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EXPLORING THE ELEMENTS OF DARK ROMANTICISM IN BRIAN EVENSON'S *FATHER OF LIES* AND GEORGE BATAILLE'S *STORY OF THE EYE*

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Abstract

The proposed research paper aims to make people aware of their darker side or evil spirit and help people to introspect their actions. Human beings to drive pleasure can go to any extent, people are mostly driven by their instinct and their evil spirits. The term "Dark Romanticism" is a literary genre which contain dark emotions. It is related to arts such as music, drama and literature. As a genre in literature, Dark Romanticism focuses on the belief of human souls' dark aspects, the notion of sin, or an evil view on the society. Some of the writers who wrote in this genre in English literature were Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. This research paper aims to find out relevant question on violence, crime, hate-mongering, religious violence, through the lens of Limit Experience which was propounded by George Bataille. The need to study these two texts in comparison has come out of the academic necessity.

**Keywords:** Dark Romanticism, Limit Experience, Hate-mongering, religious violence

In literature, we find many different kinds of genre in which stories, novels, poems, are written. There are different literary movements and school of thought which influences authors to write their work in that genre. In American literature we find that there are different literary movement which influenced many authors over the years. In nineteenth century, America we find that there were two literary movement which were dominant Transcendentalism in the first few decades and Romanticism in the later years. Writers usually do not combine two genres. However, there were authors like- Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe who used to combine two different styles like Romanticism and Gothic, in their writing.

Romanticism was popularized in the first part of nineteenth century in America, it stemmed off from Transcendentalism whose chief components were quest for truth, divine connection with Nature, individualism and self-love. Romantic poets tried to explore beauty in its different forms, recognizing how "everything is alive, related and meaningful" (The Romantic Movement). The chief aim of Transcendentalist was to look for truth instead they only tried to find out the connections among different forms of life. This movement gave great importance to nature and helped in strengthening the bond between human and nature. Idealists or the Transcendentalist distinguished between the Romantics and themselves with the question "the why rather than the how of reality." (Eigner 3). The

Romantic authors and its followers main concerns was to understand the reason for any action rather than the process of carrying it out. They wanted to make the ordinary things look as vivid and unknown. They filled everything with hope, beauty and freshness.

Romanticism gave birth to Gothic literature which developed into a new literary genre and it also produced some other sub-genres like realism, naturalism, metaphysical etc. Gothic literature presents "the darker side of awareness...guilt, fear and madness...the uncomfortable sense of being in a fantasy world which is about to reveal secrets of the human personality" (Howells 5). Plots of these novels involves horror, terror, secrecy and illness. Characters and Readers discover horror on a daily basis. In these novels, the quiet hearthside was often established as a positive pole against the diabolic attractions of the superhuman quest (Eigner 121). It takes the reader into a completely different world which is filled with terror and horror, evil is very much apparent there. These novels are usually set in places far from city. The author willingly distances the reader in order to keep them far from the details. This gives the reader a relief when they return to real life from this evil world.

Father of Lies is a novel written by Brian Evenson in 1998. Writing a review about the Book, Karl Wolff writes, "especially relevant in this present age of religious violence moral bankruptcy." The novel revolves around the protagonist Eldon Fochs who is a Provost in the corporation of the Blood of the Lamb, which is also known as "Bloodites". This is a fictional sect of Christian religion which is created by Evenson to criticize the church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS). Evenson very skillfully questions the process through which Provost is being appointed in the church and their promotions. He also questions the intention of the church authority and why a person who is charge of murder, rape and sexual assault of minor children is being protected and given a free hand to exercise his power. He through this novel makes us aware about the evil which is enacted upon innocent people in the name of religion and how these kind of people uses religion for his own evil desire and organized crimes, they defame the religion for their own sake.

