlinger79)

These metrics, while intended to improve accountability, create an environment where errors are framed asper sonalfailings rather than systemic challenges. Elizabeth's pointed remark underscores the isolating burden this system places on practitioners, intensifying shame and moral injury. The suggestion that publishing outcomes could incentivize avoiding high-riskpatients reveals a form of systemic evil, where defensive medicine becomes a rational response to institutional pressures, ultimately compromising equitable and patient-centred care. Hester's critique of competence-based frame works resonates here, as this dialogue reveal show systemic incentives distort ethical decision-making, privileging appearances of success over the realities of patient vulnerability:

> Certainly, the ability to demonstrate technical and scientific competence is imperative to advance in medical school and noon would wittingly seek medical care from an incompetent doctor; nevertheless, as I outline below, the idea that competence in the culture of the patient can and does off-set power inequities requires further interrogation. (Hester 2)

Hester's argument for cultural ethics rooted in empathy and shared accountability provides a valuable lens for analysing Elizabeth's plight. The film critiques the traditional, reductionist binary of competence versus in competence, advocating for a broader understanding of medical ethics that recognises human error as a systemic and relational phenomenon rather than a purely individual failure.

The concept of competence, as explored by Hester, is deeply entangled with cultural and institutional norms. Arthur Kleinman's reflections on the biomedical model further illuminate how the reductionist focus on technical mastery marginalises the relational and emotional dimensions of care (Kleinman 22). Elizabeth's ethical failures are not the result of isolated negligence but emerge from a culture prioritising institutional reputation over patient welfare and staff support. This focus distorts competence into a tool for evaluating individual practitioners without acknowledging the systemic factors that shape decision-making in high-pressureenvironments. Carl Elliott exploresthede humanising effects of institutional systems that prioritise procedure over personhood:

> Tolstoy brings to attention how deeply attached we are to the institutions that make possible all sorts of goods for ourselves at terrible costs to others, an attachment entirely compatible with attempts to make those costs a little less burdensome and the institutions thus a little less troubling to more tender consciences. (Elliott 142)

The moral foundation of care is undermined by the medical system's abstraction of interpersonal and cultural dynamics into strict checklists, which turns complex human relationships into administrative chores. *A Mistake* illustrates this erosion, depicting how a focus on technical competence over emotional and relational sensitivity leads to ethical failures with tragic consequences. The film underscores how such lapses, often attributed to individual failings, are systemic evils–symptomatic of a healthcare structure that marginalises humanity in favour of sterile efficiency.

Good's ethno graphic research further illuminates these dynamics, particularly in the training of medical students. Good describes how students are conditioned to "undo the common-sense narratives of patients" to construct medically meaningful arguments with the rapeutic consequences (Kohrmanand Good 241). This process sharpens their biomedical "gaze" and clinical reasoning, but at cost : the psychosocial aspects of patients' illnesses — their social histories, emotional states, and lives beyond the clinical setting—are systematically excluded as "inadmissible evidence"(Kohrmanand Good 243).The film echo esthis critique by exposing how the marginalization of these dimension screatesa nethical void, allowing systemic harm to persist unchecked.

In *A Mistake*, the ethical failures are not merely personal but structural. The film

challenges the viewer to consider the concept of "evil" not as the result of malicious intent but as the cumulative effect of dehumanising practices embedded within the medical system. This aligns with Hannah Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil," where

harm arises from ordinary people acting within systems that normalise unethical behaviours (Burin and Arendt 122). The film's protagonist grapples with her culpability, symbolising the ethical dilemmas faced by medical professionals who operate within a frame work that prioritises efficiency, detachment, and technical skill over compassion and accountability.

Systemic Pressures and the Construction of Evil

In *A Mistake*, systemic pressures within the medical profession play a significant role in constructing narratives of "evil" and individual failure, often at the expense of broader institutional accountability:

> Delivering bad news to patients is a “necessary evil” in medical practice and usually requires certain techniques as well as sufficient patient-contact experience. Physicians should conduct such talks appropriately based on their patient's condition and cultural context, but there are certain principles in common they should follow. The six-step protocol “SPIKES” offers a standard frame work on how to properly deliver bad news to patients. (Gao 108)

This perspective complements the analysis of delivering bad news as a" necessary evil" in medical practice. While such conversations inherently cause distress, their purpose aligns with the greater ethical objective of patient autonomy and informed decision-making. Dr. Elizabeth Taylor's error, while devastating, exemplifies what John D. Banja identifies as the systemic moral failure of institutions that prioritise perfection and reputation over transparency and meaningful reform. Banja argues that such environments cultivate a "culture of silence," where fear of blame and professional censure discourage open dialogue about errors.

Over the past decade, “cultural competency has become a critical component of medical education,” emphasising the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural beliefs, values and practices of patients (Berlinger 104). While this integration is aimed at improving patient care and fostering trust, it also raises ethical dilemmas, particularly when cultural norms are manipulated to obscure medical errors. Similarly, Rebecca J. Hester's critique of competence-based frame works under score show these systems cape goat individuals, deflecting attention from deeper structural flaws. This framing misrepresents human error as solely individual, perpetuating cycles of fear and blame that erode trust and compromise ethical practice, ultimately obstructing the possibility of systemic growth and improvement:

- You have been invisible to your patients and your performance levels have been equally invisible until now because we are going to be publishing surgical outcomes publicly. This, of course, raises profound questions, because once publication starts, patients and potential patients will assess your track records and compare you to others. Of

> course, they won't know that the surgeon down the road, who has much better statistics, only qualified six months ago, and has operated on a grand total of seven young, non-smoking white patients, whilst youhave been in the trenches, operating on the morbidly obese, the diabetic, elderly brown folk with histories of falls and gout and respiratory disease. You will be compared surgeon to surgeon, and every case of everyone who has ever died underneath your scalpel will be on full public display. Every surgical site, infection, every nicked aorta.

- Will some surgeons be forced tore tire?
- May be. Probably.
- Will some surgeons be treated unfairly?
- Yes, most likely.
- Why, then, should we allow this, even encourage it?
- Transparency and informed consent. (*A Mistake* 00:36:08-00:37:21)

The dialogue underscores the ethical complexities of publicising surgical outcomes, revealing both its potential to advance transparency and its unintended consequences. As explored by Fritz Allhoff and SandraL. Borden, the tension between transparency and fairness is emblematic of broader ethical dilemmas in healthcare: "Systemic considerations significantly alter our ethical approach to medical error prevention and response, necessitating are-evaluation of policies and procedures for justice and fairness" (Allhoff and Borden 52). Publishing surgical outcomes aligns with ideals of accountability and informed consent, yet it risks creating a distorted narrative of practitioner competence. Surgeons handling complex, high-risk cases may face unjust comparisons with peers operating in less challenging circumstances, exacerbating inequities and fostering defensive medical practices.

This practice, as argued in All off and Borden's work, reveals a structural bias that prioritizes easily quantifiable metrics over nuanced contextual evaluations. There sulting focuson performance statistics might shift attention away from systemic improvements in healthcare, instead placing undue moral and professional burden son individual surgeons: "Physician trust is built through patient listening and belief, while transparency in interactions aids in trust-building and informed consent acquisition during test administration" (Allhoff and Borden 131).

Transparency, while valuable, must be balanced with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse variables that shape medical outcomes to avoid perpetuating inequities and undermining trust in the system:

> While there is a tendency to assume a homogeneity or disciplinary focus to discursive practices, Foucault argues that they are not purely and

> simply modes of manufacture of discourse. Rather, they bring together or pass-through a number of disciplines or scientific areas, gathering them into sometimes inconspicuous clusters. (Hester 6)

In their effort to protect the irreputation, the hospital administration distances itself from Elizabeth, effectively isolating her asthesole bearer of responsibility. This man oeuvreservesto shield the institution from scrutiny, deflecting attention from systemic shortcomings such as inadequate support for decision-making under pressure or insufficient mentoring structures.

Hester's analysis reveals that such practices are not unique to the medical field but are part of a broader cultural pattern where power is maintained through the vilification of individuals.

Foucault's observation, as cited by Hester, that discursive practices transcend disciplinary boundaries to form in conspicuous clusters, provides alensto examine the pervasiveyetinsidious nature of administrative evil in medical ethics. Guy Adams and Danny Balfour's concept of administrative evil highlights how ostensibly benign bureaucratic structures can enable harm byfragmenting accountability and normal is in gethically question able practices (Adamsand Balfour 10). In the context of medicine, this interplay manifests in policies and cultural norms that prioritise institutional efficiency over patient care, often under the guise of competence. Ethical conundrums arise when professionals like Elizabeth are trapped within these systems – compelled to adhere to protocols that obscure individual humanity in favour of rigid metrics.

This systemic integration of administrative evil fosters an environment where ethical failures are diffused, leaving practitioners vulnerable to the unintended consequences of their constrained agency. Thus, Foucault's insights, aligned with Hester's critique and the theory of administrative evil, challenge us to re-examine how medical practices and policies perpetuate ethical dilemmas under the facade of scientific and administrative rigour.

Calls for enhanced cultural competence within the medical profession often operate under the assumption of a knowledge deficit among healthcare practitioners. This perspective implies that practitioners approach the clinical environment as blank slates, lacking any prior cultural understanding. However, research challenges this assumption, revealing that medical practitioners' subjectivities are shaped by their own cultural contexts, biases and interactions within a broader socio-cultural framework. Moreover, *A Mistake* challenges the conventional depiction of "evil" by refusing to present Elizabeth as a villain. Instead, it portrays her as a flawed yet empathetic professional navigating a rigid, unforgiving system. This complexity aligns with Hester's assertion that cultural narratives of evil often over simplify ethical dilemmas, reducing multifaceted issues to clear-cut moral failings:

- but this is important to us. Publishing results is a bad idea. We will avoid very sick patients. Why risk adding someone who will likely die to my numbers? Why should I take that risk? Changes everything. Which surgeon will give theirregistrar ago, if when it all turns to shambles, it goes on their record? (*A Mistake* 00:37:58- 00:38:19)

The statement shows how such reforms prioritise statistical appearances over equitable treatment, marginalising those with complex health conditions. Furthermore, the reluctance to allow registrar stogain experience underline show systemic pressures undermine mentorship and the broader cultivation of medical competence. Hester's critique of competency-based models aligns with this, as the focus on measurable outcomes erodes relational ethics and the moral commitment to serving all patients, regardless of their prognosis. This dialogue exposes how a misapplied pursuit of accountability risks compromising both patient care and professional development. By focusing on Elizabeth's humanity, the film critiques the cultural imperative to locate evil in individuals rather than addressing the systemic conditions that enable failure.

The dialogue shows the tension between institutional accountability and the ethical obligations of individual practitioners, a dynamic that Stephen Wear explores in *Informed Consent*. Wear emphasises that informed consent is not merely about procedural transparency but about fostering trust and shared decision-making between patients and healthcare providers (Wear and Moreno 52). The surgeon's concerns about publishing surgical outcomes highlight how systemic pressures, such as public reporting of performance metrics, can distort the patient- physician relationship and erode the foundational principles of informed consent.

The fear of taking on high-risk patients, as expressed in the dialogue, reflects a shift toward defensive medicine that prioritizes self-preservation over patient-centered care. This under mines the ethical framework of informed consent, where the patient's autonomy and unique medical needs should remain central. Wear's work critiques such systemic distortions, arguing that they can compromise the collaborative nature of informed consent, reducing it to a mechanism for institutional transparency rather than a means of fostering genuine patient empowerment:

- The decisions that we have to make in theatre in fractions of seconds are boiled down to "they lived" or "they died." No context, no case histories, just "they lived "or" they died. "That's not transparency. It's looking for someone to blame.

- I understand what you're saying.

- Do you?

- Yes.

- But once we pass this first storm, hopefully then we can focus on worthy things, such as risk adjustment.
- Risk adjustment?
- Have you heard of Z51.5? That's acode for palliative care in the UK system. A Z51.5 doesn't go on anyone's stats because it says that the patient was already dying when they came in. Patients died quietly. No chemo, no scalpels, just morphine and flowers.
- Would mysepsis have qualified?
- Do you understand?
- Should I have not intervened?
- May be, it's better for the patients that way. May be, because attimesit's best not to operate. Let them die with dignity. And maybe the publishing of data will mean that more people die with less intervention. (*A Mistake* 00:56:27 - 00:57:46)There are ethical tensions and professional anxieties surrounding the publication of surgical outcomes. There duction of complex medical decisions to binary metrics strips away the nuances of case histories, patient contexts and the myriad factors influencing outcomes. This over simplification not only obscures the complexity of clinical work but also fosters a culture of blame, rather than fostering transparency or meaningful improvement in care.

The concept of "risk adjustment," as introduced in the dialogue, provides a counterpoint to this oversimplification. The reference to the UK's Z51.5 code for palliative care underscores how systems can acknowledge the inevitability of certain outcomes, distinguishing between intervention failure sand natural progressions of terminal conditions. This distinction is critical to ethical medical practice, as it reframes end-of-life care as an opportunity to provide dignity, rather than pursuing futile interventions to preserve metrics.

The moral quandaries surrounding the publication of surgical outcomes evoke what Nancy Berlinger discusses in *After Harm*: the tension between ethical account ability and the unintended consequences of performance metrics. By highlighting the potential for metrics-driven transparency to reduce unnecessary procedures, the film suggests a paradoxical benefit in fostering more thoughtful, patient-centred care. Yet, as Berlinger warns, this emphasis on data canal so perpetuate systemic inequities, as practitioners may avoid high-risk patients to safe guard their success rates. This reflects the neoliberal prioritization of standardization and accountability, which reshapes healthcare into a system that values measurable outcomes over the complexities of qualitative patient experiences. Such imperatives, while seemingly aligned with ethical reform, risk

distorting care practices, privileging institutional preservation over equitable and compassionate treatment. Through this lens, the film critiques a system thatcommodifies care, where ethical dilemmas arise not from individual failings but from the structural constraints of a metrics-obsessed culture.

The influence of cultural knowledge in medicine extends far beyond contemporary debates about competence and transparency, reaching deep into the historical and political dimensions of medical practice. As Daniel Hendrick has pointed out, medicine was a central "tool of empire," employed in various contexts to exert control over colonised populations (Headrick 240). This tool, while ostensibly aimed at promoting health, often operated as an instrument of violence and exploitation. Warwick Anderson's concept of "colonialpathologies" underscores how medical practices, both in colonised regions and within the United States, perpetuated harmful stereotypes and racialized medical practices (Warwick 12). These pathologies were not confined to the colonial era but have continued to influence medical treatments for minorities, the poor and other marginalised groups.

Scholars such as Harriet A. Washington and James H. Jones have documented how cultural knowledge was extracted from subaltern subjects and used to legitimise medical violence, often under the guise of promoting health (Hester 9). This cultural knowledge, far from being a neutral or benevolent force, became integral in shaping discriminatory medical practices. The violence perpetrated through these practices involved not only the physical extraction of biological information from marginalized bodies but also the continued exploitation of cultural understandings that were used to justify inequities.

Feminist and postcolonial scholars argue that imperialism and culture are inextricably linked in these histories of medical violence. The intertwining of cultural knowledge with medical practices serve store in force existing power dynamics, ensuring that medical knowledgeremains a tool for maintaining hierarchies of race, class and gender. These historical injustices continue to reverberate today, shaping contemporary medical discourses and practices. The acknowledgement of this legacy is crucial when considering the ethical dimensions of modern medical competence and transparency, as these dynamics are still at play in the ways healthcare systems treat diverse populations.

The Fragility of Trust in Medicine

Trust is the corner stone of medical practice, yet it is also one of its most fragile elements, particularly in the face of mistakes. In *A Mistake*, the erosion of trust following Dr. Elizabeth Taylor's error highlights the precarious balance between professional authority and patient confidence. Rebecca J. Hester's arguments in *Culture in Medicine* provide a critical framework for understanding this dynamic, stressing how institutional cultures shape and often jeopardize trust. In the film, Elizabeth's colleagues, patients and the public quickly turn against her, framing her as untrustworthy not merely because of

her error but because of a systemic unwillingness to address broader institutional accountability:

> - I just don't think we can be idiots about this, and do it just because other countries do. How many cardiac surgeons can we afford to lose? Do you know how many we've got? - Twenty-nine! It's not enough.
> - Liz. Thankyou.
> - Twenty-nine.
> - And according to him, half are going to have toretiresoon. (*AMistake*00:38:57- 00:39:18)The speaker's concern about losing cardiac surgeons reflects the precarious balance between implementing reforms like publicising surgical outcomes and retaining essential medical personnel. The plea not to blindly follow other countries further critiques the uncritical adoption of global standards without addressing localised realities, echoing Hester's call for a culturally and ethically grounded approach in medicine. This shift of the hospital's management exemplifies Hester's critique of competence-focused paradigms, which foster environments where errors are interpreted as personal moral failings rather than systemic challenges.

Foucault's concept of episteme offer sacritical framework for understanding the systemic and cultural forces underpinning biomedicine and its ethical paradigms. As Foucault explains, epistemes are "strategic apparatuses" that delineate which forms of knowledge and practice are deemed acceptable within a given scientific field. This perspective is crucial for analyzing the culture of competence in medicine, where technical ensembles, institutional norms, and pedagogical practices reinforce a limited set of values and exclude others. In contemporary biomedicine, debates surrounding research findings, medical procedures, and pharmaceutical efficacy revolve around metrics of "good" and "competent" practice. However, these epistemic boundaries often marginalise personal belief systems, patient phenomenological experiences, and structural forces influencing health outcomes. Such exclusions perpetuate a reductive view of medical ethics that privileges measurable outputs over relational and contextual dimensions of care:

> Meanwhile, questions of personal belief, the phenomenological experience of the patient, and historical and structural forces shaping health outcomes are seen as outside of the realm of scientficity and are, therefore, largely excluded from biomedical pedagogies. (Hester 6)

Hester's critique aligns with Foucault's analysis, highlighting how the episteme of competence is shaped not only by clinical priorities but also by neoliberal imperatives such as standardisation, efficiency, accountability and the commodification of expertise.

In this system, prestige and professional authority are intertwined with market-based healthcare metrics, creating an environment where systemic pressures may compromise ethical decision-making.

