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Murder Crafted as an Art; Two Selves Inside One Mind: A Study of Personality Disorder in Kazuo Ishiguro's Short Story *Waiting for J*

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Abstract:

This paper shall look into the hideous terrains of Kazuo Ishiguro's deceptive short story *Waiting for J*. The short story was published in 1981 which appeared in *Introduction 7*; stories by new writers and was dismissed as amateur and having low critical regard. Besides its low critical regard, this paper shall enquire into the rationale of the internal psychological effect of the speaker that makes him narrate and commit the murderous feat that lays beneath the surface of *waiting for j*. However, this study shall be an analysis of how narrative formation and psychological disorder of this Ishigurian narrator goes hand in hand to reveal the emotional repression of human psyche. The famous yet failed, intellect yet insane narrator desires for becoming a messiah in his respective field ends up in depressing state when *j* fails in his professional pursuit. Despite the story revealing it overtly, the narrative has undertones of depression and disorder arising out of failure and trauma. The nameless narrator's failure in becoming a scholar in academics leads to his skewed personality disorder, what he projects through the character of *J* reveals some hidden features of the narrator's split personality that is vulnerable to murder, sadomasochism and voyeurism. The narrator of *Waiting for J* unfolds his tale in such a subtle precision and devious drama that it easily deceives the reader into believing that *J* and the narrator are two normal human beings sharing a good friendship. But this study shall concentrate upon carving out the narrator's serious bipolar and schizophrenic disorder what lays underneath his narrative doubles. In *waiting for J*, the unnamed narrator waits for his friend *j* whose full name is never mentioned. He waits for *j* during his 40th birthday only to be murdered by his spirit as a childhood pact to avoid old age. However, he never displays any traits of psychological disorder. But this paper shall discuss on his mental illness with regard to

narcissism and obsessive personality disorder validating its clinical origins in psychiatry. Mr. J who was murdered four years before the birthday of the narrator and the unnamed narrator were one and the same person. The dual self of the narrator is symptomatic of his psychological disorder with regard to OCPD and narcissism. Further this paper shall explore the instance of a film the house that jack built directed by Lars Vons Trier in 2018, where the protagonist architect Jack suffers from the same psychopathic disorder ends up in a series of heinous murders what he considers as a form of art. The parallels shall be posited between waiting for J and the film keeping in mind the question of how and what leads one into serious personality disorder. In lieu of the criminality, the disordered mind involves the strange and fatal case of the architect Jack and Mr. J calls for the treatment of real-life cases of bipolar and OCPD patients (Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder). Adding to this the strange and classic case of J shall be discussed validating the Mac Donald triad theory.

Keywords: Mental Disorder, Murder, Sadomasochism, Schizophrenia, Dual Narrative, Trauma, Depression, Sexual Repression, voyeurism, Suicide.

Human mind is the greatest creation of God, may be the most complex phenomenon to understand. It is often said that no great mind can exist without a touch of madness. Insanity inside a sane human mind probably shapes it into a phenomenal thing. starting from Dr Faust to Hamlet any human who has pertained to any obsession has ended up in a decay or madness. It may be Hamlet's obsession for searching his father's murderer or Dr Faustus' obsession for gaining knowledge. Too much of anything leads to destruction. Unlike Hamlet and Faustus, there have been many individuals whose obsession arises not out of their passion for gaining power or knowledge but from failures in life that permeates through parental expectations leading to childhood traumas. Kazuo Ishiguro's short story waiting for j that was published in 1981 chronicles an unnamed narrator who waits for his friend 'J' on his 40th birthday only to be killed by the same. The nerve shredding pact of murder between the two in their childhood naturally strikes the reader's mind which is obviously not a normal pact. The abnormality behind the pact speaks volumes of the anonymous narrator's psychological disorder. This psychedelic plot becomes more nerve wrenching when the narrative unravels undertones of J's murder four years prior to the narrator. Mr. J who is supposed to be the childhood friend of the narrator promises

to come on his birthday only to kill him. J who happens to be four year older to the narrator must have been 44 as the narrative occurs on the narrator's 40th birthday. The décor of the narrator's room and his taste for minimal details in cleanliness is quite symptomatic of his obsessive personality disorder. "my room is quite fashionable, much of my furniture being purchased from a predominantly tasteful Scandinavian shop. I am especially fond of the glass coffee table that occupy the centre of the floor. I keep on it several carefully selected items; an ashtray, handmade from baked clay, a set of tea mats of intricately laced cork, an elaborately corkscrew I had acquired in Spain. The dome shaped paper weight beside me on the desk is the other item I usually keep on my table. I try not to alter the position of these items and it was only with the greatest reluctance that I removed the paperweight in order to include it in my gallery of weapons"(Kazuo ishiguro.p.4,1981) The excessive care and precision with which this fellow emphasizes the details of objects in his room pronounces obsession with cleanliness and décor of things. It is common in OCPD patients (obsessive compulsive personality disorder) that they are obsessed with the order and décor of things they possess. "I keep on it several carefully selected items; an ashtray, handmade from baked clay, a set of tea mats of intricately laced cork, an elaborately corkscrew I had acquired in Spain." This mirrors his extra care for being picky with things and his enthusiasm for travel as well. What Abel Thamby has to say is "It is characterized by a maladaptive pattern of excessive preoccupation with detail and orderliness, excessive perfectionism, and need for control over one's environment. The same has to say that there is enough evidence to suggest that the different symptoms of OCPD begin in childhood. In a retrospective study, most individuals dated their symptoms starting in childhood. In fact, a large epidemiological study found that about 13.5% of the youth met the criteria of OCPD. In 1903, Janet described "psychesthenia" (now called OCPD), characterized by traits such as perfectionism, indecisiveness, orderliness, authoritarianism, and restricted emotional expression.