Fochs is the main character in the novel. Evenson constructed the character of Fochs very brilliantly, even after committing heinous crimes, he still has the courage to justify himself and tries to disguise himself as a paranoia. More about him can be understood through his psychiatrist Alexander Feshtig. In his early session with Fochs, Feshtig question him-

"If I say to you, "Fochs, you're no longer a person, you're on object," what object comes to mind?"

Fochs: Well, I don't know. A slice of paper, I guess."

When Feshtig further investigates and asks what is the thing he likes about paper. Fochs answers that he can write on it. Before the end of the first session Feshtig made Fochs admit that he has thoughts about children, they don't have clothing on their skin and he writes his name on their body and sometimes even God's name. For Fochs paper and skin is identical. Being in the profession of Provost, he counsels lots of children in his congregation. Alexander Feshtig concludes after the first session is that writing on the body of a child is a kind of ownership or claims which shows his pedophilic nature.

Fochs early childhood and teenage: Feshtig interviews Myra, Fochs's brother to know about Fochs's childhood. His father was the provost in the church and his whole life was the church. Fochs got his early teaching about Bible and religion from his father.

However, he was a man of short-temper, he always use to hit Fochs for his mistakes. Sometimes, even with a spade so hard that blood rolls down from his head for not following his command. Fochs's mother divorced him and married Frank who was a non-believer. Although, Fochs was the eldest of the three and got his full dose of religion from his father and started reading scriptures because of fear from his father. For him religion was not something he practiced out of faith but out of fear and fearfulness. He found escape in religion; he started believing that he can commit any sin and God would forgive him because he pray to him. Asking about his

behavior in childhood and if Fochs had killed anyone in his childhood his brothers answers-

"No chance," he said. He kept shaking his head. "Killed animals when he was a kid, though," he finally said. "Killed our cat by twisting its head mostly off. Had a thing with head and animals- sometimes didn't like to see the two together. Used to find stray dogs too and lop their paws off. Most people were just glad that someone was getting rid of the strays, so they didn't ask no questions."

This act of killing innocent animals for sport led him to become a criminal-minded person who started enjoying his cruelty and dark emotions. Fochs as an adult and his crimes: As an adult and during the course of the novel Fochs commits several crimes. His most of the time goes into committing crimes and trying to get away from its repercussions. After being appointed as a Provost of the church, the first crime he commits is the rape of a twelve years old boy whom he interviewed for becoming priesthood. The way he commits this is also of great significance. He asked the boy if he had done anything that could make him not suitable to accept the gift of the priesthood. The boy answered no in a soft voice. Fochs insisted that he needed to know the truth. The boy remained silent, Fochs got closer to the boy he looked straight into his eyes. The boy got frightened, Fochs asked the boy why was he lying. The boy asserted that he was not lying. Fochs insisted that God told him that the boy was lying.

Fochs admits his act through these lines in the novels-

"God told me that where evil had made its mark, good must follow, burning evil out and purifying the body. I told the boy to remove his pants and he eventually shucked them. I told the boy to remove his underwear and when he would not I stripped those down myself. I could feel God endowing me with holy power. I reminded the boy that I was his spiritual leader and that obedience was the law upon which all other laws were predicated. If he didn't listen to what I said, but to the nothingness beyond hell,

which would make hell look like a picnic. Then I told him to reach down and grab his ankles but to keep his legs as straight as he could. But he wouldn't do it, so I had to do it for him. I came up behind him and held my hand over his mouth, wrapping the other around his chest. Then, where evil had been before I forced good in until he bled."

In the above quote we can see how Fochs has referred to God multiple times while admitting his crime which according to him is an act of purification of soul. Fochs is well-aware of his crime but he uses God to escape from the trial and in this process, he is backed by the church authority. Every time he is saved his intensity of crime aggravates.

In another instance, Fochs murders a girl and after killing her he rapes her, she has to come to Fochs to confess her sin which she has committed. Fochs asks her several questions about his sin which is incest in nature. She had an affair with her brother.