The publicising of surgical outcomes in *A Mistake*, forinstance, exemplifies how these epistemic forces impose rigid standards that obscure the nuanced realities of medical practice, such as disparities in patient demographics and case complexities. By interrogating the construction and maintenance of this episteme, the film and Hester's work call for a reevaluation of the values underpinning biomedicine, advocating for an ethical paradigm that integrates scientific rigor with relational and phenomenological dimensions of care.

In *A Mistake*, the hospital's calculated distancing from Elizabeth mirrors how systemic priorities often undermine the very trust they seek to protect. The tragic death of her student surgeon, consumed by guilt over aseemingly minor mistake, underscores the silenced, isolating realities of a healthcare system that enforces corporate-like distance and accountability, depriving individuals of the communal support needed to confront error and grow. The portrayal of his death reveals how systemic pressures, focusing on institutional image and efficiency, contribute to a culture that stifles emotional engagement, ethical reflection and ultimately, trust:

- Richard Whitehead was my registrar. Many of you knew Richard, and those of you who didn't, I'm sure you can identify with him. He was a youngman, 26. And as a registrar, he was still learning, still training. He didn't die. He committed suicide. And, um, he's dead now because he overdosed. That's the truth of it. He took his own life in a filthy garage, alone.- Elizabeth, that's enough.

- We talk about teamwork.

- Liz...

- We talk about resilience.

- Did Richard lack resilience? This youngman for whom I am responsible?

Because if you're telling me he lacks something, I don't accept it. I operated on a patient who died after the surgery. Richard was under my supervision, and he did as I asked. I told him to push harder, and I chose the timing, and Ichose the words I said, and I chose the way I said them. And he just... It's my responsibility. I am responsible for the risks I take every time I perform surgery. And Richard is dead because he blamed himself for a mistake I made. I didn't make my responsibility clear enough to him. He was a student doctor. And... And we're hanging a target around his neck with this vigil. And I'm not going to let this boy be scapegoated publicly by middle managers and doctors-turned-bureaucrats. We are in service.

We have a covenant with our patients. "I will save you with my skills." But we have a covenant to each other. We're in service to each other, too. Both those covenantsare being broken here today, and I will not stand by and help pretend that's not the case. That's enough. Restinpeace,Richard.(*AMistake*01:25:03- 01:27:58)

There are limitations to focusing on individual attributes like resilience while ignoring systemic pressures, power imbalances and the relational nature of medical practice. The current exchange calls for a shift from performative blame to structural accountability and collective care, embodying Hester's vision of a more equitable and humane medical culture. Hester arguesthat the reductionist approach to cultural competence in medicine abstracts human complexity, perpetuating systemic inequities under the guise of individual responsibility:

To both acknowledge and ignore culturally diverse patients, and their beliefs and experiences, physicians have learned to hear only particular kinds of narratives and to extract only what is held to be the most clinically relevant information. (Hester 11)

This critique parallels the themes expressed in the dialogue, particularly in Elizabeth's confrontation of systemic failings and her refusal to scapegoat Richard. Elizabeth's speech highlights the intense pressures within medical training and practice, embodied in the figure of Richard, a young registrar naviga8ting the precarious balance between learning and accountability. Her interrogation of resilience challenges the reductive notion that individual traits, such as grit or mental toughness, are sufficient to navigate the systemic pressures of medical practice. Hester would argue that this focus on resilience as an isolated characteristic ignores the broader cultural and institutional structures that contribute to burnout and mental health crises in healthcare workers.

The dialogue also foregrounds the relational dynamics within the medical hierarchy.

Elizabeth's admission of her role, choosing the timing, words and approach that led Richard to internalise blame, underscores the unequal distribution of power and responsibility in medical training. Hester critiques the medical field's tendency to pathologise individuals rather than examining how cultural and systemic factors shape outcomes. Here, Elizabeth resists this tendency by refusing to allow Richard to bear the weight of a mistake rooted in her decisions and the structural norms of their shared profession.Hester's call for are imagining of medical practice that centers equity, collaboration, and cultural humility directly challenges the dominant competence models, which reduce professionals to mere technical performers. In this context, the public vigil for Richard risks becoming ape formative act, serving as a superficial gesture that obscures the deeper structural issues, such as institutional neglect and the failure to address emotional and relational dynamics within the medical field, which ultimately contributed to Richard's suicide.

Elizabeth concluded the story with her dialogue with Lisa's parents when she drovefar into their abode, far away, in the middle of a farm:

- Is there anything you would have done differently?
- That's the hard bit. No. I would not. All the decisions I made were to try to save Lisa. If the operation were to happen again, I could make all the same decisions. But I would endeavour to be better at explaining it, be better at taking responsibility. I allowed doubt to creep in. Lisa fought. She fought hard. You need to know that. In the end, her body gave up, des...despite all our experience and care. And please know that your daughter was cared for. I wanted a good outcome for Lisa. And I'm so sorry.
- Thankyou.(*AMistake*01:29:54- 01:33:32)

Through this exchange, the film crystallises its central themes, offering a critical reflection on the nature of responsibility and the emotional burden of medical practice.

Elizabeth's candid acknowledgement foregrounds the duality of medical errors: they are both personal and systemic. Elizabeth's recognition of her mistake, juxtaposed with the inevitability of Lisa's death, illustrates the complexity of accountability in medicine. Her words align withRebeccaJ. Hester's critique of the biomedical model, which often individual is eserrors while obscuring the broader systemic pressures that shape clinical decisions. In this context, Elizabeth's admission transcends individual culpability and becomes are flection of the inherent uncertainties and limitations of medical practice.

Conclusion

The ethical dilemmas explore din *A Mistake* provide arichterra in for examining the concept of evil in medical practice. Dr. Elizabeth Taylor's journey underscores the limitations of competence-based frameworks, which often overlook the deeper relation a land systemic aspects of medical ethics. Through Elizabeth's experience, we see how these frameworks failto account for the moral complexities and human vulnerabilities that shape medical decision-making.

Hester's critique of the cultural competence model advocates for a more empathetic, relational approach to medicine, one that recognises the interconnectedness of professional responsibility and personal accountability. This shift in perspective is crucial for addressing the "evil" embedded in medical systems, where systemic failures are often obscured by the scapegoating of individuals, as seen in Richard's tragic death.

In *A Mistake*, the portrayal of Elizabeth's error and its aftermath illustrates how the systemic culture of blame and perfectionism cultivates an environment ripe for moral injury, where good intentions and professional ethics become casualties of institutional pressures. This aligns with the broader philosophical discourse on evil, where actions

driven by structural forces, such as the need for institutional reputation and defensive medicine, are not merely the result of individual failings but are symptomatic of a morally flawed system. The failure to address thesedeeper, structural issues infavour of punitive me asures represents a form of systemic evil, perpetuating cycles of harm and eroding trust.

Ultimately, the film's critique of medical culture and Hester's alternative vision for medical ethics point toward a much-needed transformation. By embracing a paradigm that balances professional accountability with empathy and systemic responsibility, medical practice can move away from a focus on individual culpability toward one that fosters growth, collaboration, and genuine ethical reflection. Such a shift has the potential to confront the evil of medical error more effectively, promoting a practice of medicine that is not only competent but compassionate, equitable, and deeply human. This analysis calls for are consideration of how we define and respond to moral failures in healthcare, urging a cultural shift that would prioritize systemic reform and relational ethics, thereby nurturing a more just and effective healthcare system.

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Aswathy Kishore

Embracing Evil and Negotiating Identity by Transcending a Calcified System : A Deleuzian Take on *Gender Outlaw on Men, Women, and the Rest of us*.

Abstract

This article is an exploration of Gender Outlaw on Men, Women, and the Rest of us, viewed through the lens of Deleuzian philosophy, specifically drawing on concepts such as 'rhizomatic' identities, 'becoming', 'nomadology', 'desire and affect', and the 'body without organs'. Kate Bornstein and S. Bear Bergmanproblematize the fixed notions of identity, sexuality and gender liberating one from the act of passing and being a creature of darkness. By throwing light on its 'rhizomatic' quality, the article attempts to unleash the hidden power games of the culture leading to the creation of a 'third space'. The concept of becoming is applied to illustrate how Kate Bornstein and thecharacters in the book embrace various strategies in their effort to fluidify their gender identities fleetingly or permanently. The idea of 'nomadology' provides a framework to analyse how the territorialization of gender- the binary system acts as a battlefield that is deterritorialized by various inescapable modifiers and lays down a foundation for the dialectic system as a playground. The notion of 'desire and affect' highlights the productive force that brings about the ontological actualisation or self-organisation of the being and how they transition from one state to another by an awareness of the shifting dynamics in the gender roles, gender expression, and gender attribution. Finally, the concept of the 'body without organs' illustrates how Kate Bornstein is going to transform herself into something that the dictionary has trouble naming as she defies the organization to which her body is subjected under the dictatorship of the culture of the world. It also offers insights into the dynamic and resistant nature of the safe, sane and consensual gender identities, inviting readers to reconsider and expand their understanding of a gender of kaleidoscopic magnitude beyond the imprisoning traditional binaries.

Keywords: Rhizome, Becoming, Nomadology, Desire and Affect, Body without Organs, Third Space, territorialization, deterritorialization

"Gender is a wooly worm" (Bornstein13) says Kate Bornstein in *Gender Outlaw on Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*as she wishes to impart to gender a playfulness that comes with the fluidity and complexity of gender. She deploys a metaphor- wooly worm, the larval form of the Isabella tiger moth to signify the transformative and ephemeral nature of gender. According to her, gender is very much like a cocoon. "In goes one gender, out comes the other" (Bornstein163). The transformation is demarcated into pre-transition

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and post-transition stages. For the transformation to take place, one has to unplug from the culture that remains complacent with the two options-man/woman it extends to explore the other likely options. She attributes to gender a fluidity and dynamicity by likening it to a flowing river as"the way of gender is a living, changing path, like a river —it does no one any good to try to keep either gender or a river still" (Bornstein19).She believes her body belongs to her and thereforechoses to exonerate herself from the ritualistic subjugation of her body to the whims and fancies of the arborescent model perpetuated by the community, institutions and families. She treats her body as an instrument for experimentationrather than a byproduct of organization bynot concedingto the act of passing. "Passing is defined as the act of appearing in the world as a gender to which one does not belong, or as a gender to which one did not formerly belong" (Bornstein168). She prefers not to remain a part of the culture that insists on labelling her as a creature of darkness, shame, capitulation, silence, invisibility, lies and self-denial (Bornstein *168*).Therefore, she hunts down the lines of flight from the arborescent model of gender, identity and sexuality to liberate these concepts from its fixity and to endow it with a "work in progress" stature. But the culture has a tradition of labelling anything that defies boundaries as evil and monstrous because such transgressions challenge the norms evoking fear and rejection.

Judith Butler has interpellated the fixity of gender as an objective natural thing expressing an essence by detaching it from the material bodily facts and terming it as a construction that is open to change and contestation in *Gender Trouble.* She claims that "gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler 278). In *Bodies That Matter,* she liberates sex from being "a simple fact or static condition of a body" and views it as "a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of these norms" (2). Kate Bornstein follows a trajectory along Butler's line of thought as she brandishes the wooly worm nature of the gender emphasizing on its transformative potential rather than fixity. The transformation she underwent from a man to a woman and then identifying with neither is itself symbolic of a conscious and a willful performance which lets her be or not bea gender unlike the performance of others which perpetuates the theatricaland conventional regulatory norms through unconscious or forced reiterations.

Kate Bornstein discovers a 'third space' as "the "third" is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis...[T]he "third" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge" (Bornstein138). She definesThird Space as a space that welcomes the outcasts and encourages them to violate the rules and challenge the binary system by playing with gender. To her, "queer theatre" is her "Third Space" (Bornstein182). The Third Space is a space she has created for herself that lets her be herself "at home, at play, and at work" (Bornstein185). It is a theatre that accommodates

the oppressed, the “members of any borderline community or noncommunity” and “anyone who falls through the cracks of the cultural floorboards” and “anyone who is the 'Other'” (Bornstein207).The Third Space as a queer theatre embraces ambiguous characterswho do not deem the revelation of gender necessary (Doc Grinder in Bornstein's play “Hidden: A Gender), characters who have felt like a woman but was born a man and transforms to a woman just to find out that it was never worth the pain and trouble, characters who are basically agender or relate to neither of the binaries (Herman/ Kate), characters who convert to men to enjoy the privileges men enjoy but never content with their life as a man as they feel they identify with both male and female (Herculine/Abel). Bornstein's “Third Space” and Homi Bhabha's “Third Space” share a common theme of transcending binary categories but they address distinct social and cultural issues. While Kate's Third Space emerges in the context of gender, Bhabha's concept of the “Third Space” introduced in “The Location of Culture” is rooted in postcolonial theory.

> "It is the 'third space,' though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 37).

The Third Space founded by Homi Bhabha is a site of cultural production where new identities and meanings are created, challenging the dualities like colonizer/colonized and the self/other. It allows for the possibility of cultural difference and the emergence of new, hybrid forms of cultural identity. He claims that cultural identity is not fixed but rather constructed in a “third space” where different cultures interact, negotiate and create something new. Therefore, both Bhabha's and Bornstein's ideas share a commonality in challenging binary thinking, embracing fluid identities and the creation of new, non-dominant identities coexisting in solidarity.

The Third Space can be read alongside the Deleuzian 'rhizome' which according to Deleuze is governed by the principles of connection and heterogeneity, principle of multiplicity, principle of asignifying rupture, and the principle of cartography and decalcomania (Deleuze and Guattari7, 8, 9,12). The Third Space embodies the interconnectedness by allowing for the different identities to connect, overlap and influence each other. It helps transcend the bi-polar system of gender prevalent in the theatre by embracing the likely possibilities between and beyond the categories. The rhizomatic principle of connection emphasizes the potential of a network of infinite connections and possibilities. The queer theater likewise encourages and prospers on the connections with an “outsider mentality” thereby incorporating the marginalized (Bornstein203).The Third Space is a site of heterogeneity, intersectionality, fluidity, and inclusivity because it nurtures the coexistence of diverse gender identities and facilitates

its interactions in non-hierarchical waysimplicit in the fluidity of her theatrical style by incorporating lesbians, agender, gay men, bisexual, trans folks etc. who are on the road to self-discovery. It embraces the complexity and richness of human experience, allowing for a more inclusive, expansive understanding, and empowerment of sex and gender outlaws by reserving a space that is immune to the segregations effected by religion, law and medicine.One of the important aspects of "multiplicities is that they are defined by 'lines of flight,' through which they escape enclosed formations and connect to other multiplicities from the outside" (Tamboukou 6) .The Third Space is symbolic of the multiplicity of gender experiences and possibilities challenging the notion of gender as a fixed, singular and a narrow concept that is not inclusive of various "inescapable modifiers: class, race, age, disability, mental health, religion, family and children, politics, looks, language, and habitat and ecology" (Bornstein16). The principle of asignifying rupture involves a breaking away from the established system of dualism and the Third Space is a testimony to the disruption of the homophobia, transphobia and the traditional gender binary system, aimed at mutilating the stereotypes. The application of the principle of cartography helps perceive gender as an open notion that is a work in progress, created and recreated, and open to change, exploration and redefinition. It is a continuous process of becoming which acknowledges that gender identities can change over time and that it is influenced by experiences, interactions and contexts. The theatre likewise offers Bornstein the space to play with her most powerful instrument- the audiences through her plays to mess with their preconceptions of gender (Bornstein188). The principle of cartography therefore, captures the flexibility and adaptability of gender identity rather than a tracing which attempts to fit individuals to the pre-established categories without ever acknowledging its complexity and dynamic nature. The queer theatre makes itself obsolete with each accomplishment by renewing its purposes, experimenting new styles, encouraging new artists, and thereby aiming at its evolution with an eye on the ultimate goal to freedom without subjecting it to a scrutiny or a meticulous judgement to a particular standard or quality of work(Bornstein205).

Rosi Braidotti states that to be a nomad one need not necessarily travel. "It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic process, not the literal act of travelling" (Braidotti 26). In treading a path laid down by her by subverting the foundations of the binary gender system, she undergoes a process of becoming as ""nomadism is not a situation of being but of becoming…a creative sort of becoming, a performative metaphor" (Braidotti27).Braidotti opines that the "nomadic consciousness is not about dispensing with identity altogether, but rather about not taking any kind of identity as permanent"(Braidotti64). Bornstein can be said to be at home without being grounded or rooted in an identity given to her. The nomad in Bornstein is in the pursuit for new modes of becoming, never constraining to a single permanent identity.Her journey from a man to a woman with an artificially constructed vagina, from woman to an agender, from an agender to someone the dictionary has trouble naming is suggestive of

her nomadic consciousness. In her nomadic journey, she deterritorializes herself from the narrow framework of gender by replacing the foundation of gender initially based on the binary system making it a battlefield to a gender based on dialectic system transforming it to a playground (Bornstein16,17). She thereby embraces an identity which society considers evil and engages in a playful identity. A binary system being a system that segregates one over the other, an encroachment or a growth on one side meant an attack on the other. But an introduction of a component that identifies with neither of the sides annihilates the binary into infinite pieces.The foundations of gender continue to exist even after the encroachment of the nonbinary component but the destabilization brought about by the dialectic makes way for the existence of multitudinous nonbinary components which gradually carves its way and makes its placein the system.

The process of destabilization can be said to be driven by a desire as a lack suggestive of the lacunae in the binary system that flexed exclusively the either/or spaces and the desire as wish as put forward by Lyotard, which is "the absence of something which is needed, the urge to generate utility, improve upon our human environment" (Brewis & Linstead 175). The desire which stemmed from a paralyzing either/or model of gender paves way to desire as a productive force and a creative force. This productive force prompts a transition in the way an individual perceives a being by an awareness of the flawed, reiterative performative mechanism by which the gender assignments and gender attributions operate, and how the gender identities, gender roles and, gender expressions come to being.