The narrator's claims to be a scholar contradicts his taste displayed in his room suggests that he projects sculpting as his pastime. 'I frequently work with marble, but my preference is for wood. I gain immense pleasure from carving soft wood'. J who the narrator claims to be his boson childhood friend echoes his strange behavioral disorders when he kills a rabbit ultimately echoing his own mental illness. And it is more fascinating when the narrator says 'it seemed to me it went on forever, hammering and hammering quite passionately, as if crafting something out of stone.'(Ishiguro, 1981, p.4) Hence this certainly poses a question that what could possibly

lead the narrator to compare killing with the act of crafting? Because killing is a murderous feat that differs totally from the act of crafting which shares a creative faculty of mind. The narrator's confessional narrative is highly symptomatic of a skewed disordered personality that has its roots in his childhood trauma. J is never his friend but a utopian creation of his own psyche, whom he projects to be a sculptor. It is the narrator's fantasy to actually become a scholar where he has failed and he romanticizes his own idea of being a scholar. In reality J is the narrator's other self who never arrives to murder him on his birthday. The killing of the rabbit is an act of sadomasochism that speaks volumes of the narrator's real self who is a sculptor in reality. His failure in becoming a scholar remains as a trauma for which he projects his own self by the name J who he claims to be a sculptor. The pact made between the two is actually his own suicidal note which has to occur on his 40th birthday. The rabbit killing incident scares him of J, which is his unconscious confession of his own self. Since childhood he is scared of j and sometimes, he runs away from him. It is symptomatic of a serious bipolar disorder that suggests his running away from his own self. The narrator does not display his own real self that is suicidal, depressed and bipolar rather fabricates himself as an avid reader and scholar in a university. 'two of my walls are completely covered with books. I have studied extensively and it is acknowledged that I am as well acquainted with my particular field as anyone in the country' The narrator is someone who works in a university at the same time being a professional sculptor doesn't sound promising rather deceptive and delusional. To take the similarities into consideration, the two selves both J and the narrator lives in gloomy apartments. Both have visitors frequenting them time to time and most importantly the young lady according to J likes to entertain her guests till all hours. The mood of the narrative shares the same bleak apartment underneath footsteps going on every now and then. This noir mood of the short story has parallels of both j and the narrator to be the same person dwelling inside one traumatized mind. Aubrey Lewis suggested that there were two types of personality in individuals with obsessional neurosis: one characterized by negative affect, stubbornness, and irritability and the other by uncertainty.

The House that Jack built:

There have been instances where many mentally ill subjects share their tastes in art. As this narrator happens to be a sculptor perceives killing as a form of art; ‘it seemed to me it went on forever, hammering and hammering quite passionately, as if crafting something out of stone.’ This scene is quite reminiscent of the 2018 psychological thriller film, ‘The house that Jack built’ directed by Lars von Trier. The character of Jack has been inspired from Ted Bundy the psychopath of the 70's who nearly raped and killed more than 30 women. Theodore Robert Bundy was an American serial killer who kidnapped, raped, and murdered numerous young women and girls during the 1970s and possibly earlier. In the five episodes the failed architect Jack perceives his orchestrated murders as his life’s stupendous work of art and furthers his heinous murders to create a masterpiece. Jack utilizes Dante’s Inferno as a touchstone behind his artistic murders. Hence to Neel Burton; “personality disorder predisposes to mental disorder resulting in distress and impairment and calls for treatment. These personality disorders even predispose to criminal activity which are often treated with the primary purpose of preventing crime.” (The 10 personality Disorders) According to Neel Burton personality disorders can be classified into ten categories viz; cluster A-paranoid PD, schizoid PD, Schizotypal PD. In Cluster B- Antisocial, Borderline, Histrionic, Narcissistic PD, Cluster C- Avoidant, Dependent, Obsessive-compulsive PD. Hence the unique case of Mr J/narrator falls under the Obsessive – compulsive Personality disorder or Anankastic disorder as defined by the current jargon of personality disorder.

