

Cognitive Correlation In Gothic: A Semiotic Approach

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ABSTRACT

Semiotics is theoretically used to unravel the meaning by connecting and interpreting different signs and symbols. Evolution of meaning begins from shared to agreed meaning by the interpretation of facts and information. Thus, certain philosophical tradition is concerned with the understanding of how people use different signs and symbols in meaning-making. To understand the correlation of meaning the researchers has taken two short stories of K. Hari Kumar's "The Devil's Flower and a piece of Rock", "A Pair of Pale Hands" are analysed in terms of the semiotic approach, namely the triadic model. This triadic model by Charles Sander Pierce is a three-dimensional model whose axes are: Representamen, Object, and Interpretant. In this research paper, the researchers had correlated the process of meaning-making with Setting, Myth and Blood. Each are individually identified in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* in creating its meaning and development in the story. This paper associates Representamen as form, the setting, Object as a referent to myth and blood. In association with the representamen and object, we get interpreted meaning called the Interpretant. This correlating structural process is seen with reference to Jacques Derrida's 'Model of Parergon'. Thus, this paper purports to explore the narrative as a structure of interconnected signs and symbols that are organically rooted to the gothic style of writing and deriving its meaning semiotically.

Keywords: Triadic model, Setting, Myth, Blood, Embedded Narrative, and Model of Parergon.

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Introduction:

Gothic is a widely popular genre in literature from the early 19th century to the present day. Indian Gothic fiction uses characters and scenes that highlight underlying cultural beliefs and values that give a gothic understanding. The aim is to address basic social and cultural issues, which makes it a bit more political depending on the region. It examines the fall from past glory to decay, and despair, the lasting effects of myth forming a basic pattern in Indian Gothic. Its characteristics include the presence of irrational, terrible, and excessive thoughts and meaning-making sense. Gothic fiction in counter-fiction is an attempt to combat things as they are by imagining things as they are not. It is a matter of differing opinions about what is real and unreal. The concept of reality reflects the world through a mirror. The Gothic genre looks through the dark glass to allude to the hidden realm of human experience.

Formal realism is a form of creating a standard of reality through the experience of a single character. It explores the inner consciousness and perception of an individual character in the story. It focuses on educating the reader on how to read and react to the story. Thus, gothic literature is a reaction to formal realism and it tries to work in a direction that is almost the exact opposite of formal realism. The very basic aspect of Gothic fiction is that it does not try to reflect everyday life, no matter how wonderful and crazy the situation may be, the characters in Gothic stories always react more faithfully to those situations. Daily reactions to these situations yield an explanatory spontaneity that the reader can identify as supernatural. It's an important part of Gothic that blends realism and real fantasy characters to see in the real world, as they are placed in completely bogus situations. This paper limits its talks about how real people react and get influenced by unreal situations.

This research paper is based on a true incident documented collectively as *India's Most Haunted*. From this collection, two short stories are analysed in view with a

semiotic approach. Semiotics, the study of sign and symbol got its name from the Greek terms semeion meaning 'to signal, to interpret a sign'. The philosophical tradition of sign theory dated to Charles Sander Peirce; its philosophical traditions extend from semiology to semiotics. The study depicts the philosophical tradition of sign in view with Peirce's 'Triadic model' using the three-dimensional model's axes namely Representamen, Object, and Interpretant mentioned in Figure 1.

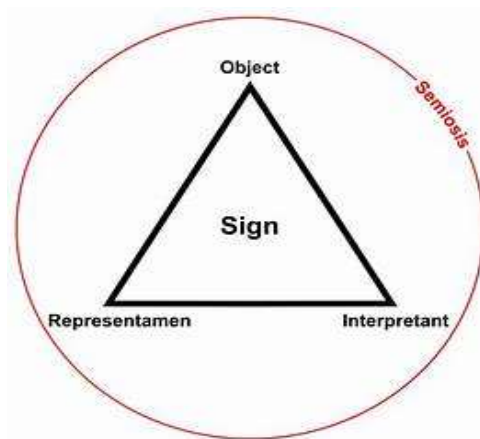


Figure 1. The Triadic Model of Charles Sander Pierce.