The question of gender assignment is mostly settled by the doctors thus medicalizing the process of gendering by conveniently overlooking the "DNA, hormones, or dozens of other nuances of biological sex (Bornstein49). The possible line of flight from a gender assignment as a social responsibility is the disposition of gender determination at the will of the individual with whom is vested the legal, moral or ethical right to decide the gender. This calls for the need to eschew the classificatory principles of gender providing people with the luxury to decide on the gender of their liking, with the society playing no role in its formulation (Bornstein50).

Gender attribution is the process by which an attributer attributes gender to an individual based on the "behavioural cues" like "manners, decorum, protocol, deportment"; "textual cues" like "histories, documents, names, associates, relationships"; mythic cues like "cultural and subcultural myths" – "weaker sex, dumb blonde" etc, "power dynamics as cue" like "communication techniques, degree of assertiveness" etc, "sexual orientation as cue" built on a "heterosexual imperative" that compels a man to go on a date only with a woman(sometimes a male transexual passing as a female going on a date with a man) simplifying the task of an attributer who then looks for cues to arrive at a necessary conclusion as to who is the woman and the man among the two, and the "biological gender as determined by science and documented by the state"

(Bornstein56, 57,58). A deconstruction of the gender attribution follows from a line of thought that "sexuality and gender are discrete phenomena" (Bornstein58). This is corroborated by the fact that there exist variants to the gender-based relationship dynamics in addition to the heterosexual model, gay male model, lesbian model, and bisexual model(Bornstein61). A transgression of the boundaries of these models involves an individual from one of these models engaging in a relationship with an individual belonging to a different model- a heterosexual male with a lesbian woman.

Gender identity is the identity assumed by an individual with or without subjecting to various factors of influence like "peer pressure, advertising, drugs, cultural definitions of gender," etc (Bornstein51). This is presumed by many as a "natural process" which problematizes the notion of being and belonging. Kate Bornstein chose to be a female(being) just because she never felt like a man and wanted to "belong with other women (belonging)" (Bornstein51). Her denial as a man outweighed her disinterestedness in being a woman which prompted her for a surgery to transform from a man to a woman as she felt she belonged with women. But belonging with women and being a woman are two different things. After the conversion, her failed attempts to feel like a woman led her to define her as an agender. Bornstein's girlfriend, Catherine, whom she loved has become David, the "man of her dreams" and the man her "mother always wanted her to be" (Bornstein494). Her unsettling question to people who is in complete and absolute identification with their genders is what it actually and really means and feels to be like a man or a woman.

Gender roles are the factors or cues that an individual adopts based on which the society attributes gender to an individual. Gender roles are performed by many to access entry to an acceptable gender. Jobs, economic roles, chores, hobbies, appearance, sexual orientation, methods of communication are the factors taken into consideration by the people to assign gender roles(Bornstein53). One is likely to adopt those cues that would validate him/her as belonging to a particular gender. But with the passage of time, the mix-up and the intersectionality of these factors make it difficult to classify people merely on the basis of gender roles. The classification has to be done away with calling for an identity thatevolves with an expanding knowledge of the self.

Gender expression is basically about putting "gender identity into play," a matter that is to be placed at the discretion of the individual. "Clothing, body modification, speech, posture, movement, language, attitude" are some of the ways in which one expresses one's gender (Bornstein 54). This kind of interpellation with reference toa hackneyed organization of gender based on the cues spawn serious rearticulations. The recrudescence lies in not limiting gender expression to a few components but in playing with the gender in blizzard ways (cross-dressing for instance)that the naysayers evade from the prediction of genders in the midst of abounding gender plays and the ensuing confusions.

Kate Bornstein expresses her incapacity to comprehend people who is determined to label her as a manor a woman when she has persevered in shedding all that she thought she was- the "identities", "dead and dying cells" (Bornstein493). She hopes in the next seven years, she will have shed her "girl skin", "right next to" her "lesbian skin," "man skin," "boy skin" (Bornstein 495). She believes the body takes seven years to regenerate itself, so the body one is occupying now is devoid of a single cell that occupied it seven years before thereby implying one is reborn and rebuilt after every seven years. She intends to leave behind "nothing of this body" and warns people to take one last look as she is "changing already" and "gonna be new all over again." (Bornstein 495). Kate's line of thought aligns with the concept of "Body without Organs" (BwO) developed by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. This concept emphasizes the need to do away with the systematic organization of the body which forecloses possibilities by treating it as a closed notion. She views her body as a constantly changing assemblage of desires, intensities, flows that resist organization. Body without Organs makes no claim to negate the body but is rather a way of thinking about the body as a multiplicity of possibilities.

Kate Bornstein's take on gender is suggestive of the kaleidoscopic magnitude, desires, intensities and flows beyond the confines of an imprisoning unsafe, insane and nonconsensual gender. According to her an unlearning of gender requires it to be safe, sane and consensual. Safe gender concerns the right of an individual to be what one wants when one wants to be without the risk of being "fixed or mutilated." Safe gender ensures the security of expression without harming oneself and others in this process of expression. It liberates one from the need to hide and lie as it facilitates an outlet for the true expression of oneself at any given time (Bornstein 166,167). Sane gender is about having a place and space for everyone irrespective of whether they are outcasts or not. It is about expanding the immense magnitude of the spectrum of gender to exonerate it from the black and white divisions and spruce the spectrum up with the colours of a rainbow "by asking questions about gender-talking to people who do gender, and opening up about gender histories and gender desires" (Bornstein 167). Consensual gender has less to do with a doctor assigning gender, the state documenting it, the law enforcing it and the church sanctifying it. It is rather about respecting the right of an individual to define one's own gender and fill in the blanks without the necessary intervention of law, science, religion, state or other means of regulations in filling the blanks. It provides one with the space to "question" the gender, "play with it" and "work it out with friends, lovers, or family" (Bornstein 167).

The *Gender Outlaw on Men, Women and the Rest of Us* enlightens one to perceive gender blur not as a sinful act of perversity denounced by the religion, fixed by the magical elixir of medicine or enforced by the law. Gender identity falls within the purview of an individual who sets on a path of discoveryto decide who one really is by abandoning the conceptions of what one thought one was all the while. Sexual identity

defines who one wants to be romantically and sexually involved with which has practically nothing to do with one's gender. Gender is not a question of the need to belong to either of the categories buta battlefield in which reason and nature come into conflict with each other reproducing a whole new set of rules, questions and lines to break, answer and transcend respectively, a playground that has to outlive the conscience of the society, the taming of the religions,and proceeding to a movement towards 'zero' which is the point where people and their ideas move out beyond their boundaries to become their opposites" (Bornstein421). A reworking of the gender system that is flexible and open to experimentation and challenges complementing the time is thus significant as "calcified systems of thought lead to calcified worldviews, and thus to a lack of imagination and empathy which inhibits new ways of thinking and understanding" (Transgender Genealogy 144). A Deleuzian approach is a panacea to the stagnation and calcification that leads to a non-finalized state of being through an endless process of ceasing to be what one was and the process of becoming what one is.

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Aswini R

The Sublime and the Sinister in Gothic Literature : A Retrospective Through a Gothic Lens

Abstract

This paper explores The Sublime and the Sinister through a Gothic lens, illuminating the labyrinthine nature of beauty and terror in 18th and 19th century literature. The Gothic tradition ensemble the sublime-experiences that inspire awe, with the sinister, embodying fear and the uncanny. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Edgar Allan Poe's The Raven, Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights and Ann Radcliffe's On the Supernatural in Poetry, exemplify how evocative landscapes and decaying beauty provoke profound emotional responses. The study explores themes of monstrosity and the dread of the unknown, inspired withawe,reflecting on the societal anxieties pervasive in theera's literary discourse. The Gothic aesthetic serves as a powerful medium for interrogating the complexities of the human psyche, inviting us to confront the surreal boundaries between beauty and horror.Ahuman is God's magnum opus, he who adorns the title in all its glory, and as long as we don't perish the two-faced angel or demon is never at peace.

Keywords: Gothic, sublime, sinister, horror, evil

Gothic literature has long provided a haunting lens through which to explore the most unsettlingaspectsofhumannature,revealingthefinelinebetweenaweandhorror.TheGothic genre,whichtracesitshistorybacktothe18thcentury,isrenownedforitsabilitytoblendthe sublime—the overwhelming beauty that inspires awe—with the sinister, invoking dread and terror. This balance of beauty and horror captures the essence of the Gothic tradition, revealing both the heights of human ambition and the depths of despair. The Gothic genre becomes a vehicle for exploring the allure and peril of crossing boundaries—whether moral, intellectual, or supernatural—thereby illuminating humanity's deepest anxieties and aspirations. In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, and Ann Radcliffe's *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, we see distinct treatments of the sublime and the sinister, each revealing different aspects of human fear, obsession, and transgression.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: Sublime Nature and the Sinister Boundaries of Ambition

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is often considered a seminal Gothic novel, particularly in how it uses the concept of the sublime to heighten the novel's sense of dread and tragedy. Shelley's sublime lands capes —the towering Swiss Alpsz, the frozen waste lands of theArctic— serve not only as beautiful settings but also as symbols of

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nature's vastness, power, and in difference to human suffering. These environments reflect the scale of Victor Frankenstein's ambition, which is itself a pursuit of the sublime. He seeks to transcend human limitations by creating life, attempting to harness nature's mysteries for his own ends.The sinister aspect of *Frankenstein* lies in the horrific consequences of Victor's ambition. By pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration without considering the ethical implications, Victor creates a being that is beautiful and terrifying—a creature that inspiresawe, horror, and ultimately, despair. "I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health" (Shelley 35). Victor's willingness to sacrificeeverythingforhisexperimentunderscorestheblindnessofhisambition.Thecreatur e itself, born of Victor's intellectual hubris, embodies the sinister consequences of unchecked ambition and the dark potential of human curiosity. Victor's decision to play God and defy natural limitsturns the sublime into something twisted and grotesque.Thecreature's anguish, isolation, and rejection highlight the tragic fallout from Victor's failed experiment, showcasing Shelley's cautionary view of the dangers inherent in humankind's relentless quest for knowledge.

In this way, Shelley uses the sublime to underscore nature's power and humanity's fragility, and the sinister to explore the psychological and ethical darkness that can arise from such ambitions. *Frankenstein* becomes not just a tale of horror, but a meditation on the perils of overreaching ambition, presenting a Gothic vision of human folly.

EdgarAllan Poe's *The Raven*: Psychological Sublimityand theHaunting Power of Grief

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* (1845) combines the super natural with the psychological to evoke both the sublime and the sinister. The poem tells the story of a grieving narrator who is visited by a mysterious raven that speaks only the word "Nevermore." Poe's dark, melancholy atmosphere, paired with the sinister presence of the raven, captures the psychological experienceofloss and despair. Here, the sublimemanifests not in nature, but in the narrator's over whelming grief, which takes on an almost super natural power of its own. Theraven, as an emblem of the sinister, embodies death, loss, and then arrator's descent into madness. The haunting refrain of "Nevermore" evokes the inevitability of death and the impossibility of escaping grief: "And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting / On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door" (Poe lines 103-104). The raven's presence acts as a constant reminder of the narrator's loss, leading him to confront his own powerlessness. This encounter with the supernatural also represents a psychological sublimity, where the intensity of the narrator's grief elevates his despair into something transcendent, even poetic.

Poe's skilful blending of the supernatural and psychological makes *The Raven* a profound exploration of the sinister forces within the human mind. The poem delves into

the Gothic tradition of madness and despair, using the raven as a catalyst for the narrator's journey into psychological terror.Through this work, Poe demonstrates how the Gothic sublime can be as much about the darkness within the mind as it is about external horrors.

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*: The Passionate Sublime and the Destructive Power of Obsession

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) presents a different, more personal approach to the sublime and the sinister. Set on the wild Yorkshire moors, the novel's Gothic atmosphere is rooted in the landscape's stark beauty and brutality. The moors represent the sublime in their untamed vastness, reflecting the intense, almost supernatural emotions of the characters, particularly Heath cliff and Catherine. Bronte's descriptions of the moorsevokeawe and dread, creating a natural setting that mirrors the extremes of passion and vengeance in the novel. The character of Heathcliff is the embodiment of the sinister in *Wuthering Heights*. His obsessive love for Catherine and his relentless quest for revenge reveal the destructive potential of unbridlede motion. Heath cliff's presence in the story disrupts the lives of every one around him; his passion blurs the line between love and hatred. “Whatever our souls are made of, his and minearethesame”(Bronte92). Aloveso in tense that it crosses in toob session—aforceas consuming and dangerous as the moors themselves. Through Heathcliff and Catherine's doomed love, Bronte demonstrates how love, when it crosses into obsession, can become a force as violent and destructive as any supernatural horror.

Bronte also subtly incorporates the supernatural in the novel, with ghostly apparitions and haunting dreams that seem to blur the boundary between life and death. These elements heighten the Gothic atmosphere, allowing Bronte to explore how the sublime and the sinister can exist within the realms of human passion and obsession.

Ann Radcliffe's *On the Supernatural in Poetry*: Terror vs. Horror and the Intellectual Sublime

Ann Radcliffe's essay *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (1826) provides a crucial theoretical foundation for understanding the Gothic tradition's use of the sublime and sinister. Radcliffe famously differentiates between “terror” and “horror,” two sensations that are often conflated in Gothic literature but that she argues have distinct psychological impacts. Radcliffe champions terroras the preferred modeforGothic writers,as it allowsreadersto engagewith the sublime— experiencing a we and wonder at the my sterious and unknown. “Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul and awakens the facultiestoahigh degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them”(Radcliffe148). Her perspective influenced numerous Gothic writers, encouraging them to employ suggestion and subtlety to evoke fear rather than explicit depictions of violence or the grotesque.

Conclusion

Gothic literature captures the enigmatic depths of the human psyche, spotlighting the intense conflicts and desires that drive human behaviour: the pursuit of knowledge, the terror of the unknown, the anguish of loss, and the consuming power of love. The genredelves in to the mind's darkerimpulses, where curiosity and ambition of ten clash with ethical boundaries, and deep emotional connections risk transforming into obsessive, destructive forces. In *Frankenstein*, Victor's hubristic quest to surpass natural limits reveals the perilous side of human curiosity when it loses sight of empathy. *The Raven* explores griefasan all-consuming psychological force, where sorrow morphsintohauntingobsession,illustratinghowunresolved trauma can distort perception and tether the mind to despair. Similarly, *Wuthering Heights* portrays love as both passionate and ruinous, with Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship reflecting the psyche's capacity for both attachment and vengeance, blurring love with resentment. Ann Radcliffe's *On the Supernatural in Poetry* theorizes that terror—unlike horror—engages the imagination in a profound confrontation with the unknown, suggesting the mind's simultaneous need for both mystery and meaning. Gothic literature, therefore, revealsacomplexportraitofthehumanmind,embracingthesublimeandthesinisterasforces that illuminate humanity's profound psychological complexities and contradictions. These works showcase the genre's versatility and lasting power, revealing how the sublime and sinister, in their intricate dance, continue to resonate with readers. Gothic literature's fascination with the unknown, the beautiful, and the terrifying ensures itsc ontinue drelevance, capturing the eternal tension between human aspirations and the mysteries that lie beyond comprehension.

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Dr. Dinesh Panwar

Triumph Over Oppression : The Multifaceted Nature of Evil in *The Color Purple*

Abstract

In The Color Purple by Alice Walker, the idea of evil manifests through various forms of oppression, abuse, and systemic injustice, primarily shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and class. The protagonist, Celie, endures physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of men, reflecting a broader societal evil rooted in patriarchal dominance and the dehumanization of Black women. This personal evil is intertwined with societal structures of racism and sexism that normalize such abuse. However, Walker does not present evil as absolute or immutable; rather, it is depicted as something that can be overcome through resilience, self-empowerment, and the formation of supportive relationships. The transformative power of female solidarity and spiritual awakening helps Celie and others reclaim agency and challenge the forces that oppress them. By addressing the multifaceted nature of evil, The Color Purple underscores the possibility of redemption, healing, and the triumph of love and self-affirmation over cruelty and injustice.

Keywords: Oppression, Systemic injustice, evil, race

In The Color Purple by Alice Walker, the idea of evil manifests through various forms of oppression, abuse, and systemic injustice, primarily shaped by the intersections of race, gender, and class. The protagonist, Celie, endures physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of men, reflecting a broader societal evil rooted in patriarchal dominance and the dehumanization of Black women. Pain and oppressionis evident in the beginning of the novel when the little girl writes to God and asks "I am fourteen years old .I have always been a good girl .Maybe you can give me sign letting me know what is happening to me " She further describes her pain" He never had a kine word to say me .Just say you gonna do what your mammy wouldn't .First he put his things up gainst my hip and sort of wiggle it around .Then he grab hold my titties.Then he push his thing inside my pussy.When that hurt ,I cry .He start to choke me ,saying you better shut up and git used to it.But I don't never git used to it .And now I feels sick every time." (The Color Purple 3).Walker through Celie and her experiences in a male dominated society where she finds no one to listen her .She address her letters to God while writing letters to God ,she is still afraid and sceptical because she never had good experience with male gender. The image of God in Christianity is a white beard male which makes Celie more doubtful about the idea of justice by the omnipresent. This personal evil is intertwined with societal

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structures of racism and sexism that normalize such abuse. These social evils not only normalize but also systematically naturalize in the society. The unnatural order is made natural by creating narratives in support of oppression of a particular gender or race. These evils are backed by the society because they suit to those who are powerful in the social structure. The black women in The Color Purple are at margin, she is not only oppressed by the white people but also by their own male community. Walker highlights these social evils in the Color Purple and how women is the most hurt by these social norms. However, Walker does not present evil as absolute or immutable; rather, it is depicted as something that can be overcome through resilience, self-empowerment, and the formation of supportive relationships. The transformative power of female solidarity and spiritual awakening helps Celie and others reclaim agency and challenge the forces that oppress them. By addressing the multifaceted nature of evil, The Color Purple underscores the possibility of redemption, healing, and the triumph of love and self-affirmation over cruelty and injustice.