Fochs before killing her utters-

"Christ's blood will not wash her clean. She must atone for her sins with her own Blood. Killing her is the best thing for her. Kill her to save her."

Here, again we find that Fochs claims his act as a command from Christ. Evenson's novel can be understood as an allegory of blindly obeying religion where a man of evil intention and habitual criminal prey on innocent people. In the novel Evenson has used the word- "Christiananalysis" or "Christian-based analysis" which means interpreting anything through the lens of Christianity and psychoanalysis. When the news of the murdered girl come into the paper and television and Fochs is forced to face trial, his wife also confronts him that he had killed her. He first tries to convince his wife that he had not done anything like that but when his wife refuses to believe him, he takes her for a drive in his car and eventually kills her without any remorse. For him, no relation is greater than his own interests. His words after killing her was:

"I killed her, God was beside me."

This is the third crime that Fochs has committed and it is most horrifying in nature. Because he has killed his wife just for asking him valid questions. Fochs is unstoppable in pursuing his pleasures, he uses God and Church as an instrument to escape his trial because anyone who tries to accuse him is portrayed in the bad light and disregard towards the religion. The mother of the boy whom Fochs molested at the beginning of the novel is excommunicated by the church authority. The Church stand in solidarity with Fochs, according to the church, church elders are the messengers of God and any action taken by them could not possibly be wrong. Fochs's actions become extreme day by day. Evenson has created a character who is most disturbing one in recent fiction, the character is completely unsympathetic and detestable.

His crime does not stop here, after being recovered from the accident he preys the young girl who is given the task of taking care of his children. He sexually assaults her. Evenson was writing this book while he was still working as professor at BYU, he knew that if he has to publish this work he has to leave his position or he will be expelled from his job. This novel deals with controversial themes which is related to church than Evenson's other works. The work focuses on two things, one it raises the issues of abuses which takes place in Church and other it questions the authority of Church and people who blindly obey religion. The novel shows how dangerous things might get by blindly obeying religion. Evenson in his resignation letter attacked the Church for censoring his novel without having proper knowledge of literature. When asked about from where did he get inspiration for writing this novel. He answers,

"I began to speak about abuse with other Mormons. Often they argued there was a problem, but said it wasn't as bad as in Mormonism as in other religions. A relatively small number of people were being abused. It doesn't sound so bad if you think of it in terms of numbers, I suppose, but as soon as you start putting names and faces with the numbers, you realize that percentage doesn't matter: what matters is that there are children and adults who are being abused

and who being given harmful counsel from their religious leaders. What matters is that much of it could be easily prevented.

The novel *Story of the Eye* can be read in comparison to Brian Evenson's *The Father of Lies*. The three main characters in the novel are extremely objectified and dehumanized. They are governed by their erotic desire and unfulfilling lust which leads them to the mental breakdown. The protagonist of the novel Simone is the one who runs the course of the novel and manipulates the other character to become part of her transgressive activities. All her action in the novel is driven by her insatiable lust for erotic transgression, which leads her to do things which can be considered maniacal, for example, breaking eggs with her ass, sitting in a saucer of milk, or inserting the eye of a dead man inside her vagina. In the first go, we may have this illusion that Simone deliberately forces other characters in the novel to do things that they were not comfortable in but later we may realize that she herself is the victim of her libido.

She could not control her lustful desire and she herself is dehumanized. She is like a machine which cannot be gratified. She is unable to control her sexual impulse and has no control over her desires. Another character who is the victim of Simone's excessive sexual desire is Marcelle. She commits suicide because of the guilt she undergoes after taking part in an orgy. She is the only character in the novel which can be considered as the symbol of sanity. She is treated as an object of gratification by Simone, she is pissed upon and humiliated to an extent that she chose to die than to live with such agony. The other minor characters such as police, parents, and administrative figure are used to show the normalcy by the novel is actually a demonstration of the violence of eroticism.

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