It must be hypothesized that the behavioural patterns of the narrator in the short story waiting for j calls for a serious psychoanalytic study. His preoccupation with high orderliness in things, sophistication, perfectionism and a murderous instinct behind his craftsmanship echoes a mentally disturbed personality who has failed in his pursuit of becoming a scholar. In the same breath the narrator’s relationship with the neighborhood girl next door must be examined. Waiting for J centres around primarily three characters i.e. the narrator, Mr. J and the neighbor Jewish girl who is probably Sally Croffick a prostitute Mr J had earlier told about. The Jewish girl lived beside his room since last one year. But the narrator despite his temptation for inviting her in for a coffee always resisted thinking it absurd. He even contemplates how he would ask her for a coffee what remains only as a fantasy. ‘The young lady across the corridor likes to

entertain her guests' (Ishiguro, p8,1981). This sentence strikes the reader with a note of duality, as it is actually said by j but it pronounces the Jewish girl too. The first lines of the short story may illustrate this aptly; "The little Jewish girl across the corridor has many night visitors. Quite probably she is a prostitute. Several times in the last few hours I have stopped my typing on hearing footsteps ascending the staircase. But they have gone past my door and stopped at hers." (Ishiguro, p1, 1981) The narrator's preoccupation with the Jewish girl next to his door is provoked by the footsteps that he hears in the night. It can not necessarily be concluded that she was a prostitute as she herself wears long boots which is supposed to make heavy clattering sounds as well. The narrator's idea of drawing the Jewish girl as a prostitute bears its roots in his psychological repression regarding Sally Croffick. In childhood as he was very inclined to know the identity of Sally Croffick yet he never remembers what had happened that day but the killing of the rabbit incident by his friend j. A closer analysis might disclose that it was not J but he himself who hankers after Sally that afternoon in her farmhouse. The narrative is projected and fabricated deceiving the reader into believing that it was J who requests him to follow Sally. But it all takes place inside the psyche of the unnamed narrator who has been suppressing his desire for Sally that he could not express. Later the killing of the rabbit is an act of psychological displacement regarding his chasing of Sally Croffick. The sexual repression for Sally is displaced in the killing of the rabbit. By saying, 'I believe we were on our way towards Sally's farmhouse, I do not remember exactly', he deceives the reader on his lack of memory regarding that event, which is a typical Ishigurian narrative technique. What happens after following Sally that day is never narrated but it can be said that j/narrator is quite sure of her being a prostitute. The voyeurism of the narrator is well pronounced here in the topos of prostitution. With the same note the Jewish neighbor girl is the displacement of Sally Croffick.

The Mac Donald Triad Theory:

With regard to the psychological instinct for murder and sadism the Mac Donald theory is worth mentioning in this context. This theory first gained momentum when researcher and psychiatrist J.M. Macdonald published a controversial review in 1963 of earlier studies that suggested a link between the childhood behaviors and a tendency toward violence in adulthood. According to Mac Donald the serial killers exhibit three signs in their behaviour that are wetting

the bed, torturing and killing the animals and fire setting. MacDonald believed cruelty to animals is stemmed from children being humiliated by others for extended periods of time. This was especially true of abuse by older or authoritative adults who the children couldn't retaliate against. Children instead act out their frustrations on animals to vent their anger on something weaker and more defenseless. This may allow the child to feel a sense of control over their environment because they're not powerful enough to take violent action against the adult who may be causing them harm or humiliation. (Macdonald JM. (1963). (The threat to kill) In this connection the obsessive behaviour of the narrator in the short story *Waiting for J* validates the Macdonald triad. The history of the homicidal personality has witnessed many monsters like Tedd Bunny, Jeffrey Dahmer Dennis Raddar who kills and tortures animals during childhood. The killing of the rabbit by Mr. J echoes the dysfunctional and abusive childhood of the narrator that permeates in his cold-hearted lack of empathy. In the same breath the narrator's decorum of various statues and artifacts made by him in his room mirrors the serial killer's desire to keep trophies. The serial killers desire to award themselves for their killing stems out of their hyper narcissistic personality disorder what J approves of having.

Conclusion:

The short story has the ghostly undertones when j is murdered four years before the narrator and promises to come to the narrator on his 40th birthday as a ghost only to keep his end of the bargain. This scene is quite reminiscent of Mephistopheles coming for signing the soul selling pact to Dr Faustus. As a matter of fact, waiting for j has no ghostly presence in the short story rather it's the projection of the narrator's unconscious. Mr. J is the other self of the mentally ill narrator who projects his repression. The childhood pact to avoid old age is also a projection to kill himself on his 40th birthday. There is no existence of any person called J as his friend rather Mr. J's existence remains inside the narrator's mind only. This behavior reflects the narrator's OCPD personality disorder. It is never known whether he kills himself or not in the pretext of the spirit of J's arrival. But surely his intentions of killing himself with a knife on his birthday can't be denied. *Waiting for J* is a metaphor for the narrator's hopeless hope to end his depressed life. His waiting for Mr. J connotes his 40th Birthday when he is supposed to kill himself. The *Waiting* is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* which has the similar undertones of a vague waiting for a person called Godot whose existence could mean

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anything for anyone as ultimately Godot never arrives, nor does Mr. J. Although Ishiguro's narrator's *Waiting* is quite different from Beckett's. Yet the metaphor of *Waiting* continues ever after with the unsaid narrative: "I feel an odd mixture of relief and disappointment each time I find J is not standing there behind me. He will come, of that I am certain." (Ishiguro kazuo,9,1981.)

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