Charles Sander Pierce (1839-1914), an American philosopher, connected cognition to his triadic model. A sign is "something that is determined by something else, called its Object, and mandates an impact on a person, called its interpretant," (Pierce 1931-1958) such that the latter is thus mediately commanded by the former. The interpretant, Pierce's most unique and distinctive component, may best be described as our knowledge of the sign/object relationship. Pierce emphasizes the role of the interpretant because signification is not a simple dyadic link between sign and object: a sign only signs when it is understood. The sign was defined by Peirce as a triadic process termed semiosis. Peirce added a unique and frequently shifting language to his sign definitions. Peirce previously described his sign model as a triple association of

sign, object signified, and cognition generated in the mind in verbal material. He states that mainly "Nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign"(Chandler 13).

The paper purports to investigate K. Hari Kumar's short stories as a cognitive semiotic world of symbols that operate reciprocally to communicate a message. Semiotics is the epistemic descriptive sphere that views imaginatively literary work of arts as a semiotic text more precisely as a complex network of interrelated signs, then the short story is the kind of text that lends itself to semiotic scrutiny. The researchable questions to be raised concerning the problem of the study are

Is there any semiotic structure in the gothic narrative?

Do myths influence readers in gothic? Could this be analysed by semiotic study?

How are Hari Kumar's short stories linked to create the gothic significance?

Gothic Setting

The setting gives the transformation of the genre from a normal situation to supernatural story. According to Peter Hutchings, Professor of film studies states that "Forest has the ability to stir a wide range of emotions in Humans. The Forest is used as a source of threat in our culture". The common setting in Hari Kumar's two stories is Forest. The description of the forest in "The Devil's Flower and a piece of Rock" begins with the primary setting in Gurgaon (Kerala). The author begins the story with the description of his summer vacation with his grandmother. Their conversation led to a narration of the secondary story, in which the grandmother begins with a detailed description of the forest.

The back of the place overlooked a vast stretch of uninhabited forest area that ended at the small Krishna temple built four hundred years ago by early

settlers. The area near the temple was decently populated, however, the mile between the theatre and the temple was always deserted, especially after sunset. The people of the village were even afraid to enter the perimeter of the place as they believed it was haunted by a Yakshi (Kumar 2)

The story shifts from a theatre to an inhabitant forest. Madhavan takes a shortcut through haunted forest to reach his home quickly to see his wife. The mood of the forest can be evaluated as dark and isolating the mind of the character. This creates the effect and affects the mind of the readers and gives associated meaning to the gothic setting. In “A Pair of Pale Hands” the primary story setting begins in Karnataka starting towards a wedding function. The story shifted from car travel to jeep travel. The secondary story begins with the return from the Carnatic competition in an old jeep at 8 pm to avoid the traffic and routed small village Punarur, a hamlet with a small population. It is the place where Narkasur was slain by lord Shiva and believed that his spirit still haunts the place. The common sound description is mentioned in Hari Kumar. K short stories are “A flutter of batwings. Chirping crickets. The hoots of an owl. Even a jackal howling in the distance, adding to the nocturnal sounds. The clouds got darker and the thunder louder.” (Kumar 7). This element enriches the effect of the gothic setting in the forest.

Forest influences fear that gets emerged from the idea of the mysterious and the unexplored. The influence of the unknown shapes fears and creates a sense of gothic. The characters are isolated either physically, emotionally, or mentally in order to create an atmosphere of fear. Madhavan physically gets isolated and Radhika emotionally gets isolated. Readers are also made to be isolated by the authors using aspects like supernatural and magic that are unfamiliar to us. This process of change in the meaning is illustrated in Figure 2.