Walker's depiction of evil is first and foremost personal and intimate. Celie's narrative, presented in the form of letters to God and later to her sister Nettie, reveals the depth of her suffering. From the beginning, Celie is a victim of her stepfather, Alphonso, who rapes her and fathers two children by her. This form of evil is not only a violation of her body but also an obliteration of her identity and sense of worth. As Celie recounts her trauma, the reader is introduced to the horror of a world where Black women's bodies are subjected to extreme forms of violence. Scholar Mary Helen Washington highlights this brutal reality in her analysis of the novel, noting that "Walker's portrayal of Celie's abuse is a stark reminder of the compounded oppressions faced by Black women, who suffer under the intersecting forces of racism, sexism, and classism" (Washington 162).

The abuse Celie suffers at the hands of men extends beyond her stepfather. Her husband, Mister, continues the cycle of violence. He marries Celie not out of love but out of convenience, treating her as a workhorse and denying her basic human dignity. Here he says “Let me see her again. Pa callme. Celie, hesays. Like it wasn't nothing Mr. want another look at you .I go stand in the door .The sun shine in my eyes .He is still up on his horse .He look me up and down. ……Turn around, Pa says”(The Color Purple 12).These lines shows how Celie is being treated not as human being but just a body which are to be used for sexual gratification and to do household jobs.(Celie's experiences reflect the entrenched patriarchy that pervades her world. The patriarchal structures in the novel dehumanize women, reducing them to objects of male domination and labor. This dynamic is evident in the way Mister's expectations for Celie revolve around domestic servitude. When Celie's sister Nettie tries to escape Alphonso's abuse and seeks refuge with Celie and Mister, he attempts to abuse her as well, demonstrating the pervasiveness of male violence in their lives.

This personal evil is further reinforced by societal racism, which compounds the suffering of Black women. In the broader societal context of the early 20th-century

American South, African Americans are subjected to systemic violence and disenfranchisement. White supremacy ensures that Black people remain oppressed, with little recourse for justice. Celie's abuse is tolerated because it fits within a larger societal framework that devalues Black lives. Historian Beverly Guy-Sheftall argues that "Walker's novel exposes how Black women experience a unique form of double oppression—as women and as African Americans—that makes their struggle for dignity particularly arduous" (Guy-Sheftall 45). This systemic racism is not incidental but is a core part of the evil that permeates Celie's life.

However, Walker's treatment of evil is not static. Rather than portraying evil as an immutable force, she offers pathways for overcoming it. One of the most significant ways Celie fights back against oppression is through the power of female solidarity. Women in The Color Purple support and uplift each other, creating networks of care that become essential to their survival. Characters like Sofia and Shug Avery play crucial roles in helping Celie recognize her own worth and potential. Sofia, with her defiant spirit, refuses to be subjugated by men or by the racist society around her. She is the one who fights against the male oppression. She presents herself as an example of individual identity. Her resistance inspires Celie to begin questioning her own subservience. Shug Avery, with her confidence and sexuality, introduces Celie to the concept of self-love and independence.

The transformative nature of these relationships is a central theme in the novel. Through Shug's mentorship, Celie discovers her own voice and gains the courage to confront Mister. In a pivotal moment, Celie finally asserts herself, saying, "I'm poor, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (Walker 207). This declaration marks a turning point for Celie, who moves from a state of passive suffering to active self-affirmation. As critic Trudier Harris observes, "Celie's journey from silence to speech symbolizes the broader struggle of Black women to reclaim their identities and assert their humanity in a world that seeks to erase them" (Harris 89).

Spiritual awakening also plays a vital role in overcoming evil. Initially, Celie's relationship with God is one of obedience and fear. Her letters to God reflect a belief that suffering is her lot in life. However, through her relationship with Shug, Celie's understanding of God evolves. Shug introduces Celie to a pantheistic view of God—a divine presence that exists in nature, in people, and in love. This shift allows Celie to break free from the oppressive, patriarchal version of God she once knew. As Celie explains, "God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it" (Walker 195). This reimagining of spirituality empowers Celie to see herself as part of a larger, interconnected universe where she is worthy of love and dignity.

Walker's exploration of evil is also nuanced in that it allows for the possibility of redemption. Mister, who once epitomizes patriarchal cruelty, is not beyond change. By

the end of the novel, Mister develops a sense of humility and remorse. His relationship with Celie shifts from one of domination to one of mutual respect. This transformation underscores Walker's belief that evil is not fixed and that individuals can change. As Celie observes, "He ain't Shug, but he begin to feel like family" (Walker 285). This reconciliation suggests that healing is possible even after profound harm.

The theme of redemption extends beyond personal relationships to the broader social context. The women in The Color Purple achieve a sense of liberation by forging new paths for themselves. Celie becomes an independent businesswoman, finding joy in making and selling pants. Her economic independence is a radical act in a society that seeks to limit Black women's opportunities. Celie's triumph is not just personal but symbolic of the resilience and strength of Black women collectively. Scholar Barbara Christian argues that "Walker's novel is ultimately about the resilience of the human spirit and the power of community to heal the wounds inflicted by systemic evil" (Christian 72).

In conclusion, The Color Purple by Alice Walker offers a multifaceted examination of evil, revealing how personal abuse, patriarchal dominance, and systemic racism intersect to oppress Black women. Walker has been successful in conveying the mental and physical pain of black women in the American society, Through Celie's journey, Walker demonstrates that while evil is deeply embedded in societal structures, it can be overcome through resilience, solidarity, and spiritual transformation. The novel emphasizes that love, self-affirmation, and the possibility of redemption can triumph over cruelty and injustice. By addressing these themes, Walker not only highlights the suffering of Black women but also celebrates their strength, agency, and capacity for healing.

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Deceivers and Believers : Punishment of Trickster Deities As A Form of Intellectual Oppression

Abstract

The presence of a "trickster" deity is seen in most pantheons acros scultures.Their deception or trickery is seen as a trait of evil, and what usually follows their actions is some form of punishment. But is this notion of punishment as straight forward as it seems? Is it truly a product of absolute "good" trying to defeat absolute "evil" or could this be a consequence of power attempting to exercise control over free thought? This paper begins by asking and answering the question of what is considered "evil" and how the primary trait of evil is non-conformity of the trickster to the principles set by the Supreme Divine Authority. The authors analyze various representations of the trickster deity in a few Western and Non-Westernpantheons. Prometheus, Loki, and Satan are analyzed to identify elements of the trickster deity in the Western portrayal, whilst Sun Wukong, Coyote, and Anansi are analyzed to identify elements of Non-Western portrayal. Through this process the authors attempt to identify commonalities and variations between their actions, representations and consequences faced. The symbol of "chains" as a measureofpunishmentisanalysed.UsingFoucauldiantheories,thepaperarguesthat non-conformity to then ormsset by the Supreme Divine Authority serves as the solereason behind punishment, even when the non-conformity is a sign of intellector good-will.Originsof the trickster deity can possibly be understood using Foucault's Episteme theory. The authors ultimately seek to postulate that these acts of punishment are in fact attempts at intellectual oppression by the wider pantheons on their trickster deities, who represent the spirit of human intellect, resistance and free will.

Keywords: Biopower, Evil, Power Dynamics, Authority

Understanding "Evil":

What are our first memories of evil? For those of us who grew up in a Christian household,it would be the "Devil". Our parents would state that some of our actions,the"undesirableones", were"sins" and that the "devil" would come for us. That there was a place called "hell" where the bad children would end up after death. We believed them, naive children that we were. Whereas, those who have a "fear" of God, or who arecalled"God-fearing"areconsideredtobe morerespectableinsociety.The ones who fear God are good. The ones who confess their sins are good. This power dynamic is introduced to childrenatanearlyage,alongsidefairytalesand folktales that also have narrativesof"good"and"evil"inbuiltintothem.Butwhoisthis"Devil" that so many of us have feared growing up? When we say "fear" in this context, we differ in meaning from "God-fearing" in the aspect that one fears becoming like the Devil, whereas one fears

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punishment from God for sins they might commit. To define the Devil, let us look at The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary:

(in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim religions) the most powerful evil being; Satan. (Oxford)

Satan:

If we consider that the Devil, Satan and Lucifer are all the one and the same entity, we see multiple biblical entries providing different description softhesameentity. The Book of Genesis first refers to the "evil" entity as a "serpent", who offers Eve the knowledge of good andevilif she eats theforbiddenfruit.(*ESV*,Gen3.4-7) The Book of Ezekiel describes Satanas being "the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (Ezek. 28.12-17).

There is a common consensus then that Satanwas an entity initially favored by God, but castout for not conforming to God's divine authority. The heroicportrayal of Satan by Miltonaddsa few extra layers to the entity's personality, depicting him as the leader of are bellion against Godand his armies in heaven. He lost the war against God and was "hurld headlong…to bottomless perdition" and "to dwell in Adamantine Chains and penal fire" (Milton, 35-50)

This evolution of the character of Satan/Lucifer/The Devil, or whatever other title one deems appropriate, has seen a shift in interpretation. The "Evil" one hereisseenasan opposer to God's word in Genesis, pride in Ezekiel and as a revolutionary in *ParadiseLost*.Hisroleasatrickster is what our focus will be on. Known as the "father of lies" (John 8.44), Satan'sroleas the "evil one" or "adversary" emanated from his role as a liar or trickster, which trails backin his role of deceiving Eve. When the trickster meets Eve, he challenges the order of God wherein God forbade Eve from eating the fruit because it would lead to her death. The Trickster however, tells Eve that this information is false. (Gen. 3.1-5)

This is the part where our argument builds in. The trickster in this instance is not the deceiver he is made out to be but rather is the truth fulone whotells Eve the truth of what will happen when the fruit is consumed.Thetricksterpromises wisdom and knowledge to humanity and delivers on that promise (Gen 3. 4-7) and thehumans, "god-fearing" at this point, donotdie, as God said they would. From here, we trace the first "lie" or "deception" back to the God of the Judeo-Christian religion, who we will classify as the Supreme Divine Authority (SDA), a term we will use across all pantheons. For opposing the SDA, the serpent was punished for eternity (Gen.3.14-15), the woman was punished with the pain of child birth (Gen.3.16) and the man was punished with mortality and having to work for his food. (Gen. 3.17-19). The theme we undertake to analyse depicts similar patterns wherein opposition or contradiction to the SDA's norms, results in severe and cruel punishments, that seek only to punish the intelligence of the trickster which is used

to bypass oppressive conditions imposed by the SDA.

Our first definition of "Evil" is any moral or intellectual position contrary to the oppressive authority imposed by the SDA that expects and demands conformity to its principles. Conformity to such principles will earn one the moniker of "Good" and deviance will be labelledas "Evil." To escape the oppression induced by such principles, some entities employ the use of their own intelligence, often in the form of deceptive practices and trickery, and are punished cruelly for it.

The Western Trickster Gods

It is our position that many religions have trickster gods or deities. Christianity has Satan, the Deceiver. Greek mythology has Prome the us, the Titanoffire and foresight. Norse mythology has Loki, god of mischief and blood-brother to Odin. Apart from the West, other regions also have their own version of tricksters. In Chinese mythology, the rearemany gods and demons that pull pranks and playtricks, but may be none more so than SunWukong. In West African and Caribbean folklore, Anansi takes the position of the god of trickery and knowledge. And the Native Tribes of the American continent have another popular trickster, Coyote. Solely for the purposeofclassification,wehave included the Judeo-Christian pantheonwhichoriginatedfrom the Middle-East, as part of the "West", based on its multinational spread and global significance within the Western regions today.

Prometheus

There is a difference in approach to how some cultures view trickery as compared to others. Satan's rebellion landed him in hell in Adamantine chains and hellfire. (Milton) While in Hesiod's *Theogony* we see the tragic fate of Prometheus:

> And he bound crafty Prometheus in inescapable fetters, grievous bonds, driving them through the middle of a pillar. And he set agreat winged eagle upon him, and it fed on his immortal liver, which grew the same amount each way at night as the great birdate in the course of the day. (Hesiod)

Prometheus, known as the creator of men, is believed to have deceived Zeus twice to earn this cruel punishment. The first instance of deception occurred while deciding the apportionment of what parts of the animal sacrificed is owed to the gods and what parttoman, and the second time was when he stole fire to give to mankind. One may question why such punishment was doled out to Prometheus, and it would be a good question. What is so dangerous about intelligence, the display of it, or the use of it towards a purpose without the consent of higher authority?

The common theme of bondage and punishment drives us to wonder what constitutes the underlying psyche of the authority doling out such punishment. There are: i) restraints

on the limbs of the condemned, ii) the condemned is restrained in an isolated place, far away from communicating with society or loved ones, iii) there is further torment on the condemned's body apart from the restraints and lastly, iv) the condemned has performed some form of "trickery" or deception against the SDA, or has exercised agency in the form of intelligence against the principles of the SDA.

The "chains" seen in both (Satan and Prometheus) instances act as a symbol of oppression used against the condemned trickster for his deception of the SDA. What we must also ask is "Why were those chains necessary?" Chains symbolize more than simple punishment; chains are an insult for the use of intelligence. An insult which seems to say that while the trickster may befree in mind, his body is trapped. In the case of Satan, notonly was he exiled to Hellforeternity but was also chained to a rock, thereby deprived of free movement. The psychological punishment of restraint wherein the condemned prisoner is restricted from exercising his motor functions, at the same time being assaulted with additional deadly harm is indicative of a mentality of punishment that can only be contrived by acruel, and daresay-"evil"entity.While one may consider this a controversial statement regarding Satan, few will challenge the same notion whenappliedtoZeus'sroleinthepunishmentofPrometheus.Increasinglycurious,isthat both times Prometheus "deceived" Zeus, he did so for the benefit of humanity. Zeus also deceives, mostly for his own benefit, primarily to seduce and rape women. While being seenas immoral and detestable by audiences today, Zeus'cunning intelligence is argued to be the tool necessary for maintaining his sovereignty and dominance, both in the pantheon and among humanity. (Detienne and Vernant 69) Cunning has always play edarole in Greek mythology, and one may say is an intergenerational trait among the gods in its pantheon. Our anos was deceived by his son Kronos, Kronos was deceived by his partner Rhea and son Zeus, and Zeus was deceived by Prometheus. If trickery is performed by the SDA, it is celebrated. If performed by a trickster who is not the SDA, it is punished.

Loki

The most famous of all tricks terstoday would definitely be Loki, the Norse God of mischief. The intelligence and beauty of Loki is mirrored in Ezekiel's description of Satan. His introduction in the *Prose Edda* states that "Loki is beautiful and comely to look upon" and like Satan, Lokitoo has the title of "the first father of falsehoods". (Sturluson)

Beauty is again mentioned here to be a characteristic of "evil", another mirrored trait of Satan. The thought that something beautiful may also be "evil" has been a repeated pattern of description. There is no mention of Prometheus's beauty but all three of the deities have been called "crafty".

This "crafty" Norse trickster had a fate similar to Satan and Prometheus, wherein he too was "chained" to a rock. However, his bindings were made from a material unseen in other pantheons.

> "Then were taken Loki's sons, Váli and Narior Narfi; the Æsirchanged Váli into the form of a wolf, and he tore asunder Narfi his brother. And the Æsir took his entrails and bound Loki with them over the three stones: one stands under his shoulders, the second under his loins, the third under his houghs; and those bonds were turned to iron." (Sturluson)

One can see the repeated theme of "chains" used to restrain the trickster deity. In this case, many argue that like Satan, Loki was also malevolent and "evil" in his dealings with the Norse pantheon. That Loki's punishment was justified (like Satan's) fortwoprobable causes. The first, was Loki's insults as mentioned in the *Lokasenna* in the *Poetic Edda*. The other reason, the one most agree was the cause for Loki's imprisonment, was Loki's role in the death of Baldr. Baldr, being the Norse god of beauty, forgiveness and all things good and noble, was beloved by all the gods. The story goes that once Baldr had a nightmare in which he foresaw his death. He expresses his fear and concern to the rest of the pantheon. Frigg (Baldr's mother and Odin's wife), makes sure all elements on the earth, including grass, animals, rocks, trees, birds, etc. could not kill Baldr. Loki, disguised as a woman, tricks Frigg into revealing to him the only thing on the planet that could kill Baldr: mistletoe. Frigg's reasoning to not secure mistletoe is that the mistletoe plant was too new and young to be able to harm Baldr. Loki then finds the plant, sharpens it into a projectileandasksHodr,theblindbrotherofBaldr,totakeashotathim.Since all the other gods were throwing dangerous items, including weapons, at Baldr, and he was unhurt, Hodr also took a shot with the mistletoe. This shot killed Baldr. Eventually, the gods figured out that Loki was behind the mischief. They tracked him down, Loki tried to escape by turning into a salmon but Thor caught Loki by the tail.

What is most striking about this story is that Loki did what Loki does. While Odinmay represent wisdom, Loki is the epitome of intelligence. Loki did not seek to murder Baldr. He had no personal grievance against the god of goodness. What we may imagine that most intrigued Loki are two possible reasons. The first: the god of mischief may have been angered to see the audacity of the gods in making Baldr invincible, a trait not even possessed by the All-Father, Odin, himself. This audacity may have driven Loki to put the gods in their place. The second reason we may imagine would be Loki's tip-off to Frigg about them istletoe. Her reasoning was not sound to Loki, and at that time, he may have wanted Friggtocorrecther mistake. However, since she did not, Loki was the reckoning Frigg deserved for her negligence. One must remember that as the most intelligent god of the Norse pantheon, it may have been Loki's self-assumed responsibility to test the gods in whatever way he deemed necessary and showthem the consequences of their actions if they faltered due to their lack of intelligence. Therefore, it is submitted that Loki was not punished forbeing "evil"ormischievous,butrather he was punished for his intelligence.

The argument has been made that in most, if not all the religions of the West (Christianity, Ancient Greek religion and Norse mythology), deities with the most

intelligence were punished for their intelligence, in the cruellest manner possible, by the SDA. These deities have also been permanently alienated as "evil" and rejected from holding positions of respect in their respective pantheon.

The Non-Western Trickster Gods:

One may look at the Non-Western Trickster deities and see a different approach towards morality and craftiness than displayed in the West, and the role that trickster deities play in maintaining balance in power and influencing culture.

