

PREFACE

The figure of the psychopath has simultaneously riveted and repulsed the society in equal measure. What makes the representation of the ‘deviant’ so fascinating to the readers is by itself an engrossing subject. Why has a person turned out to be the way he is or what is it that makes him behave in such a drastically different manner defies rational explanation. Several questions immediately come to the mind as soon as one hears the word psychopath. ‘Psycho’ is a familiar word but is it the same as psychopath? Who is a psychopath? What is psychopathy? What is it about the psychopath that transfixes us? Why is the dreaded figure so fascinating that he finds a place in literary texts as well as in the popular culture? The terms ‘Psychopath’ and ‘Sociopath’ present a problem as people are not sure whether they mean the same thing or if there is a difference. Doctors, however, make no such distinctions as both share common traits and hence, are lumped together and classified as Antisocial Personality Disorder, which covers a broad spectrum of deviant personality traits that ranges from narcissism to sadism. And then again, the common perception of a psychopath is that of a serial killer. But all psychopaths are not necessarily serial killers, though all serial killers are undoubtedly psychopathic. However, it is the serial killer that finds greater representation in popular fiction as he very often drives the market forces.

There is a general opinion that popular fiction does not merit any serious attention as they lack the quality that characterizes literary fiction. The standing of the psychopathic fiction is even more dismal as most of them center upon narratives involving the serial killer, which are considered both superficial and sleazy and hence not worthy of reading. However, this thesis aims to disprove such misconceptions and show that there are books among the ‘three penny’ novels, the ‘shilling shockers’ or the ‘slasher’ novels that echo some important cultural concerns of the period in which they are located.

The depictions of the psychopath in most of the works tend to simplify or ignore the different dimensions of psychopathy as the emphasis is more on the crime committed rather than the mind that produces such acts of criminality. This study is an attempt to encapsulate some of the most recognizable works dealing with psychopathic characters that has contributed significantly to popular literature in terms of the literary themes, the social contexts in which they evolved and the critical responses to such endeavours.

The study also aims to dispel the notion of the psychopath being a contemporary phenomenon as literary works have time and again proved that he is the embodiment of the ubiquitous evil, making his presence felt across time and space. However, this study intends to interrogate the circumstances that have made America a fertile breeding ground for serial killers, which in turn has paved the way for significant representation of these predatory creatures in American popular culture.

The eight works of fiction gleaned from an array of books, which portray the figure of the psychopath succeed in delineating the major aspects of the psychopathic character. This thesis, through a judicious selection of popular fiction, makes an attempt to open at least a few locked doors that bar access to the understanding of psychopathy.

Organization of the Study

The character of the psychopath challenges simplistic or linear explanations and no single work as such has been able to capture the entirety of the complex nature of the psychopath. Hence, this dissertation attempts to bring together a collection of narratives that represent both English and American popular fiction, that not only offer a multi-dimensional perspective to the study of the psychopathic personality but also shed light on the cultural landscape that engenders them. The study proposes to dispel the notion of the psychopath as a contemporary phenomenon as literary works have time and again proved that he is the embodiment of the ubiquitous evil, making his presence felt across time and space. At the same time, this study wishes to interrogate the reasons for America becoming a fertile breeding ground for serial killers.

Some of the texts used for this study have been chosen to show a particular pattern in the evolution of this genre, which maps the movement of the psychopath from the periphery to the center of civilized society, marking a change in the status of the deviant. There is an increasing trend to base the psychopathic narratives on the life of psychopaths around us which turns fictional accounts to non-fiction novels. These narratives will examine such transitions in the genre of psychopathic fiction, while scrutinizing the origins of psychopathy. Apart from interrogating the ways in which the psychopathic killer is constructed in these narratives, this study also intends to bring within its ambit, gender concerns such as misogyny and homophobia that are woven into the chronicles of the psychopath. The organization of the chapter divisions is based on the evolution of the psychopathic character over specific periods of time.

Certain fundamental questions related to the portraits of the psychopath in popular fiction have to be dealt with. For instance, why are we fascinated by horror that repels us so

much? Is it because of our morbid preoccupation with the deviant? How do the selected novels reflect the problem of psychopathy and other related issues such as patriarchy and misogyny? What is the role of the moral value system in this discourse? These are some of the concerns that will be addressed in this dissertation.

Works Selected

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert L Stevenson

The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde

Psycho by Robert Bloch

Misery by Stephen King

A Clock Work Orange by Anthony Burgess

Zombie by Joyce Carol Oates

American Psycho by Bret Easton Ellis

The Silence of the Lambs by Thomas Harris

The theoretical framework for the study of the psychopaths has taken into its ken both psychological and literary theories that helped in giving a sense of direction to the study. The employment of various theories such as the Degeneration theory, forwarded by Max Nordau, the Psycho-analytical perspectives of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Melanie Klein trace the origins of psychopathy to childhood trauma. Michel Foucault's theory related to power dynamics has thrown open new vistas of understanding of the relation between psychiatry and the prison. The psycho-analytical studies related to Freudian concepts of 'Oedipality', 'repression' and psycho-sexual trauma are used in this study along with the

concepts of ‘doubling’ and ‘doppelganger’ to shed light on issues that contribute to the development of the psychopathic character.