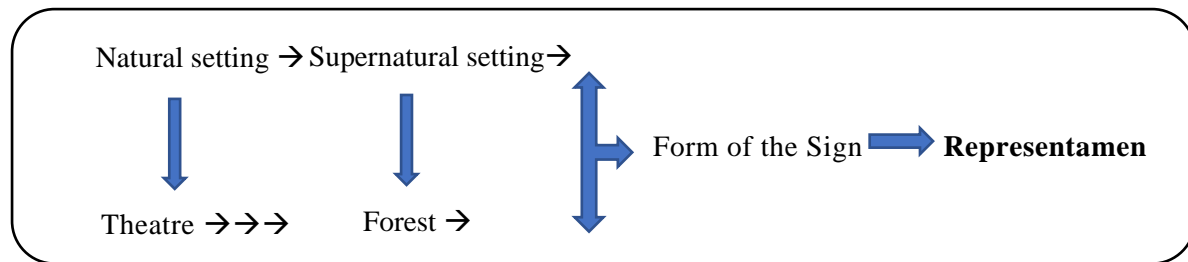


Figure 2. Forest as Representamen.

Thus, the forest as a setting plays a significant role in gothic. To support this analysis reference is taken within Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, in which Macbeth is informed by a supernatural being, “Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill Shall come against him” (Macbeth 96-98). During the assault against Macbeth, the trooper camouflage with branches and claims to be trees. In this manner, the prophecy comes true. Thus, forest setting gives the answer to his fear of death. Another supporting reference to the importance of setting in gothic is highlighted by Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin Russian philosopher revised gothic realism as grotesque realism. In which grotesque means all that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life and recognized by all suddenly become meaningless dubious and hostile.

Our own world becomes an alien world. Stressing particularly on the element of alienation he claims that the grotesque is an alienated world where all that is friendly and familiar becomes hostile and the world undergoes a change. In this context, Bakhtin points out that alienation discloses the potentiality of a different world, of another order, and another way of life. According to Kayser's, grotesque “expresses not the fear of death but the fear of life” (Bakhtin 49-50). Bakhtin defines this statement by claiming that grotesque imagery never represents death as a negation of life but part of life as a

whole. Thus, setting being a part gives the initial influence of fear and darkness to the whole story highlighting its grotesque meaning as base to representamen.

Use of Myth:

Myth serves a more profound purpose that connects the ancient with modern culture. Myth is a sacred tale that explains man's experience to the world. Use of myth in a text gives an interpretative approach. Myth shapes the meaning of a literary text. In Macbeth

First Witch -All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

Second Witch -All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

Third Witch -All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter! (Macbeth 48-50)

These lines mention the influence that was created in the minds of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Before hearing the prophecy, they did not have any thought to claim the throne or kill Duncan. But on hearing the words of the witches, they believed it and murdered the king without further thinking. This sudden change in their decision resulted in tragic death. This kind of sudden decision that resulted in unexpected pain and death is also seen through the influence of mythical characters in Hari Kumar's short stories. In "The Devil's Flower and a piece of Rock", Yakshi is depicted as "Yakshi were said to be benevolent celestial beings like Devas...Yakshi are said to prey on single men" (Kumar 2). In "A Pair of Pale Hands" the presence of Narkasur is said as "stay close, guys, this is the halli where Narkasur was slain by Lord Shiva. It is believed that the spirit of the asura still haunts this place" (Kumar 21)