Coyote:

Firstly, we look at the lesser-known trickster god that is native to America. Or one may say, native to the original residents of the American continent. The character being referred to is the Coyote. The Coyote is one of the main characters in the Native American mythos. While the Coyote is depicted differently in different regions in the Americas, there are some common elements we can see among the mall. The Coyoteatworst, is malevolent and violent and, at best, is intelligent, cunning, humorous and heroic. The Coyote is as powerful as the creator or Earth Maker in *Coyote and The Earth Maker* story (Kerven). His intelligence helps him survive all attempts on his life that the Earth Maker undertakes along with the people of the world. There is also an instance of "chaining" similar to that of the Western pantheons:

> "They snared Coyote in a rope and led him along to the edge of the great water. They waded through it, dragging Coyote shamefully behind them, out to a tiny, barren island far, far from the shore. There they bound him tightly on top of a rock." (Kerven pt. IV ch. 2)

The Coyote in this instance takes the help of his friends, Gopher and The Grass, toturnintomist and escape the bonds. The Coyote being an intelligent being with friends who help him get out of oppressive restraints imposed by the SDA, is an element not seen in Westernlore. The only other instance that comes close is when Prometheus is rescued by Hercules in some versions of the myth.

Itis also quite interesting to note that the primary reason for Coyote's imprisonment was because, like Loki with Baldr, he was against actions that over threw the natural order of life and death. The reason to catch, punish and kill Coyote as given by the respective SDA is that the SDA wished to create a world without death, which Coyoteopposed, for which he wastermedas "evil." (Kerven)

While the common theme of opposition to the norms laid out by the SDA being labelled as"evil" repeats here, we see a deviation in the narrative wherein the SDA and his followers are outsmarted by the trickster deity who ends up becoming the hero of the tale. Even more surprising in this tale, is that after an apocalyptic flood is inflicted upon the Earth in an attempt to kill the Coyote, he outsmarts the SDA by disguising himself as a

man and helps build the boat. Further, completely alien to us is the notion of something like an apology being issued from the SDA, or an acknowledgment of the trickster deity's power, a concept completely absent from Western lore, when Coyote is still alive at the end of the story. (Kerven)

Anansi

Anansi (Or Anancy), is a West-African and Caribbean trickster god that is a central figure in African lore. Similar to Coyote, he uses trickery and deception to reach his goals. In some tales, he is a spider, in others man. While primarily working for his own interest, he is not much of aleader like Coyote. However, the use of intelligence to overthrow the oppressive narrative imposed by the SDA is apparent.

In the most popular tale of Anansi, he is a Spider who is envious of the SDA (Nyankupon)and seeks to be as famous as him through the telling of stories. In this pantheon, the SDA is not authoritative or quick to punish the trickster for insolence but rather chooses to provide a fair chance for the Spider to prove himself. A three-step task is assigned to the spider, which if completed, will result in the world listening to only Anansi's stories. The first task was to collect a jar of bees. The trickster spider tricked the bees into the jar and sent it back to the SDA. The next task was to catch a boa constrictor. This too he completed successfully by taking advantage of the snake's naivete. The last task was to catch a tiger, which he completed by sewing up the tiger's eyes and leading it straight to the SDA. The SDA was so impressed with Anansi's intelligence that he allowed all stories thenceforth to be classified as Anansi Stories. (Barker and Sinclair pt. I ch. I)

There is a shift in the approach towards the trickster deity in the West-African and Caribbean folk-lore as being a wise, lovable troublemaker whose stories fill children with glee. Although not all Anansi tales go in the deity's favour, it is noted that every story has some moral teaching that is used in the tribe's pedagogy to educate the children. Mostly seen, is that if there is intelligence, there is usually a reward for it, not punishment.

Sun Wukong:

The final trickster for our analysis will focus on the Chinese god, Sun Wukong. The character was first featured in the ancient text titled *Journey To The West,* a popular Buddh istnarrative. In the tale, Sun Wukong is naughty, plays pranks on the gods of Chinese pantheon and generally wreaks havoc. Wukong seeks immortality and finds every way to attain it. After being appointed guardian of the divine peach orchard, he eats all the ripe fruit which gives him immortality. He steals certain pills of immortality and even travels to the underworld to erase his name from the list of mortals who are nearing death. The character of Wukong is a classic trickster-god-hero who uses his intelligence to attain godhood and immortality and posesasa foil to the SDA in his pantheon, the SDA being attributable to different deities, including the Buddha.

The tale details how the Buddha issues Wukong a challenge to somersault out from his right palm, and the completion of which will lead to Wukong achieving the status of the Jade Emperor and his palace. Wukong accepts and tries to somersault out of the Buddha's palm, but reaches a portion of the world with five gargantuan pillars. Thinking this to be the end of the world, he assumes victory and even leaves a message and a puddle of his own urine at the first pillarasa sign of his conquest. When returning to the Budhha, he learns something interesting:

> "You pisshead ape!" scolded Tathāgata. "Since when did you ever leave the palm of my hand?" (Cheng-EnWuch.7)

The trickster had never left the right hand of the Buddha, which meant that the right hand of the Buddha could cover the whole world. On attempting to try again, the trickster was punished forhis arrogance by the Buddha himself, whose fingers transform into five connected mountains made of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth, and appropriately named"Five-PhasesMountain", where Wukong is imprisoned for five hundred years. (Cheng-En Wu)

It is not lost on the authors that this punishment was inflicted upon the trickster by the religious authority, the Buddha, aiding the political authority, the Jade Emperor. Together, we may refer to them as the SDA, as in doling out this punishment, they were hand in glove. Further, this punishment is the only one among the other tricksters that deviates from the concept of "chaining", albeit in form alone. The element of bondage of the body but free domto the mindis still applicable. Therefore, "chaining" is primarily justifiable only when linked with both religious and political authority.

While the trickster in this instance is punished for his opposition to the SDA and his chaotic nature, we may see that there is a comparatively (albeit marginal) bonafide purpose of reformation. The purpose of reforming the prisoner is first seen in the case of Wukong as compared to the rest of the deities we have analysed. Wukong is fed and taken care of and his punishment exists for a period of five hundred years, after which the main plot of the story begins, and the Trickster deity takes on the role as one of the protagonists of the story.

The Trickster undertakes a "hero's journey", where his characteristics are "reformed", his promises kept and his personality grown. Finally, for his efforts Wukong is given Buddha hood and falls within our definition of the SDA. The only one among our deities who has done this task.

Contextualising Power:

The Foucauldian notion of Biopower extends to exercising control over the body "as an object to be manipulated" (Foucault and Rabinow 17). This is seen in both types of panthe ons, atvarying degrees. In the case of the Western trickster deities, control over their bodies in all three presented cases is carried out through chains and physical harm

inflicted. For Satan, chains of adamantine and penal fire serve as the sources. Prometheus is bound to a rock and an eagle causes him physical harm by eating at his liver daily. In the case of Loki, the entrails of their child bind them while dripping venomserves as the primary source of bodily harm. In the non-Western pantheons presented, we see that binding, if present, is either a situation that the trickster recovers from – Coyote with help of his friends, or one that does not happen as is the case with Anansi. In the Non-Western pantheons presented, control over the body is not usedasa method of ultimate punishment but as a step in the trials of the trickster, as isalso thecase with Sun Wukong

The "chaining" acts as an indicator of power the pantheon sand the SDA possess. In the non-Western pantheons, we see that rather than overt showings of power or dominance, thereis space for conversation and the trickster to gain their freedom. In the Western pantheons, perceived deviance includes denial of the will of the SDA, or displays of intellect, even for the good of others, in the case of Prometheus; ortocarry out their role in the panthe on, in the case of Loki. Normalisation seen in the examples of the Western pantheons therefore leads to intellect being treated as an anomaly, which draws punishment through the binding and torture of the body.

The Episteme of the Trickster

The Episteme by Foucault serves as an explanation for paradigm shifts that occur in history that provide a pathway for scientific discourse and development. The same concept may also be utilized to analyse historical aspects of the development of myth, literature and religion, and how these interact with each other. Patterns and coincidences can always be put to this test. If the growth of Science-Fiction can be studied using the method of epistemes (Boon), so too can the origin of the Trickster-God, and consequently, Evil.

If we can extract common traits from the Western tricksters, we can agree that these tricksters were generally: i) Intelligent, ii) Wise, iii) Crafty - we must also look at their lesser known attributes, that they were: iv) Leaders, v) Politically-motivated and lastly vi) shared a close personal relationship with the SDA. Using these common traits, we can trace these religions to their inception and propose that these Western Tricksters may have originated from what we may call the "Progenitor Myth" involving the first trickster, now longlost in time. Tospeculate, there may have existed a powerful ruler at some point, who placed trust in a close friend or relative, who possessed great intelligence. A narrative of opposition to the ruler may be imaginatively constructed whereupon some form of betrayal must have occurred leading to negative consequences for the people of that kingdom. Myths are constructed narratives, spread through oral tradition by the ancients. It is not wholly out of the realm of possibility that these mythshave travelled and transformed individually in their own manner. If this is agreed upon, then there would have been a shared narrative wherein such opposition caused chaos and was then summarilytermedas"evil." The practice of using absolute force and power over the

trickster's body to imprison and chain him may have originated from this episte me that came about from the West. This may have occurred long before the concepts of organised religion may have existed and such paradigms have found their place among various religions that emanated and grew in the West.

The Non-Western trickster deities pose a different theory of the Episteme. While trickery is present, these deities are not portrayed as the symbol of malice and depravity we tend toassociate with the Western Tricksters. Non-Western deities are common in that they all are: i) represented as animals, ii) are leaders of their people, iii) compassionate, and most importantly

iv) are not known to share a close personal relationship with the SDA. Apart from Sun Wukong, Anansi and Coyote existin tales that span their origin continent in different narratives and forms, allowing us to construct a completely different theory of origin. The Non-Western Trickstersare moral lessons, often depicted as animals, used in pedagogy to show us when and when not to use cunning. While the Western pantheons used discipline and punishment to invoke fear and obedience and discourage the use of intelligence against authority, the Non-Western tricksters encourage us to express intelligence to creatively solve problems, regardless of oppression from authoritative structures and systems.

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Encountering the Evil : A Study Depicting the Visceral Fear and the Thrive for Survival in the Movie *The Deliverance*

Abstract

The ontology of demonic forces portrayed in the American movie The Deliverance (2024) is explored by examining its terrible impact on black subjects individual and collective and how theystrive for survival. The plot revolves around the protagonist Ebony Jackson and the occurrence of strange happenings in her family when Ebony's children are affected by an evil entity. They began to display serious psychiatric issues inside the house and also in public spaces. The paper analyses the vulnerability of the black-gendered subject exploited by the evil forces unleashed by several incidents happening in the movie. It peruses the blackness in terms of its gender aspects as well. It also ponders on how the women belonging to Ebony's community come together to offer her guidance in dealing with and exorcising the evil. Bell Hook's perceptive lens of black feminism is the methodology employed here to understand the functioning of the grand structure of patriarchy and also the conditioning bestowed upon its subjects. This discursive structure fails to consider the perturbation of its subjects under the evil power.

Keywords: Demonic, black subjects, psychiatric, patriarchy, vulnerability, perturbation,

The structuralist perception of binary opposition regarding good and evil dates back to time immemorial. The idea of evil and any kind of association with evil entities was destined to be doomed and so was always viewed with fear and suspicion. The medium of cinema effectively depicts the battle between the entities of good and evil leaving behind imprints in the minds of its audiences forever. The genre of horror movies also depicts this power struggle epitomizing the aspect of fear leading to a purgation of emotions in the viewers of such movies.

The ontology of demonic forces portrayed in the American movie *The Deliverance* (2024) is explored by examining its terrible impact on black subjects individual and collective and how they strive for survival. The supernatural American horror movie *The Deliverance* was directed by the Oscar nominee Lee Daniels. The plot of the movie was loosely based on true events that happened in the life of Latoya Ammons and her family who lived in a haunted house in Indiana, United States. The movie depicts a black family of a single mother Ebony Jackson (Andra Day) and three children moving into a house that is haunted. Ebony worked hard to meet the needs of her teen son Nate (Caleb McLaughlin) daughter Shante (Demi Singleton) and the youngest son Andre(Anthony B.

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Jenkins). Ebony's white mother Alberta(Glenn Close) who is a cancer patient lives with them.

The plot revolves around the protagonist Ebony and the occurrence of strange happenings in her family when Ebony's children are affected by an evil entity. They began to display serious psychiatric issues. In one of the opening scenes of the movie, the tension between Ebony and her children is visible while they are having their dinner together. Although she loves her children she also punishes them harshly. The negativity lingering around the house could be a reason for the conflicts happening between them. Ebonyrealisessome kind of evil power belonging to the place as she notices putrid odour coming out of the basement in the house and finds a dead cat in the basement.Thereis also a scene whereyoung Andre acts weird as he sleepwalks and goes to the basement and is seen talking to someone and taking orders but Ebony's eyes can see nobody there.Thus it can be inferred that the devil lives in the basement of their house.

The study focuses on the foregrounding of this evil element in the movie through the lens of a black feminist perspective. The methodology mainly employed here isBell Hooks's tenets of feminist perception. Bell Hooks was an iconic feminist involved in second-wave feminism. Her work *Feminist Theory*: *From Margin to Center*highlighted the issues of the poor black women whose stories are pushed to the margins by the mainstream white feminists whose dominant discourse of feminism discussed only the issues of a category of women belonging to an elite class. Hooks advocates in her book that "Black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women.White women may be victimized by sexism,but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people" (15).

In her essay *Understanding Patriarchy*Hooks critically analyzes the institution of patriarchy which objectifies males as superior and considers females as of an inferior stature. She identifies that " Patriarchy is a political – social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females…"(1). The functioning of the grand narrative structure of patriarchy is visible in the society where Ebony lives. It blames her for separating from her husband and believes that she alone cannot look after her three kids. Her frequent consumption of alcohol worsens the situation. Initially, Ebony's mother is doubtful about her daughter. Her daughter asks her "Why would you sniff my breath like that infront of my kids, Ma?"(Daniels01:39:02). Alberta being a white mother was curious about her black daughter's behaviour always. She replies to Ebony "Girl, I'm trying to see that you live a clean life"(01:38:45). At a later point in time when Alberta witnesses several incidents of demonic possessions happening to her daughter and grandchildren decides to keep her side.Cynthia (Mo'Nique) who is a caseworker is another black woman appointed by Child Protective Services to keep checking on Ebony and her kids. Cynthia after knowing about the strange behaviour of the kids tells"Their father came into court and made

allegations that there was drugging, drinking, and neglect in this house"(01:19:33). She also reminds Ebony about the seriousness of the situation"You got a baby that thinks he got whooped by the whole playground you got two big kids that don't have no idea where these bruises came from"(01:18:33). The patriarchy is assigning the absence of a father figure in the house to be the reason for the chain of drastic incidents happening in the house. Instead of delving into the real problem, it tries to threaten Ebony by reminding her of the chances of losing custody of her children. Ebony falls prey to the complex structure of patriarchy which sets out rules for a woman to be modest and obedient to the dictums of men.

Being a black single mother Ebony finds it hard to convince the patriarchal society about the demonic possessions happening to her children. When she seeks help from the authorities they initially associate the issues happening to the children with Ebony's hallucinations due to alcohol consumption. Later they related it to some kind of mental illness caused by inappropriate ways of managing children.The evil living in the basement tortures the family further day by day.Thenegativity caused by the demonic presence started to reflect on the behaviour of the kidsseriously as they started to act weird in school. The family could not reveal the real cause of such acts infront of the public initially as nobody was going to believe their story.Even Ebony's friends started asking her "Ebony, What's wrong with your kids? All of them?"(01:14:27). At times the evil took possession of Ebony and tried to harm her kids.The influence of the demonic powers on the children is clear when Alberta confesses to the doctor "They don't remember anything when they come out of these trances they have been having" (00:54:26). Alberta recently joined the church and is now a true believer could sense the negativity in the house. She says, "There's something evil in our home, and it is feeding on my family" (00:54:10).Initially it takes control of Andre and makes him sleepwalk to the basement from where Ebony brings him back. The demon through Andre's body possesses his brother Nate. The situation gets much worse when Nate tries to strangle his brother Andre inside the bathtub. The demonic presence inside the house seems to take possession of one body and tries to harm the other. Sometimes it triggers the subject under possession for self harm. Even Alberta got killed by Andre when he was inpossession of evil power.

When the situation worsenedthe family rushed to get medical assistance. The doctors after a checkup declared that the children's test results of the ultrasound,blood tests,MRI, and Chest X-ray all looked normal and even the doctor was satisfied with their psychological evaluation. Ebony gets irritated with their way of handling the matter."They were rushed here today having some sort of … breakdown"(01:05:15). Later the authorities establish a psychiatric issue for Ebony and the children are sent to a church foster care.When these black subjects individual and collective especially the protagonist complain about the presence of a demon in their house they are unheard most of the time. Society often fails to understand their dilemma and evade the issue relating it to some psychological problem and providing some sort of medical assistance. They fail

to help them to be relieved from its clutches. They consider it as some kind of illusion of the blacks and take the subject lightly.