Chapter Divisions

Chapter I: A Descent into the Unknown: The Enigma of Evil and Psychopathy

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first part is intended to be the cornerstone for the interrogation of the psychopathic character and his representation in popular literature. An attempt has been made to delve into the origins of psychopathy to comprehend the nature and manifestations of the disorder based on empirical studies made by experts in the field of psychiatry. Psychologists, criminologists, behavioral scientists and social historians have worked extensively with psychopaths and have recorded their observations and experiences in path-breaking treatises. The psychopath still remains enigmatic as he does not exhibit the usual symptoms like depression, mania, hysteria or neuroses that mark different kinds of mental illnesses. Psychologists have found that it's difficult to understand as well as convey the concept of psychopathy wherein the individual is outwardly intact performing all the peripheral functions normally but deficient in the core. A vignette of psychopaths gleaned from the pages of history, real life psychopaths belonging to contemporary times are juxtaposed with fictional psychopaths.

The second section gives an overview of the psychopathic characters from classical literature to popular literature in fiction and elaborates on the treatment of the psychopath in American popular writings. Tracing the origins of the psychopathic fiction that finds its roots firmly fixed in the Gothic-horror tradition, its development over the time culminating in the serial killer genre lends credence to the study that has been undertaken. The chapter also discusses the perspective of the Degeneration theory, which became a prominent discourse in

the last quarter of the nineteenth century that sheds more light on the fictional accounts of the psychopath.

Chapter II: Two Faces of Decadence

The second chapter will focus on R.L. Stevenson's Gothic novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (will be referred to as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* henceforth) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Stevenson's work articulates the late-Victorian anxieties concerning degeneration, atavism and criminal deviance masquerading in the name of science. One can easily discern the traces of an atavistic criminal in Edward Hyde who is the precursor of the modern psychopath, a 'Human Juggernaut' (8) who tramples all that is gentle and good. Though the novel has been classified as a literary study of 'split personality', we find that Dr. Jekyll is not so much a man of conflicting personality as an individual ravaged by his dependency on a new drug that can aggravate a pre-existing psychopathology, turning him into Mr. Hyde. Hyde is not only the consequence of Jekyll's experiments in the forbidden domains of science but also a symbol of the darker side of human nature. He represents the kind of depravity which peeps out from underneath the facade of gentlemanliness and bourgeois virtue.

The novel of Oscar Wilde introduces the Don Juan like character Dorian Gray who plunges into the heart of darkness with his forays into the forbidden slums of East End and the bohemian streets of London. He rebels against the obligations of his upper class status without giving up his privileged position in the Victorian society in his quest for aesthetic experiences. The striking portrait of Dorian Gray mocks him at every step as his hidden depravity becomes increasingly apparent on the surface of the painting.

The two novels bring forth the decadence that prevailed among the Victorian bourgeois and the Manichaeic nature of the elite class. While *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll*

and *Mr. Hyde* investigates how science is made to serve the turpitudes of human nature, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* examines the human urge for gratification of illicit desires in civilized societies.

Chapter III: Momism and Psychopathy

Robert Bloch rightly said in his autobiography *Once Around the Bloch*, “There are no monsters out there. They all exist inside you” (220). The third chapter intends to examine this statement by looking into the fractured personalities of Norman Bates (*Psycho*) and Annie Wilkes in Stephen King’s *Misery*.

Robert Bloch’s *Psycho* which is loosely based on the real life exploits of the notorious mass murderer from Wisconsin Ed Gein dwells on the troubled relationship between Bates and his overbearing mother. The smothering mother from the American suburb becomes the root cause of Norman’s psychosis and his crimes. Completely isolated from the world of others, Norman turns increasingly inwards. After Norman kills his mother and her lover, he becomes totally secluded and narcissistic which eventually turns him into a gender confused homicidal killer.

It is the fear of the uncanny, the horror in everyday life that Stephen King brings in to tell his story of a female psychopath in *Misery*. Probably the earliest example of a woman psychopath is found in Swinburne’s poem “Anactoria” and since then not many writers have dwelt on female psychopathy. *Misery* is a psychological horror story of repressed fears, pain, frustration, loneliness, insecurity and madness. Annie Wilkes, the crazed female fan of writer Paul Sheldon holds him hostage, infantilizing him and threatening to castrate him, if he does not use his pen to keep writing about the gothic romance character Misery with whom she has

identified. Sheldon is aware that she has already murdered thirty people including her own father and he would be her next victim. He sees in her, “The woman she might have been if her upbringing had been right or the drugs squirted out by all the funny little glands inside her had been less wrong or both” (282).

King’s novel, while describing the nightmarish experience of losing creative power, also suggests that the writer is a victim of his own celebrity status. It needs to be examined whether creativity is a masculine prerogative and whether in the destruction of the female psychopath, King is trying to assert that psychopathy is male-oriented. Along with this, chapter three will also examine Sheldon’s matrophobia and the nature of his masochistic fantasies which are used as a domination of male force in an essentially female world. This chapter will focus on gender issues, voyeurism and the dangers of ‘Momism’.