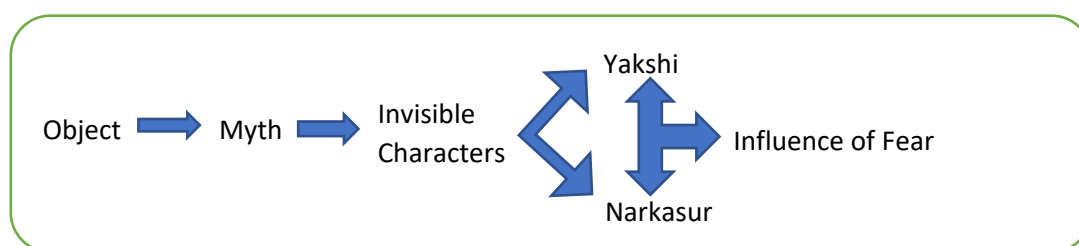


Figure 3. Myth as Object

His use of mythical characters influences the characters and reader's mind in initiating a terror meaning. Some myth that is universally believed collapses our mind and creates fear. It decreases our confidence because we don't have an answer for it or proof for it, as illustrated in Figure 3. In "The Devil's Flower and a piece of Rock", Madhavan character initially represented as a strong communist gave him the power to fight against the oppression. But in the end, his fear in the darkness thinking the woman as Yakshi he hit her to death without realizing her as his wife. The story of Yakshi narrated to him by Velappan caused an influence in his mind and defused his mental strength. This preoccupation with the Yakshi story induced fear in him. In "A Pair of Pale Hands", Radhika was frightened hearing the presence of Narkasur. Her teacher gave a normal response to calm the students and get rid of mythical influence. But in the end, she instructs the driver to kill Radhika thinking she might get possessed and kill everyone. In both, stories myths are used to give a gothic effect but in reality, no presence of Yakshi or Narkasur is identified. The meaningless influence of mythical stories gives the cognitive understanding to the referent of the gothic root as a symbol.

Blood as a Symbol:

Symbolism is a literary device that uses symbols, words, marks, and abstract ideas to represent something beyond the literal meaning. Blood globally symbolizes life. It stands as a sign that our soul remains here in our body in this life. It symbolizes the mortality of a person or is showing that they are able to experience pain and death.

In Hari Kumar. K short stories the mythological characters are connected with a blood sequence that symbolizes pain and death. Firstly in "The Devil's Flower and a piece of

Rock”, the presence of blood changes the entire story to a gothic conclusion. “...the Yakshi is a very smart being. She’ll use paalapoo fumes and her curves to seduce you. Then, she’ll figure out a way to taste your blood. After that, all you’ll get is a quick glimpse of her fearsome expression before she grows a fang and drains your blood.” These are warning given by Velappan to Madhavan about Yakshi. Madhavan did not pay much attention to the words of Velappan. Rather he started toward the inhabitant forest as a shortcut to his home. On his way, Madhavan got pierced by thorn and fell down in pain, and broke his lantern. In the dark forest suddenly, he saw a woman with paalapoo walking towards him. He identifies her as his wife but more beautiful than he saw her. It initiated a doubt in him whether she is his wife or not. Unexpectedly she licked the blood off her finger innocently saying it may attract the wild beast in the forest. This time the words of Velappan reverberated in Madhavan’s mind as “She’ll figure out a way to taste your blood” (6). Blood symbolizes to Madhavan that Yakshi came in form of his wife. This acceptance of the mythical character resulted in murdering his wife Kalyanidevi. His bold and progressive thinking was completely removed and filled with the unnatural situation that made him feel insecure. This changed the entire story to pain and death where the blood symbolizes the presence of Yakshi to Madhavan. Without further thinking, he hit her with a granite stone to death.

Secondly in “A Pair of Pale Hands” Radhika and other members were heading towards Mysore. Their jeep suddenly jerked and stopped because its engine got blown. Being 8 pm teacher searched for a shelter in Punarur. A hunched-backed woman allowed them to stay in her home. She warned everyone about the presence of asura who gets evoked with the smell of blood and possess them. Later kills everyone as revenge for his death.

Because the smell of blood attracts it, she hissed, staring into the night. It possesses its victim through blood and then uses the body to kill people, taking the soul back to Naraka. Its spirit reeks of vengeance. She finally pulled in the shutter, closing the window. She turned around and warned, Beware, those who bleed – he or she must be burnt alive before the asura takes possession of the body.(Kumar 23)

Hearing this Radhika got frightened meaning while the driver returned saying that their jeep is ready to start again. When all started “Radhika realized something that sent a chill down her spine. Her cycle had begun despite the pill. She was bleeding”. Without any further thinking, the teacher instructed the driver to kill Radhika. The driver confessed to the author at the end of the story that he killed Radhika with his pale hands. Thus in both the stories the blood symbolizes guilt and death.