Hooks foregrounds the importance of "Sisterhood" and the necessity to connect with each other in their communitywhich paves the way for fighting the oppressive forces working against them. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the bonding between women based on shared victimization propounded by the women involved in the white feminist liberation movement. Hooks asserts that this bonding should develop based on a different idea."They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources. This is the woman bonding feminist movement should encourage" (45). The evidence of this sisterhood is visiblein the movie. At one point when everyone turns away their head from Ebony's issue, we see how the other black women come for her help. Cynthia relates to Ebony the story of the death of her 7-year-old son Julian and not to take her children for granted. Eventually, Cynthia also realizes Ebony's helplessness and she decides to be on her side. We often hear a phrase in the conversation between Ebony and Cynthia that points towards a kind of understanding of sisterhood. The phrase goes like this " Black woman to Black woman"(00:56:10). Here the two black women find the solution to their problem themselves by their companionship in fighting the evil power. Another woman in their community Bernice James(Aunjanue Ellis Taylor) agrees to help her family. She is an apostle who is working with Cynthia. She met Ebony and discussed the demonic presence in their house. It was Bernice who answered many of Ebony's questions. She tells her that she was acquainted with the family of Janelle and Ahman with their two kids who earlier lived in the same house twenty years back which they are inhabiting now. When they moved into the house they were happy and their boy named Trey started behaving strangely. Bernice attempted a religious ritual called "deliverance" where the demonic powers are waved off through the intervening power of God. She also informs that it is different from exorcism as one who performs the deliverance which she claims does not need an intercessor as Jesus Christ himself becomes the intercessor here. But she failed in doing deliverance to that boy and they lost him.Ebony confesses that Andre is talking to a make-believe friend in the house named Trey. Andre is claiming that he lives in the hole in the basement and sometimes in his closet. The apostle confirms that it is the demon whom he is talking to. She also says that the demon has found a way to get inside Andre and through him it is trying to possess the other two. They decide to perform the ritual of Deliverance by taking Andre out of the hospital where he was undertreatment. This act of taking Andre from the hospital was done by Ebony without the knowledge of the hospital authorities. Bernice warned her that when they are doing the act they should never feel weak and doubtful about the power of God but she herself feels doubtful and has to lose her life in the process. In the climax, Ebony tries hard and strugglesto complete the procedure of deliverance to God after the death of Bernice. Ebony utters the prayer "I rebuke you satan in the name of God.I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me "(00:15:19). Even after facinghavoc, Ebony manages to complete the process

successfully. The movie ends with an optimistic note prophesying peace and happiness to Ebony. It was only with the help of these other back women she could accomplish and win over the demonic forces. Bernice even gave her life to save Ebony. Cynthia helps Ebony to get back her children. Six months later Juvenile court granted a petition from the children's services department and permitted Ebony to have custody of her children. She reveals to Cynthia about her plans to go back to Philadelphia.She hopes to lead a peaceful life with her children.

Thus these subjects through their sharedmental strength try to find a way to overcome their issue and destroy evil. The movie orchestrates the power of the sisterhood which enables them to fight against the oppressive forces around them. Thus the black women characters in the movie reflect the progressive feminist perception of Hooks which transforms their lives and empowers them confidently to move forward in life.

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Navigating Darkness : A Study of Identity and Evilin Nathan's Journey in *The Orphanage: Millwood*

Abstract

This paper titled "Navigating Darkness: A Study of Identity and Evil in Nathan's JourneyinTheOrphanage:Millwood"exploresthethemesofevilandidentitythroughthe storyofNathanPerry,who,afteratragicaccident,issenttotheMillwoodfacilityforyoung adults. There, he encounters unforeseen terror and unsettling behavior from both staff and residents, leading him to question his own identity and the nature of humanity within the institution.

The film delves into darker aspects of human nature as Nathan navigates a world filled withpsychologicalmanipulationandmoralambiguity,ultimatelyconfrontingtheevilthatlur ks within the facility itself. Nathan Perry, the central character, experiences profound trauma following the death of his parents in a car accident. He is sent to the oppressive Millwood orphanage, where he faces bullying and abuse, particularly from the authoritarian figure Mr. Clemens.

The conceptual framework is largely based on the theory of trauma, where Nathan's experiencesstemmedfromthelossofhisparentsandsubsequentmistreatmentatMillwood Orphanage. The oppressive environment of the orphanage, especially the feared Ward B,symbolizestheculminationofhistrauma.Thisportrayalhighlightshowtraumacanshape identity and behavior.

Nathan, the protagonist, losing his parents, faces abuse and neglect, which shapes his identityamidstabackdropofhorror.Thecharacter'sjourneyreflectspsychologicaltheorieso f trauma, illustrating how his environment fosters feelings of helplessness and fear, leading to a fractured sense of self. Nathan's interactions with other characters highlight the dichotomy of innocence versus corruption, ultimately questioning the nature of evil as a product of circumstances rather than an inherited trait.

Keywords: Abuse, helplessness, dichotomy, fear, identity

Introduction

The paper explores the themes of identity, evil, and the theory of trauma as depicted in Nathan's experiences at the Millwood orphanage. Nathan, who loses his parents, grapples with his identity a midsta backdrop of abuse and neglect, reflecting how trauma shapes one's sense of self. The oppressive environment of Millwood serves as a manifestation of

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evil, highlighting systemic cruelty and its psychological effects on children. By examining Nathan's journey, the project underscores the profound impact of traumaon identity formation and the struggle against dehumanizing forces.

Orphanage Millwood" employs non-linear storytelling to effectively depict trauma by mirroringthedisorderednatureoftraumaticmemories.Thefilmshiftsbetweenpastandpresent, allowing viewers to experience the protagonist's fragmented psyche. This structure emphasizes emotional dislocation, as scenes from different time periods reveal how past events haunt the character's present life. By presenting trauma in a non-linear fashion, the film captures the chaotic and often unpredictable nature of memory, compelling audiences to engage deeply with the protagonist's emotional journey and the lasting impact of her experiences

Theory of Trauma

Trauma is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been studied and theorized by psychologists, sociologists, and cultural critics. At its core, trauma refers to the emotional, psychological, and physiological responses to a distressing or disturbing event. However, the theory of trauma extends far beyond this basic definition, encompassing arange of ideas about the nature of traumatic experience, its effects on individuals and communities, and the ways in which it can be healed and overcome.

One of the key concepts in trauma theory is the idea of the "traumatic event." This refers to a specific incident or experience that is perceived as threatening, harmful, or disturbing. Traumatic events can take many forms, including physical or emotional abuse, natural disasters, accidents, or combat. However, not all traumatice vents are dramatic or catastrophic. Trauma can also result from more subtle or insidious experiences, such as neglect, bullying, or systemic oppression.

The effects of trauma can be profound and long-lasting.Traumatic experiences can alter an individual's perception of themselves and the world around them, leading to feelings offear, anxiety, and hypervigilance. Trauma can also disrupt an individual's sense of safety and trust, making it difficult for them to form and maintain healthy relationships.In the movie *The Orphanage: Millwood***,** Nathan Perry can be analyzed through the lens of trauma theory, which explores how past traumatic events shape a person's behavior, emotions, and interactions with others. Nathan, the protagonist, experiences profound trauma after losing hisparents, leading him to an oppressive orphanage. At Millwood, he faces bullying from peers and harsh treatment from staff, particularly Dean Clemens, who embodies the institution's cruelty. Nathan's psychological struggles manifest through haunting dreams of his parents and fearsofbeingsenttotheominousWardB,highlightingtheimpactofhistraumaticpastonhis mental state. His character's depth contrasts sharply with the one-dimensional figures around him, emphasizing his isolation and vulnerability in a hostile environment.

Nathan's trauma manifests in his dreams through vivid nightmares and distressing scenarios that reflect his unresolved emotional conflicts. These dreams often recreate feelings of panic, helplessness, and fear, mirroring his experiences in the orphanage where he faces bullying and isolation. The content of his dreams serves as a mechanism for processing his trauma, frequentlydepictinglife-threatening situations or loss, symbolizing his deep-seatedanxietiesand longing for safety and connection.

In analyzing Nathan Perry, it can be assumed that his character experiences significant psychologicaldistressstemmingfrompasttrauma.Inhiscase,thiscouldinvolvepersonallos, abuse, or a history of traumatic events that have not been processed or addressed.

1. **Emotional Dysregulation**: Nathan may struggle to manage his emotions, showing signs of anger, frustration, or sudden mood swings. This can be a symptom of unresolved trauma.

2. **Dissociation:** Acoping mechanism of trauma is dissociation, where the individual disconnects from the present moment. Nathan might display detachment or emotional numbness as a way to protect himself from overwhelming memories or feelings.

3. **Difficulty with Relationships**: Trauma often impact show individuals relate toothers. Nathan might have difficulty trusting people or show signs of hypervigilance. He may struggle with intimacy or experience tension in his relationships with other characters in the movie.

4. **Repetition of Trauma**: Nathan may repeat harmful patterns of behavior as a way of reenacting and resolving pasttrauma. This is sometimes seen in individuals who unconsciously recreate situations that mirror their earlier trauma in an attempt to gain control or healing.

Ward B plays a critical role in Nathan's psychological state, representing his deepest fears and anxieties. It is often depicted as a place of punishment and isolation, amplifying his feelings ofabandonment and dread. The mere mention of Ward B triggers traumatic memories and nightmares, symbolizing the potential for further emotional and physical harm. This fear of being sent to Ward B contributes to Nathan's ongoing anxiety and sense of helplessness, reflecting the oppressive environment of Millwood that exacerbates his psychological trauma.

Nathan's trauma in Milwood significantly impacts his relationships with others:

TrustIssues: His experiences of betrayal and abuse lead to difficulty trusting peer sand authority figures, making it hard for him to form close bonds.

Defensive Behavior: Nathan often reacts defensively, pushing people away to avoid vulnerability, which alienates potential friends and allies.

Fearof Intimacy: His past trauma creates a fear of emotional closeness, causing him to struggle in forming meaningful connections with others.

Aggression:Nathan'sunresolvedangermanifestsasaggressiontowardsothers,further complicating his relationships and leading to conflict.

Theme of Evil and Identity: The theme of evil and identity is acomplex and thought-provoking one, inviting ustoponder the darker aspects of human nature and the fragility of our own moral selves. This theme is deeply intertwined, as our understanding of evil is inextricably linked to our conception of identity. Aswegrapple with the nature of evil, we are forced to confront the contradictions and paradoxes that shape our own identities.

One of the primary ways in which the theme of evil and identity is explored is through the concept of the "shadow self." This idea, developed by Carl Jung, suggests that each individual has a repressed or hidden aspect of their personality, which contains the qualities they have rejected or hidden from the world. The shadow self is often associated with evil, asitrepresents the darker, more primal aspects of human nature.

In literature, the theme of evil and identity is often explored through the figure of the villain or anti-hero. Characters like Shakespeare's Iago, Milton's Satan, or Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov embody the complexities of evil, revealing the ways in which it can be both fascinating and terrifying. These characters also challenge our assumptions about identity, inviting us to consider the ways in which our own selves are composed of contradictory desires, impulses, and values.

The theme of evil and identity is also closely tied to the concept of morality. Aswenavigatethe complexities of evil, weare forced to confront the ambiguity of moral categories. Isevila fixed and essential quality, or is it a relative and context-dependent concept? How do we distinguish between good and evil, and what are the implications of our moral judgments for our understanding of identity?

Furthermore, the the me of evil and identity raises important questions about the nature of human agency. To what extent are we responsible for our own actions, and how do we account for the evil that we do? Are we driven by factors beyond our control, or do we possess a degree of freedom that enables us to choose between good and evil?

In addition, the theme of evil and identity has significant implications for our understanding of personal growth and transformation. As we confront the evil within ourselves, we are invited to engage in a process of self-reflection and self-transformation. This process enables us to develop a greater awareness of our own strengths and weaknesses, and to cultivate amore compassionate and empathetic relationship with ourselves and others.

Finally, the theme of evil and identity highlights the importance of empathy and understanding in breaking down the barriers between self and other. As we seek to comprehend the complexities of evil, we are invited to engage in a process of imaginative identification, putting ourselves in the shoes of others and seeking to understand their perspectives and experiences.

In conclusion, the theme of evil and identity is a rich and complex one, inviting us to explore the darker aspects of human nature and the fragility of our own moralselves. Through its exploration of the shadow self, morality, human agency, personal growth, and empathy, this the me challenges us to develop a deeper under standing of ourselves and others, and to cultivate a more compassionate and nuanced approach to the complexities of human experience.

The intertwined themes of evil and identity probe the darker aspects of human nature, revealing the complexities of morality and selfhood. As individuals grapple with their own capacity for evil, they must confront the fragments of their identity, acknowledging the contradictions and paradoxes that shape their being. Through this confrontation, the boundaries between good and evil, self and other begin to blur, exposing the inherent instability of human identity.

Nathan, the protagonist in the orphanage narrative, embodies the struggle of identity amidst evil. After losing his parents, he faces neglect and abuse from the institution's staff, particularly Dean Clemens, who represents corruptauthority. Nathan's haunting dreams of his parents turn sinister, reflecting his internal turmoil and the evil surrounding him. The oppressive environment of Millwood catalyzes a transformation within Nathan, unleashing a darker aspect of his identity that he cannot control. This interplay highlights how trauma can distort personal identity and evoke latent malevolence.

Nathan's relationship with Judy significantly influences his identity by providing asource of emotional support and validation. In the oppressive environment of Mill wood orphanage, Judy acts as a compassionate figure who encourages Nathan to express his feelings and confront his trauma. Her kindness contrasts sharply with the harshness of the orphanage, helping Nathandevelop a sense of self-worth and resilience. This bond fosters his ability to navigate his struggles,ultimatelyshapinghimintoamoreempatheticandself-awareindividual,ashelearns to value connection and trust amidst adversity.

Mr. Clemens serves as a powerful embodiment of evil in the film, illustrating the darker aspects of human nature. His character is marked by cruelty and a complete lack of empathy, using his authority to instill fear and exert control over the children at the orphanage. This manipulation highlights how evil can manifest in everyday settings, often through those in power. Clemens' actions reveal a deliberate choice to inflict suffering, showcasing a chilling portrait of how authority can corrupt and dehumanize, ultimately reinforcing the film's themes of oppression and moral decay.

Conclusion

Nathan'sstoryisapoignantreminderofthecomplexitiessurroundingidentityandtrauma within oppressive systems. It illustrates how experiences of evil can distort personal identity and perpetuate cycles of suffering. Ultimately, this analysis calls for a deeper understanding of the psychological scars left by such experiences and advocates for

empathy and reform in systems that fail to protect vulnerable individual.

The human experience is marked by a profound and often paradoxical relationship between identity and evil. On one hand, our sense of self is shaped by our experiences, relationships, and cultural contexts. On the other hand, the presence of evil in our lives can disrupt, distort, and even destroy our sense of identity. This project explores the complex and often fraught relationship between identity and evil, with a particular focus on the role of trauma in shaping our understanding of self and other.

Throughacriticalanalysisofliteraryandcinematictexts,thispaperwillexaminethe ways in which trauma can both reveal and conceal the nature of evil, and how this, in turn, affectsourunderstandingofidentity.Bydrawingontraumatheory,psychoanalyticcriticism, and philosophical theories of evil, this project aims to provide a nuanced and multifaceted exploration of the interplay between identity, evil, and trauma.

This paper has demonstrated that the relationship between identity and evil is complex, multifaceted, and deeply influenced by the experience of trauma. Through a critical analysis of literary and cinema tictexts, we have seen how trauma can both reveal and conceal the nature of evil, and how this, in turn, affects our understanding of identity. Ultimately, this paper suggests that our understanding of identity and evil must be grounded in a nuanced and empathetic understanding of the traumatic experience. By acknowledging the ways in which trauma can shape and distort our sense of self and other, we can begin to develop a more compassionate and inclusive understanding of human identity. As we move forward, it is essential that we continue to explore the complex interplay between identity, evil, and trauma, and that we do so with a commitment to empathy, understanding, and social justice.

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When Evil Comes from Pain : How Tragic Villians Challenge Our Sense of Right and Wrong.

Abstract

Villains with tragicpasts often blur the lines betweengoodand evil,compelling audiences to reconsider conventional moral boundaries. In contemporary cinema, these characters are not mere embodiments of evil but complex individuals shaped by pain, trauma, and societal injustices.Bydelvingintotheirpersonalhistories,filmmakers createmultifacetedantagonists whose actions, while destructive, are deeply rooted in their emotional suffering. This paper critically explores how such tragic villains from selected movies challenge the audience's understanding of right and wrong, urging a re-examination of justice, empathy, and moral judgment. The portrayal of these characters forces viewers to confront the uncomfortable truth that evil is not always an inherent trait, but rather the product of external pressures and unresolved grief. Ultimately, these villains invite audiences to reflect on how they might act under similar circumstances, highlighting the vulnerability inherent in all human beings.

Keywords: tragic villains, moral ambiguity, empathy, justice and morality, trauma and grief, psychological complexity.

Introduction

Sometimes the world doesn't give you any choice but to become the villain it fears. The arche type of the villain has long been a fixture in storytelling, often embodying pure evil as a foil to the hero. However, contemporary cinema has increasingly blurred the binary between good and evil, introducing antagonists whose “villainy” is shaped by pain, loss, and societal neglect. Such tragic villains challenge our moral compass, forcing us to reconsider the nature of evil itself.

In Malayalam cinema—renowned for its rooted narratives and complex characters—villains are not merecaricatures but often products of personal trauma and systemic failure. This paper examines two poignant examples of tragic villains from Malayalam cinema: Shibu from Minnal Murali (2021) and Dr Benjamin Louis from Anjaampathira (2020). By analyzing their narratives, motivations, and societal contexts, this study explores how these characzters complicate traditional notions of morality and invite empathy, raising the question: Is evil inherent, or does it arise from suffering and injustice?

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The concept of the tragic villain can be traced to Aristotle's theory of tragedy in Poetics. Tragic figures evoke both pity and fear, as their downfall stems not from inherent evil but from personal flaws or external circumstances. Unlike traditional villains, tragic antagonists possess a depth that elicits empathy, making their actions morally ambiguous.

N. Katherine Hayles' concept of 'embodied suffering' and the idea that societal systems often contribute to villainy align with the portrayals of Shibu and Dr Benjamin Louis. Similarly, moral relativism suggests that "evil" is subjective, shaped by the observer's perspective andcontextual circumstances. By humanizing villains, cinema challenges audiences to question their moral certainties.

Malayalam cinema has a legacy of portraying stories that reflect societal realities. Directors like Midhun Manuel Thomas and Basil Josephuse villains not just as an tagonists but as mirrors to systemic issues—social rejection, displacement, and inequality. Through the lens of these tragic villains, Malayalam films critique society and emphasize that villainy often emerges from human suffering.

"Anjaam Pathiraa and Minnal Murali: The Birth of Evil from Pain and Trauma"

InBasilJoseph's Minnal Murali, Shibu (brilliantly portrayed by Guru Somasundaram) serves as the film's tragic antagonist. Setina small Kerala village, then arrative juxtaposes the rise of a super hero, Jaison, with Shibu's descent into villainy. Unlike conventional villains, Shibu's "evil" is rooted in years of rejection and loneliness.