Chapter IV – Motiveless Malignity

The figure of the young demonic criminal resurfaces in Anthony Burgess’s ‘*A Clockwork Orange*’ and Joyce Carol Oates’s ‘*Zombie*’. An overpowering evil colors the tone of the narrative in both the novels in which the deeply disturbed protagonists give the readers a clue to the significance of environment in shaping psychopathy at a young age.

The novelists provide a grim analysis of a world hopelessly enmeshed in violence where people like Alex and Quentin will always be forced to become aberrant individuals whose psychic mechanism is malfunctioning. Alex’s inherent capacity for evil is intensified into acts of destructive violence because of the repressive conditions imposed by the system of which he is an integral part. As the novel takes us along with its first person narrative, it clearly demarcates the four positions occupied by the protagonist-criminal, convict, patient

and citizen. When Alex's shockingly violent ways lead him to the prison, he is in turn harassed and tortured and the only escape is to become a guinea pig subjecting himself to Ludovico's treatment. The doctors use 'aversion therapy' and 'classical conditioning' to wean him from violence and crime which ultimately leaves him incapable of dealing with the complexities of social life. The novel questions the efficacy of both the prison and the medical models as institutions of change through discipline, the methods of surveillance employed to control the mind, the viciousness of the system where the victimizer turns into a victim.

Zombie, based on the life of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer takes the reader into the labyrinths of the psychopathic mind. Joyce Carol Oates succeeds in bringing to life the terrifying sexual predator Quentin.P, fashioned after the cannibalistic Dahmer who engaged himself in lobotomizing his victims. The novella not only raises questions on Lombrosian experimentations in diagnosing criminality but attempts to dispel the general notion that psychopaths almost always emerge from impoverished and underprivileged backgrounds.

Chapter V: Inscrutable Facades

The chapter deals with the two best-sellers in popular fiction which have made a mark on the large screen – Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* and Thomas Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs*.

The post- modern condition is explored through the narrative of Ellis, where everything and everyone becomes a product of consumption in the 'flatness' of existence. Patrick is not just a man with a chiseled body, enormous wealth, successful business and a flamboyant lifestyle. He is an example of a particular type of individual, the psychopath who

deceives people around him by hiding his real self and exhibiting a factitious self that facilitates him to perpetrate violence insidiously.

Harris's novel presents not one but two psychopaths – the demonic yet suave psychiatrist Dr. Hannibal Lector and the ruthless, cross-dressing serial killer Jame Gumb, better known as Buffalo Bill. Hannibal (whose name is derived from that of the legendary military leader), the diabolic predator is befriended by FBI trainee Clarice Starling, entrusted with the task of tracing the identity and whereabouts of Buffalo Bill who has a penchant for skinning his young female victims after murdering them.

Pitted against Hannibal in a cat and mouse game, Clarice is forced to divulge the trauma of her childhood days in exchange of information on an unknown psychopathic killer dubbed Buffalo Bill, who was the former patient of the former-psychiatrist-turned-cannibal killer. The novel brings out multi-layered dimensions of sexual aberration and psychopathology by traversing through the mind of the psychopath. It echoes the concerns of Robert Bloch's '*Psycho*', as we discover that the deeply disturbed Jame Gumb (Buffalo Bill) is an extension of Norman Bates embroiled in the same Oedipality and transvestitism.

This chapter also brings to the fore the pervasiveness of deviancy which sweeps everybody into its fold. Even practitioners of medical science overstep the line, as we see in the cases of both Dr. Jekyll and Hannibal Lector who transform themselves from healers to predators. This chapter draws attention to the role of the psychiatrist in the ever widening world of the modern psychopath and the reservation that an average American holds on psychiatric interventions in dealing with disease and disorders. An attempt will be made in the chapter to find an answer to these questions as well as to the others that relate to different dimensions of perversity that Harris talks of in his novel.

Conclusion

The conclusion draws to a logical end the findings of this research study. It will make a brief analysis of the important aspects of the psychopathic personality delineated by the various authors included in this study. It will sum up the critical endeavours made by these writers to comprehend the anxieties of destabilization produced by the psychopath in the society.

Science fiction includes many other subgenres too. One of them is considered to be Anthropological science fiction which is a sub-genre that absorbs and discusses anthropology and the study of human kind. Biopunk focuses on biotechnology and subversives. Comic science fiction is a sub-genre that exploits the genre's conventions for comic effect. Psychopaths are more convincing when demonstrating fear or remorse, because they have to practice the outward signs of the emotion, like facial expressions. "The surface of the psychopath shows up as equal to or better than normal and gives no hint at all of a disorder within. Nothing about him suggests oddness, inadequacy, or moral frailty," psychiatrist Hervey M. Cleckley wrote in his 1941 seminal work, *The Mask of Sanity*.¹ A key aspect of the Mimicry-Deception Theory suggests that individuals involved in predatory behavior need to appear to be cooperative and "normal" to successfully take advantage of others. People are naturally wary of individuals who do not express fear or remorse, deeming them untrustworthy.