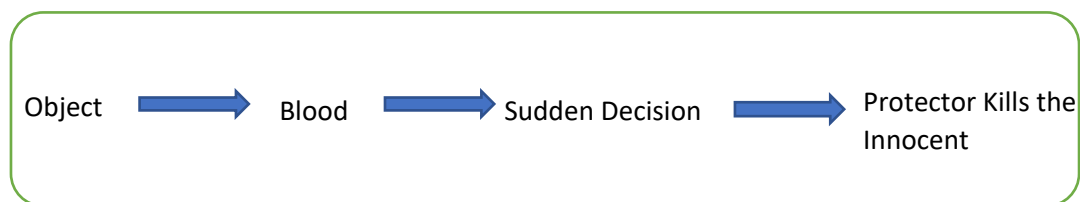


Figure 4. Blood as Object

The same symbol is also identified in Shakespeare’s Macbeth with the symbolic reference to guilt and death. In Macbeth “Will all great Neptune’s Ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand?” (58-59). After killing Duncan, Macbeth’s hand was covered with blood. He showed his hand to lady Macbeth stating that even Neptune’s Ocean is not enough to remove the blood stain from his hand. The blood symbolises the feel of guilt in murdering Duncan. “Out, damned spot! Out, I say! who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.” Lady Macbeth said these lines at the end of the play, by unconsciously

rubbing her hands to remove the invisible bloodstains. This also represents the guilt in murdering Duncan.

Thus, blood stands as a referent symbol in symbolizing the pain and sudden decision to kill the person who were protected by them.

Embedded narrative

Literally story within a story is called an embedded storyline in which a person in a story becomes the narrator of the second story. Most gothic stories have similar embedded patterns of writing. The story with present narration and the story within the story is connected to the past happening. The Inner story can also be called a secondary story and the outer story is called a primary story. The internal story has a symbolic significance for the character inside the outer story. Tales within a story may additionally divulge the historical past of the characters and their activities.

This kind of technique is used in Shakespeare's Hamlet

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

As he is very potent with such spirits,

Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds

More relative than this. The play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. (Hamlet 24)

The embedded narrative style of writing is identified in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The protagonist couldn't take decisions that resulted in procrastination. To identify the guilt of Claudius killing his father, he decided to gather more evidence before taking action. Hamlet plans to perform a play about a similar murder and wanted to see his uncle's reaction. The truth was examined from the inner to the outer story. This kind of connection between the inner and outer story to bring out the truth is identified in Hari

Kumar's select short stories. To support the connection between the story within the story and the importance of one story over another, the researchers has used Jacques Derrida's 'model of parergon' that denotes the relationship between core and periphery. He reverses the order of priority so that it becomes possible for the outside or secondary story an inessential story to be the core or the centrepiece in the text. Thus, the secondary story stands as the core of the story and the primary as the periphery. The core gives the impact of gothic essence and influence that blur the narrative and cognitive boundaries, by producing a destabilizing effect that challenges rational epistemology and suggests a deep reality that the realist novel could achieve.

In "The Devil's Flower and a piece of Rock" the primary story begins with the conversation between the author and his grandmother. Grandmother becomes the narrator for the core story. The secondary story is about Madhavan and his wife Kalyanidevi. The periphery story begins during summer vacation in Kerala. The author recalls his childhood memories about the monkey man to his grandmother. The author tried to fascinate his grandmother, instead got fascinated by her story narration. They are going towards a forest area to lit a lamp on a rock. Grandmother started to narrate a story about Madhavan and Kalyanidevi. In that core story Madhavan, the protagonist is identified with the victory of the communist party that gave him the thought and power to fight against oppression. This kind of character gets a flux in his characterization when made to walk in the dark forest alone that disturbed his mental strength. The suspense is created in the story with the inclusion of Yakshi's presence while taking a shortcut toward the village by Madhavan. Primary story suspense is resolved by the relation to the secondary story and where the destination is the same and unknown till the end of the story. Grandmother lit the lamp stating that this is the rock lured by Kalyanidevi's spirit. To readers and Madhavan's surprise, it was his wife Kalyanidevi

murdered by Madhavan. When the truth gets revealed, it was a shocking incident that can't be reversed and created a disturbed feelings in the minds of the readers.