Shibu, a socially awkward loner, lives on the margins of society. He longs for connection, particularly with Usha, a woman he has silently loved for years. However, his attempts at forging relationships are repeatedly thwarted. Shibu's rejection is not just personal but societal—his identity as an outsider renders him invisible and unloved.

One pivotal scene portrays Shibu's despair when Usha's family rejects him, despite his sincere intentions. This rejection becomes a catalyst for his transformation. Here, his loneliness and pain manifest as rage.

Shibu's eventual embrace of powerstems not from an inherent desire to harm but as a response to years of isolation and humiliation. The very powers that make Jaison a hero allow Shibu to demand recognition. Yet his acts of destruction reveal the blurred line between empowerment and vengeance.

For the audience, Shibu's actions evoke mixed emotions—his violence is morally wrong, yet his pain is deeply human. By giving Shibu a tragic backstory, the film challenges us to empathize with a man society turned into a villain.

In Minnal Murali, Shibu's arcposes significant moral questions:

- Is Shibu's "evil" entirely his own fault, or is society culpable for his transformation?

- Does understanding Shibu's pain make his actions more forgivable? Shibu's story reminds us that villainy can arise from neglect and rejection, challenging simplistic notions of good versus evil.

Anjaam Pathiraa (2020), directed by Midhun Manuel Thomas, presents a powerful example of how tragic villains challenge the audience's sense of right and wrong. At its core, the film explores themes of revenge, trauma, and justice through its antagonist, whose actions stem not from inherent evil but from profound suffering and injustice.

The story revolves around a series of brutal murders of police officers, which sets off a gripping investigation led by Anwar Hussain, acriminologist. As the layers of the narrative unfold, the antagonist's motivations come to light. The villain's past is marked by unimaginable trauma and systemic failure, especially within the justice system. This backstory compels viewers to empathize with the pain that shaped the antagonist's actions.

Here, the “evil” doesnot arise from greed, power, ormalice but from an unresolved tragedy— personal loss and betrayal by the very system that should have protected them. This challenges the audience's moral compass.While the murders are brutal and seemingly unjustifiable, the film forces viewers to ask uncomfortable questions: Can someone pushed to the brink by personal agony be entirely condemned? Where do we draw the line between justice and vengeance when the system fails individuals?

Anjaam Pathiraa aligns with the Malayalam cinema tradition of crafting morally complex characters.Rather than presenting a villain who is merely an object of hatred, the film offers a tragic figure who earn so ursympathy while still confronting us with the consequences of their actions. This duality—pain giving rise to evil—compels the audience to see how societal neglect and personal trauma can blur the lines between right and wrong, forcing us to rethink our judgment of villains.

Both Shibu from Minnal Murali and Dr. Benjamin Louis from Anjaam Pathiraa represent the archetype of tragic villains in Malayalam cinema, characters whose actions are shaped by personal pain and societal failure. Despite their different contexts and narrative styles—Minnal Murali being a super hero film and Anjaam Pathiraaa psychological thriller—both characters challenge our sense of right and wrong by blurring the line between victim and villain. Both Shibu and Dr. Benjamin Louis are driven to “evil” by unresolved trauma and a sense of injustice. Shibu is a socially marginalized figure, treated as an outcast by his village. His tragic lovestory and repeated humiliation push him over the edge when he gains superpowers. The lack of empathy and relentless rejection he experiences transform him from a lonely soul into a vengefulforce, unleashing destruction to achieve at wisted version of acceptance and control.

Dr. Benjamin Louis, on the other hand, is avictim of systemic failure. His traumastems from the death of his loved ones due to corruption. His pain manifests as cold, calculated

violence, targeting those he holds responsible. Unlike Shibu's explosive rage, Benjamin's methods are meticulous and cerebral, reflecting his psychological torment and the depth of his despair. Both films challenge the audience to empathize with the villains without condoning their actions.

Shibu is presented as a deeply human character. His transformation into a villain is gradual, and his motivations are deeply personal. Despite his crimes, his loneliness and yearning for connection make him a tragic figure, evoking sympathy even as he wreaks havoc. His descent highlights society's role in creating "monsters" through neglect and alienation.

Dr. Benjamin Louis, incontrast, operates in a world of systemicrot. His actions, while horrific, force viewers to confront the failures of institutions that push individuals to such extremes. His calculated murders of police officers expose the moral corruption within the system, creating a dilemma where his anger feels justified, but his methods donot. Unlike Shibu, whose villainy stems from personal rejection, Benjamin's rage carries a sense of collective accountability. The paths of both characters underscore the tragic potential of revenge.

For Shibu, revenge becomes his only means of asserting power and recognition. His actions are emotional, even chaotic, and his inability to find redemption ultimately leads to his downfall. The audience is left with a sense of loss— Shibu's pain could have been alleviated if someone had shown him compassion.

- Incontrast, Dr. Benjamin Louis pursues revenge with methodical precision, almost as a moral crusade against a corrupt system. While he exposes institutional flaws, his quest offers no hope for redemption, only destruction. His character feels like are flection of a broken society, where even a man of intellect and morality can be consumed by grief and vengeance.

Both films thus hold a mirror to society's failures. Shibu represents the failure of a small community to include and uplift the marginalized. Heem bodies the consequences ofalienation and emotional neglect. Dr. Benjamin Louis represents the failure of larger institutions—healthcare, justice, and law enforcement—to protect the vulnerable. His story critiques systemic indifference, which breeds monsters out of ordinary people.

In Minnal Murali and Anjaam Pathiraa, several scenes evoke profound empathy for the tragic villains, drawing the audience closer to their pain and struggles despite their descent into violence. The tenderness he shows to Ushacontrasts sharply with the way society treats him. This juxtaposition compels the audience to question whether Shibu's descent into villainy is the result of his inherent nature or the rejection he suffers repeatedly.

The moment the audience learns about Dr. Benjamin Louis's backstory—his loss of

loved ones due to systemic failures—evokes a deep sense of empathy. His grief and frustration are palpable as his personal tragedy is laid bare. The film care fully presents his suffering not as an excuse for his crimes but as a means of understanding his motivations. His pain becomes relatable, especially in a society where systemic neglect often leaves victims unheard and unacknowledged.

When Benjamin calmly explains his reasoning to the protagonist, Anwar Hussain, there's a chilling yet empathetic quality to his demeanor. He is not a man driven by blind rage but by a profound sense of betrayal and loss. His composed delivery contrasts with the chaos he creates, forcing the audience to reckon with his pain and, to some extent, understand the logic behind his actions, however misguided they may be.

In both films, these emotionally charged scenes allow the audience to see the humanity beneath the "villainous" exteriors. Shibu's longing for love and Benjamin's grief over systemic failure compel viewers to empathize with their suffering, even as the iractions cross moral boundaries. These moments remind us that "evil" often arises from unresolved pain, pushing us to reflect on society's role in shaping such tragic figure.

While Shibu and Dr. Benjamin Louis emerge from different circumstances, both characters embody the tragic villain— individuals whose suffering pushes them toward violence. Shibu's story is more personal and emotional, rooted in societal rejection, whileBenjamin'sjourneyis systemic and intellectual, rooted in institutional failure. Both characters challenge the audience to reconsiders implisticnotions of good an devil, forcingusto ask: Who is truly to blame when pain gives birth to evil— the individual, or the society that failed them? Both characters evoke empathy, challenging the audience to see beyond their violent actions. By portraying villains as products of their circumstances, both films blurt he line between good and evil, asking us to reflect on society's role in creating its own antagonists. Tragic villains like Shibu and Dr Benjamin Louis challenge the simplistic binary of good versus evil. Their stories, rooted in pain and societal failure, force audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about morality, empathy, and systemic injustice. Both characters compel viewer store consider their moral judgments: Can we truly condemn those who turn to "evil" when society has failed them?

Conclusion

Malayalam cinema, through its nuanced portrayal of tragic villains, serves not only as entertainment but also as a powerful critique of social structures. These narratives remind us that villainy often arises not from inherent evil but from human suffering—a reflection of a broken system.

In conclusion, both Shibu from Minnal Murali and Dr. Benjamin Louis from Anjaam Pathiraa embody the complexity of tragic villains in Malayalam cinema, reflecting how personal pain and societal failures can distort morality. Shibu's story highlights the

devastating consequences of emotional neglect and social alienation, while Dr. Benjamin Louis exposes the rot within systemic institutions, where justice and compassion fail those who need them most. These characters challenge viewers to look beyond their actions and understand the circumstances that shaped them, blurring the lines between heroism and villainy. Ultimately, their narratives serve as caution arytales, urging society to recognize and address the underlying causes of such tragedies before they manifest as destructive forces, reminding us that empathy and accountability are essential in preventing the creation of "monsters."

So it's time forus to think that can we truly condemn a villain's actions when their descent into darkness is born from the same pain and suffering that could break any one of us.

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Athira Sadanand

The Invisible Evil in *Parasite* : Identifying The Absent Referent in Class Oppression

Abstract:

This paper examines the representation of bourgeois ideals and the depiction of evil in the Korean movie Parasite, with a focus on the concept of the absent referent in class oppression. The absent referent serves as a interpretative lens for identifying and reinterpreting the hidden evils in Parasite. This reading helps in revealing the moral, economical, psychological and ideological tensions that underpin class struggles created by social hierarchy. The spatial dichotomy between the luxurious Park residence, semi-basement dwelling of the Kim family and the secret bunker emphasizes the economic divide within society. The real evil lies in the economic manipulation orchestrated by the upper class, an underlying theme in the movie that serves as an absent referent to the unaddressed villainy in society.

Keywords: Absent Referent, Social Inequality, Class Struggle, Deconstruction, Marxism Etc.

Introduction

The critically acclaimed, dark humour-thriller *Parasite* (2019) explores the intricacies of class oppression, systemic inequalities, and the invisible forces that perpetuate the power dynamics in society.*Parasite* (originally titled: *Gisaengchung*) a Korean film directed by Bong Joon-ho, masterfully blends dark comedy and social satire. Written by Bong Joon-ho and Han Jin-won, the movie features a stellar cast, including Song Kang-ho (Ki-taek), Lee Sun-kyun (Mr. Park), Cho Yeo-jeong (Mrs. Park), Choi Woo-shik (Kim Ki-woo), Jang Hye-jin (Mrs. Kim), Lee Jung-eun (Housekeeper), Park Myung-hoon (Geun-sae) and Park So-dam (Jessica), with standout performances that bring to life the sophisticated story of the Kim and Park families. The cinematography by Hong Kyung-pyo employs symbolic framing to the interwoven plot, with elements like stairs and scholar's rock representing social hierarchy. By analyzing the socioeconomic dynamics depicted in the film, the study explores how the bourgeois ideals, social evils and their connection with the marginalized are portrayed.

Plot and Cinematography

Parasite is about the Kim family (A Nuclear family of four), who live in poverty in a semi-basement apartment. They creeps into the rich Park family's home by posing as skilled workers- a tutor (Son), art therapist (Daughter), chauffeur (Father) and

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housekeeper (Mother). The Kims slowly replace the original staff (the Housekeeper and the Driver) without revealing their relationship with each other. Their story takes a dark turn when they discover a secret bunker in the Park house, where the former house keeper has been hiding her husband to escape the harsh consequences of their past lives. A violent and bloody battle ensues between the three families, culminating in a chaotic series of events at a birthday party in the climax. The fallout leaves the Parks and Kims forever damaged, with loss on both sides. The plot of *Parasite* is about how the struggles of the oppressed are rendered trivial, and the true villain- the bourgeois class, deepen social disparities by perpetuating social and economic inequalities.

The shots in the movie are often highly symmetrical, emphasizing the rigid class divisions in our society. The use of vertical lines (stairs, walls) and the contrast between the well-lit Park family's luxurious home and the dimly lit semi-basement of the Kim family symbolizes socioeconomic disparity. In order to show the dirty, flooded and cramped Kim dwelling in the script, an elaborate set was created. Smooth tracking shots in the Park home contrasted with chaotic handheld movements in the Kim home, further enhances the difference between the two worlds. The Park House is a modernist architectural marvel, clean and spacious, symbolizing affluence and stability of the upper class lives. It is a single family villa with a a private courtyard. The Park family bought the house from Namgoong Hyunza who was also the one who designed it. They were unaware of the fact that he had built a secret bunker in the house. The Kim's Semi-Basement on the other hand is claustrophobic and grimy, reflecting poverty and their disappointment with life. The secret bunker, which is even more cramped and darker, represents the hidden depths of class oppression.The Kims navigating these spaces (either climbing or descending) symbolizes their turbulent social life outside the Park's house.This visual dichotomy reinforces the disparity between the three families and their social position.

The background score in the movie is layered and it successfully captures the escalating tension which in turn provide the audience an air of suspense. The silence, rain and footsteps amplify the mood by creating a mysterious background for the story. Layering the sounds from climbing up (Park house) and down the stairs (secret bunker and semi basement) create a literal "class division" in soundscapes. Warm, earthy tones in the Park home evoke comfort and detachment, while darker tones in the Kim home and Bunker emphasize struggle for existence. Released on May 30, 2019, in South Korea, *Parasite* runs for 2 hours and 12 minutes. It premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won the prestigious Palme d'Or by unanimous decision.

Class Struggle in *Parasite*

In *Parasite*, the Marxist and Deconstructive ideas converge to critique poverty and economic disparity, revealing the entrapping nature of social hierarchy within a capitalist framework or system. Marxist theory views history as a series of class struggles between

the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In *Parasite*, the Parks (bourgeoisie) rely on the underappreciated labor and service of the Kims (proletariat), perpetuating an unequal economic relationship. The Kims' infiltration of the Park household reflects their desire for a better life, but their ultimate failure at the end of the movie represents the rigidity of class divisions which makes the upward mobility of lower class almost impossible. While the rain is celebrated by the Parks, it becomes a destructive force for the Kims, since it floods their semi-basement home and make them spend their night in the emergency shelter for flood victims. The semi-basement space itself is a visual metaphor for the limitations of the lower class.

Parasite interweaves the tension of its plot with themes concerning class divides and economic inequality- aspects indicative of the social problem genre. Such themes are readily apparent in the multiple levels of the film's construction, from the characterization to the camerawork to the two primary sets (Park's lavish home contrasted with the Kim's sub-basement apartment). Poverty in *Parasite* is visually associated with moving downward.(McDaniels 22)

The scholar's rock gifted to Ki-woo by his friend Min hyuk, represents both aspiration for upward mobility and the crushing weight of class expectations. The rock's transformation from a symbol of hope to a weapon in the end reflects the destructive nature of capitalist ambition. It's gifted to the Kim family by a friend who claims it will bring material wealth and prosperity to the people who keep it. This aligns with the false promises of capitalism, which perpetuates the illusion of economic progress from lower class to upper class. For the Kims, the rock becomes a symbol of their desire to escape poverty but in the climax, the rock becomes an instrument of violence, shattering their idealized dream of becoming rich, stable and of better social position. This serves as a Marxist critique of capitalism, illustrating that the structures of class are not just unyielding but sometimes even self destructive to those who try to deviate from their class boundaries. The rock's mystical value also represents the fetishization of objects under capitalism. It distracts the characters from addressing the real, systemic causes of their suffering, highlighting the misplaced faith in material symbols rather than collective action. This concept is rooted in Karl Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Despite the struggles they face, the Kim family remain trapped in the system, and the symbolic weight of the rock prevails. Dehumanization of labor is another Marxist concern in the movie. The Parks treat their employees as mere tools, often ignoring their personal struggles. This objectification parallels with Karl Marx's concept of alienation, wherein workers are estranged from the products (material or psychological) of their labour. It is this detachment from labour that allows the upper class to remain indifferent to the systemic inequalities in production.

The Absent Referent/ Invisible Evil in *Parasite*

The absent referent is a theoretical concept coined by the vegan feminist scholar Carol

J. Adams, initially used in her work *The Sexual Politics of Meat* to explain how language and culture disconnect animals from the the brutality their bodies endure in the meat-making process. It is generally used to describe a situation where the original subject or reality is obscured, displaced, or denied, while its presence remains central to the meaning of a discourse or practice. For example, terms like "pork" mask the suffering of Pigs and erase their lived experiences to objectify them. In the meat industry, animals are transformed into absent referents as their suffering is (linguistically and culturally) erased, making it easier for the meat eaters to detach themselves from the reality of their consumption.The concept is applied in Feminism to critique how women's bodies and identities are objectified in patriarchal constructs like pornography. In such frameworks women's individuality becomes the absent referent as they are reduced to mere objects meant for male pleasure. In linguistics, the absent referent describes how something (a concept or a thought) is hidden behind another, often to obscure uncomfortable truths.

The absent referent plays significant role in analyzing capitalist systems, particularly through the concepts like commodity fetishism and alienation. For example, while purchasing a product, consumers rarely think of the workers who created it. These workers who are often ignored or erased from discourses are actually absent referents. This forgetting process sustains capitalist systems by alienating labour from the final product and making systemic exploitation invisible.The invisible evil in *Parasite* is the entangled systems of capitalism that dictate power dynamics to practice social and economic hierarchies. In short, the absent referent highlights how systems of power, patriarchy and capitalism rely on obscuring the critical realities to perpetuate class exploitation. The political importance of absent referents is that, by examining them, we can unravel hidden power dynamics, challenge dominant ideologies, and make the marginalized beings visible.

The food pattern of Kim family (from mere snacks to heavy buffet) is also a significant part of the movie since it explores how lower class people are denied quality food. The Parks' comments about the Kim's smell emphasize an intangible barrier between the classes. The "smell" becomes an absent referent for the invisible systems of economic exploitation and class struggle that the Parks refuse to acknowledge openly.

In the movie, the element of smell runs through the entire storyline. The smell of Kim's family is not just the damp, musty smell in the basement. It actually refers to the smell of the poor. The smell has become an insurmountable gap between the poor class and the rich class, always reminding each other that their identities are completely different. (Liu 79)

The murder of Mr. Park by Ki-taek at the end of the movie is a symbolic rejection of the bourgeois disregard for human dignity and the proletariat's battle for restoring his true identity. According to Marxist theorists, false consciousness prevents the working class from recognizing their collective exploitation. In *Parasite*, the Kims initially compete

with the former housekeeper instead of uniting against the Parks. This infighting reflects how capitalism divides the proletariat. Ki-taek's retreat to the bunker suggests the impossibility of true liberation of proletariat within the capitalist system.