In “A Pair of Pale Hands” the primary story begins with the wedding celebration. The author begins his journey towards Udupi, accompanying his wife and her sisters-in-law and a distant cousin Radhika. Radhika becomes the narrator for the secondary story. In her story, an old woman narrates the myth of Narkasur. Radhika leaves the conclusion of the story to the author. Thus, the suspense was intended in an unexpected way where Radhika finished her story in an open-ended way and the author could not find Radhika inside his car. The truth and reality are blurred and gives a destabilizing effect in the story. The author gets to know the truth about Radhika's death and she narrated her own story to him.

Both the story narration begins by the author himself and shifted to the second-person narrative. In the first short story, the core narrator gives the description of the victim and the reason for victimization. But in the second short story, the core plot is identified as a first-person narration. The narrator turns to be the victim and the truth explained by the driver(murderer) to the author at the end of the story. The suspense in the murder and the truth behind Kalyani Devi and Radhika's death gets revealed in relation to the core and periphery story.

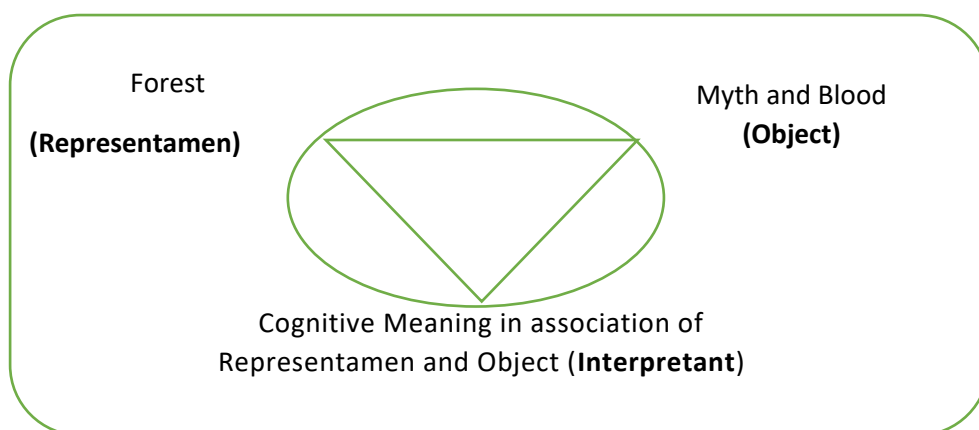


Figure 5. Cognitive correlation of Triadic theory

Conclusion:

This paper redefines the cognitive sense in gothic fiction that could be analysed through semiotic study. Hari Kumar's short stories in view with Charles Sander Pierce's Triadic model, has helped the researchers to identify Forest as Representamen that gives the basic form to the gothic sign. In addition to it, the Objects are Myth and Blood that refers to gothic symbols. The first symbol is invisible characters, they are Yakshi and Narkasur. They create an influence of fear in the minds of the isolated characters in the forest as mentioned by Hari Kumar in his stories. The correlation of the sign and symbols elevates the essence of the gothic stories. The meaning is gradually correlated and interpreted to give knowledge from shared to agreed meaning within the story. The second symbol "blood" concludes the story with the sudden decision that gives the twist in forming a gothic story. Thus, semiotically the gothic short stories could be used to analyse its process of meaning-making. Finally, the embedded narrative, on the whole, gives a proper structure to progress our understanding by correlating the theory of the triadic model in meaning-making.

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