Conclusion

To summarize, the title of the movie and the Kim family's status as "parasites" feeding off the Parks are absent referents to the social evil of class oppression. The film deconstructs the binary opposition of wealth and poverty by showing how each class depends on the other for sustenance like an unequal symbiotic relationship where one party receives more benefits. The Kims are not the real parasites nor are they exploiting the Parks. Instead they are revealing their only alternative within a social system controlled by the rich to achieve a better life. They are reclaiming from the Parks what has been denied to them for years under class division and systemic oppression. Unfortunately the poor are forced into invisibility, serving as absent referents in the system created by rich. The Parks' inability to see the struggles of the Kim's reflects how capitalist systems dehumanize laborers, making their suffering seem irrelevant and achievements invisible. Through its tragic yet critical portrayal of class struggle, *Parasite* invites viewers to question the political and economical systems in society that sustain privilege for one group and perpetuate suffering for another.

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Froth on the River: A Study of the Narrative Technique in Shyam Selvadurai's *Mansions of the Moon*

Abstract

The retelling of historical/ mythological narratives usually employs the first-person narrative whose gaze becomes the fixed framework from within which the story unveils. Such an attempt at re-viewing is not only exclusionary but obfuscating as much as the established narrative. The author weaves many elements drawn from various domains of knowledge into the story to make it as appealing as possible which makes it thematically enriching while the narrative is left wanting. It is in such a context that one encounters Shyam Selvadurai's novel Mansions of the Moon, a retelling of the famed Buddha story, which goes beyond the conventional definitions of a historical fiction both at the thematic and narrative levels. A transdisciplinary work, it engages shifting narrative perspectives which broaden the scope of understanding with respect to the story and the plethora of characters that populate the text. While the detached and sombre voice of the omniscient narrator confers it with the objectivity of an epic, the engaging story told from the perspective of Yasodhara infuses the narration with a touch of intimacy and urgency. This paper is an attempt to study how Buddhist philosophy which largely informs the novel has defined and determined the narrative technique which in turn becomes a metaphor for the spiritual journey of Buddha and Yasodhara. The paper focusses on how the fluctuating perspectives and mutable frameworks endorse the Buddhist tenet of the unstable self in its essence and action.

Keywords: Buddhism, Change, Narration, Self

Fiction, unlike poetry, is a genre where narrative technique has little or no role to play in determining the essence of the text. A novel is presumed to be complete in itself with only the content or subject matter and the narrative technique serving merely as a means of codifying it. However, as Schorer argues in his essay "Technique as Discovery," there is no "subject in art" without technique; there is "only social history" (73). He unequivocally declares that, "Technique is the only means he (the writer) has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it" (67). Hence, technique is not merely some "external machination" (74) that encompasses the novel but an inbuilt mechanism which creates it. The narrative technique is the means by which meanings and values evolve whether it be in terms of plot, characterisation or reach of a text.

Of the various types of fiction, historical novel is the one which is overtly political and has remained so since its inception. Historical novels are counter narratives that contest,

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widen, and analyse the master narratives. They do so mostly by conferring agency to those who have been historically and conventionally marginalised in the dominant version. By mobilising those who have been pushed to the periphery by complex forces of history and politics, these works position themselves as counter texts to hegemonic texts and are intentionally disruptive and polyphonic. From the iconic *Waverley* novels which inaugurated historical fiction, they have been consistently political though they adopted various modes of transmission, the most successful among them detailing the story from the perspective of a single character. To move the readers of an era far removed from the social and cultural milieu of the text is no mean task and the narrative technique employed in historical fiction/mythological retelling is one of the strategies of the art of persuasion. With the narrative keenly following a single character, the portrayal of that character's life, emotional as well as intellectual, coupled with the social context in terms of motivations and compulsions external to them, becomes an immersive task. With coherence and clarity posing challenge, elucidating the reasons, consequences and motivations demand a mode of narration which can straddle the daunting task at hand.

For Lukacs, historical novel is essentially epic in form (34). This being so, the totality of an epic can be achieved only by a detached and objective point of view capturing the repertoire of events, intrigues, sacrifices and treacheries. First person narration becomes untenable in terms of broadening the perspective and heightening the effect of it. This holds true particularly of novels which are transdisciplinary in nature like *Mansions of the Moon* (2002) by Syam Selvadurai. With impeccable attention to detail, the novel weaves together history and mythology to tell a compelling story that closely follows the journey of Buddha's enlightenment. Buddha's story has long been narrated and celebrated in fiction starting with the very popular 1922 novel *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse, which traces the spiritual journey of a man named Siddhartha who lived during the time of Buddha. A woman-centric approach to the story can be found in the novels by Vanessa R. Sasson titled *Yasodhara and the Buddha* (2020) and *The Gathering: A Story of the First Buddhist Women* (2023). To this collection joins Selvadurai's *Mansions of the Moon* (*MM*) which through its spectrum of perspectives and gamut of meanings strikes a chord of its own.

The term historical narrative best describes the novel as fiction is a sort of interpretation, and narrativization is the primary form any interpretation takes. As Noel Carroll points out, “Narration,” inevitably, “irreducibly entails selecting the events to be included in its exposition as well as filling in links that are not available in the evidential record” (35). Narration entails filling the missing details in the chain of events so that the conclusion appears logical and absolute. Selvadurai 'constructs' the 'story' of Buddha mostly from the perspective of Yasodhara, his abandoned wife. The responsibility of mediation is taken up by an omniscient narrator so that no gaps occur and the story progresses smoothly. The story has at its core the evolving selves of Siddhartha and Yasodhara which is juxtaposed with their dissolving marriage. The text doesn't stop there.

A series of events play out in the text which gives rise to many more stories like the uneasy relationship between the father and the son, Suddhodana and Siddhartha, the tragic life of the rejected wife of Suddhodana, Prajapati, and the journey of realization of Buddha's wisest disciple, Ananda. From an individual's perspective, the framework expands to include the stories of many individuals. As each story progresses, one finds the self of the character involved mutating, adopting and adapting themselves to the fluctuating fortunes of life.

Mansions of the Moon is no counter-text. Its politics does not lie in reacting or responding to any version of Buddha's story. The text is locked firmly in the matrix of Buddhism and its concomitant tenet of unstable self. Mining out the material that comprises the life of Buddha is a Herculean task and the technique definitely would have to live up to its expectations for the final work of art to be a great experience for its readers. A unidimensional perspective would have vitiated the scope of narration. The 'middle path' enshrined in Buddhist philosophy has been adopted by Selvadurai in the narrative technique used to portray the watershed moment in the life of Siddhartha and Yasodhara. This is achieved by presenting the thoughts and impressions of the characters in the third person. The advantage of such a technique is that, "Thereader perceives the action as it filters through the consciousness of one of the characters involved, yet perceives it directly as it impinges upon that consciousness, thus avoiding that removal to a distance necessitated by retrospective first-person narration" (Friedman, 1164). Thus the action remains equidistant from the interferences of an omniscient narrator as well as from the insidious grip of a first person narrator. It is neither too near nor too far – the middle path – such that the narrative steers clear of the overarching hold of any single mode of narration. The focus shifts intermittently from one character to another. Mainly, the focus of character shifts from Siddhartha, who is enraptured by his devotion to his cause, to Yasodhara, whose practical intelligence helps those reliant on her to tide over the crisis of survival precipitated by Siddhartha's abandonment on one hand and Suddhodana's death on the other. At the same time, they also have to succumb to the vicissitudes of events that unfold around them, at times eclipsing them by its magnitude and intensity. To portray the events in relation to the individuals, at the same time, depersonalizing their experiences to achieve objectivity in narration is the marker of the narrative technique in *Mansions of the Moon*. The reader is spared the perilous rationalizations of a single character which would hinder the comprehension as well as judgement of the events.

As Siddhartha progressed more into his spiritual life, he rapidly regressed from his external life. This transition of his is captured through the eyes of Yasodhara very effectively as she was very much rooted in that realm of life from which he was withdrawing. In one of the chapters where they meet a sage, she questions him regarding his thoughts and he playfully skips past her penetrating observations, wary of her drawing him into an argument which might undermine his convictions and resolution (*MM* 212-14). For Siddhartha, language fails to deliver his spiritual experiences and he becomes

incommunicado. In fact, he is almost absent in the space during the time his metamorphosis happens. Subsequently, his decision to leave to pursue "that path" (249) is not conveyed by him but discovered by Yasodhara. When confronted, he pleads guiltily, ""I…I've told you the truth so many times in my head, but now…" He shot her a haunted look" (249). After this admission, he speaks "with great effort, and haltingly, …"; which is presented as reported speech by the author encapsulating his long and arduous quest for "Truth" fraught with dilemmas, confusions and hesitations. He finally concludes directly, "I don't want to leave, because I…I do love you. But I must, I must." He is not able to give any convincing answers to Yasodhara's entreaties. All he has to offer is that "there is no choice" and he couldn't "see how to live" without following "that path." The more he advances towards his goal of spiritual satisfaction, the less articulate he becomes. For this reason, that part of the novel almost always strides forth through the eyes of Yasodhara. However, the author carefully avoids the pitfall of it regressing into a painful monologue by a deserted wife by widening the horizon of Yasodhara, ascribing new duties as mother and finding new friendships for her. Thus the narrative advances smoothly and no vantage point is lost.

According to Norman Friedman, two major distinctions can be made with regard to modes of transmission. One is "summary narrative," which means "telling," and the other mode is "immediate scene" which implies "showing" ("Point of View in Fiction" 1169). While summary narrative is "a generalized account or report of a series of events covering some extended period and a variety of locales, …;" immediate scene "emerges as soon as the specific, continuous, and successive details of time, place, action, character, and dialogue begin to appear." Selvadurai is obviously a master when it comes to immediate scene as seen in the chapter titled "Netted Birds," where Siddhartha and Yasodhara on their return from a short trip engage in a squabble leading Yasodhara to get down from the palanquin in a sour mood:

> She turned and went towards the street doors, not looking back. Inside, she took a lantern from atop a low wall and passed through the short passageway that led to the women's private courtyard. It was deserted at this time, trickles of light spilling out from the rooms above creating patterns on the clay floor, glistening on the pond. She held up her lamp, looking at the new shrubs along the edge of the courtyard, shrubs she had planted in the last four months (*MM* 202).

In the given instance, although nothing is being spoken, one finds a meticulous presentation of sensory detail in terms of setting (lantern light, deserted courtyard, clay floor), action (passed the passageway, held up and looked) and character (Yasodhara). Here the scene unfolds in front of the eyes of the reader as austerely as it does in the eyes of the character. The details aesthetically presented gels with the reader's sensibility and dominates his/her inner eye rather than the attitude of the narrator. At the same time, there

are instances in which the narration contracts/shrinks into an economical mode where an indirect approach in the form of a summary is adopted. For instance, the relationship between Yasodhara and Siddhartha prior to their engagement is summarized thus:

> Born a month apart, she and Siddhartha had known each other since they were infants. Their nicknames, Ushas and Surya, had come from the way her cousin had tottered after her in those early years, like Surya, the Sun, following his beloved Ushas, Dawn, across the sky. Once past early childhood, they had grown apart, though the nicknames stuck. Yasodhara had moved into the world of her girl cousins and the raucous games they'd played with her brother and boy cousins: …. Though Siddhartha had sometimes joined in these pursuits, he spent most of his visits trailing her father, whom he hero-worshipped. Dandapani was patient and gentle with the boy's precocious questions, … and even (allowed) to accompany him on his trips out into the kingdom to see about various matters.… Yasodhara had also come to understand that her father pitied Siddhartha because he was despised by his own father, Suddhodana (11).

The advantage of narrative medium is its flexibility and in this narration one finds a plethora of scenes embedded, conceding a wealth of information starting from the early childhood of Siddhartha and Yasodhara, their early bond, and their teenage years, fraught with trouble and insecurity for Siddhartha, while it exuded happiness and goodwill for Yasodhara. The reader also gets a glimpse into the nature of Siddhartha, his cordiality with Yasodhara's father and the frayed relationship with his own father, which serves as an ominous warning of the future.

In the early stages of the novel, Siddhartha's dilemma and strengthening of his resolve to pursue his chosen way are relayed to us from his perspective itself. He was one who was "in need of solitude" (19) and used to spend hours "lost in thought." All the chapters which are narrated from his perspective are exclusively devoted to his encounters with ascetics and his various engagements with them with regard to the "path" (20) and the "truth" (21). During his apprenticeship years, he comes across a Nigantha who convinces him that "this apprenticeship that he'd wanted fiercely, that he'd worked so hard to get, and he was sure would cure all that troubled him, had failed to do so. Failed to fix his inclination towards pensiveness and make him the outgoing, brilliant person he'd always longed to be" (*MM* 21). That night is spent sleeplessly by him recollecting his own life which endorsed the truth behind the words of the ascetic regarding the inevitability of sorrow in the life of everyone irrespective of his/her position in life. Siddhartha tries to pacify his disturbed mind by visiting one ascetic after another in search of the desired answer, which is disrupted by his marriage and his responsibilities as governor first and as judge later. Even then, his troubled spirit fluttered within him, yearning for the final

release which came many years later when he embraced the "Middle Way" (288). Yasodhara, on the other hand, though affectionately attached to him, nursed a fiercely independent spirit which "needed to breathe," (27) because of which she welcomed his early pursuits as she looked forward to this "shared independence" (27). However, as life took its "unfixed" and "provisional" (105) course, this independence soon lapsed into estrangement reaching a point where she sarcastically dismisses their conversations as "polite conversations" (201) camouflaging their real thoughts. Their marriage hits the nadir when her pregnancy is revealed and the "false note" (205) in the apparent excitement of Siddhartha hitting her hard.

Ananda is another character in the novel who gets to tell his own story. His experiences of significance, whether it be his risky journey of becoming a rich merchant and foster father to a slave's child (122-27), or his spiritual journey of joining Buddha's fold (287-89), come to the readers through his own words as first-person narration. Thus the infinite possibilities of narrative technique is explored in the text which adds to its beauty and appeal. Shifting points of view widen the scope and range of the narrative with the narration progressing in the least intrusive manner. Those interferences and observations seen as the prerogative of an omniscient narrator are almost entirely absent in the novel. Such interpolations, which Friedman calls "Editorial Omniscience" (1170), have the power to sway the judgement of the readers as their critical faculty will be severely compromised. The descriptions in the novel are placed directly within the sensory frame of one character or other as seen in the chapter "Siddhartha and Truth of Truths": "As Siddhartha sat gazing at the fire, he was also *mourning* Maha Kosala, who surely must have starved himself to death by now; and he also *recalled* his time at the Savatthi Court, the kindness of the old man towards him …. He was *thinking* too of his old friend Pasenadi. He'd *heard* from the tax collectors …he had made another strategic marriage…" (*MM* 111-12). Here the events come to the reader through the mind of Siddhartha. What the other characters do, the setting and all the related materials are relayed to the readers through the character. When the novel begins, the time of the year, Yasodhara's current status and her age, all reach the readers through her:

> When Yasodhara goes out with her aunt and the Manager of the Fields to look at their plots … she sees with her expert eye, that the paddy, if it does come to maturation, will have fewer than usual grains on its stalks. As always, she watches with longing the women workers in the raja's fields, wanting so much to join them, but knowing such a thing is impossible now, given her status in the palace …. (1).

The choice of the narrative technique is important not only for the intended effects but also crucial for the underlying philosophy of the work. As Syam Selvadurai clarifies in the Preface to the novel, he wanted "to honour and imitate how old stories had incorporated the tenets of Buddhism into their very narrative structures" (xvii). Of the "three poisons"

Buddhism identifies, he intends to focus on the third one – "moha"- which is the delusionary idea "we have that anything is stable and unchanging". If an artist's strength lies in how well he is able to master the technique of his art, Selvadurai is a master artist. His forte lies in being able to be an austere practitioner of the philosophy he subscribes to. The Buddhist philosophy of 'change' is applied technically in the novel by him. With the narration shifting its focus from one character to another in terms of their social exchanges and interior monologues, it captures with clarity and precision the assumptions of stability that reign their lives as well as the incorrigible contradictions that govern those assumptions.

Schorer views narrative technique as a mode of "thematic definition" (69). Similarly, Friedman contends that, "… an author is assisted in his search for an artistic definition of the(se) values and attitudes by the controlling medium offered by the devices of point of view" (1167). These propositions entail that narrative technique essentially defines the theme, sets the tone, and determines the destination of the text. Here, Selvadurai employs shifting points of view to 'show' how the 'self' changes as the narrative unfolds. With the lens trained on the novel from every possible angle, the neutrality of the text is strictly maintained. In other words, the text adopts the "Middle Way," which is the realization that "everything is in flux and changing all the time, including each person, including the world, the stars, the planets. Including the gods" (*MM* 163). As change is inevitable and all encompassing, it demands a multidimensional approach in deciphering it and one has to credit the author in adopting the narrative technique that aligns with this objective. Not only in terms of the development of the theme, but also in terms of evolution of the characters, one finds the Buddhist notion of change at the pivot. The characters imbibe this change to their own self and the self of others and come to accept both, whether it be the character of Suddhodana who hated his son from his birth and resisted his second wife for being alive while his first wife died, or Anuruddha that "dissolute cousin" (386) who led an Epicurean life. Suddhodana eventually declares that "he is an upasaka, a lay follower" (311) of his own son. Anuruddha changes beyond recognition in demeanour and attitude (386). This acceptance of each other is emblematic of their embrace of Buddhism. This is particularly true of Yasodhara whose whole life has been a Buddhist journey in itself; what Buddha earned through ten years of penance outside the palace, Yasodhara gains it within the frontiers of her life through her own rites of passage, enduring her own share of penance and sacrifice. From one who had been fiercely possessive of her 'self', she transforms into a person who willingly gives up her own son to the very 'path' she so passionately hated once before ultimately embracing it herself. When the novel ends, both Yasodhara and Siddhartha stand at the same milestone in terms of Buddhist philosophy, converging at that point by following divergent ways.

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