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Unveiling Truths: Perspectives Across Time and Cultures

Introduction

Have you ever taken the time to reflect on the significance of narratives and how they shape our knowledge and understanding of what is true as opposed to what is believed to be true? The knowledge that we have in our minds transcends morality, time, and culture. As they say, one needs to understand where they are coming from in order to determine where they are going or where they should go, and in order to achieve that we need to ask the right kind of questions. In doing so we can be able to revisit and revise what we already know to be true. As we consider the various forms of literature at our disposal to deduce the truth about our history and that of other cultures, religions, and traditions, we come across recurring events of oppression, injustice, and the relentless pursuit of justice across different societies. In this paper, through an examination of diverse literature spanning continents and epochs, I will demonstrate how concepts of evil, truth, societal pressures, and individual interests serve as pivotal themes that shape human behavior societal dynamics, and cultural narratives.

Methodology

To understand the literature in this unit, we need to apply a critical theory to the existing literature and formulate an argument based on the critical theory. Considering the critical theory for this unit, “evil is the interruption of a truth by the pressure of particular or individual interests,” which states that by doing things that go contrary to the norm, we are

essentially suppressing the truth. The suppression of truth stems from the relentless pursuit of individual interests which can sometimes be viewed as individuals having too much ambition. This pursuit, which is a result of individuals being too focused on success causes them to withhold the truth or rather impose their own truth to create some sort of mental slavery.

A good example in a real-life scenario would be a situation whereby a team member deliberately withholds information or even goes as far as bending the rules of play in order to sabotage a team effort for the sake of their selfish gains. By withholding knowledge and information or altering the truth, individuals can alter how others perceive reality. As we expand our critical lens toward literature from a diverse set of cultures such as the indigenous people of North America, Oceania, South America, Asia, and Africa, we can notice a lot of interference of truth in the form of the destruction of sacred sites by invaders in Oceania, displacement of communities from their indigenous land in native North America, and the destruction ancient civilizations and literature in Asia and Africa, in order to impose a different form of truth (Poddar and Patke).

1. Evil

The ancient cultures of Oceania and North America believed that evil was a powerful concept which they likened to a spiritual being capable of bringing a plague or a natural disaster to the people. For this reason, various substances and practices have been used by other different cultures to shield themselves from perceived evil beings. This essentially reflects the complex relationship between belief systems, traditions, and the concept of evil in itself. For instance, the use of yellow cedar bark was significant in North America due to the belief that it contained anti-inflammatory properties that had the ability to cure wounds and chase away evil spirits (Eastern Red Cedar: Native Cultural Significance).

But what exactly is evil? Evil might be associated with acts of wrongdoing, darkness, or anything that goes against the norm (what is considered to be good, or right within a belief system). In the context of ancient world literature, evil was seen as something malevolent such as a spirit or a mysterious force that could cause trouble. However in the context of our critical argument, evil is the act of suppressing the actual truth and substituting it for a different more malicious version that creates a premeditated reality. In this case, the acts of violence, deceit, and distortion of reality prevent the truth from coming out to light thus ensuring a sort of mental slavery on the target subjects.

2. Interruption of a Truth

As stated earlier, the interruption of truth emerges as a recurring theme in narratives across diverse cultures and historical epochs demonstrating the complex relationship between deception and concealment within human interactions. In truth, there are instances whereby concealing the truth may have negative consequences. For instance, in the narrative setting of ancient Greece in the text, the *Odyssey*, within the context of hospitality and disguise, Ulysses prepares for his encounter with the old woman, mindful of the distinctive scar on his leg that could potentially reveal his true identity (Homer). This scenario shows how people navigate circumstances whereby revealing the truth may have negative consequences on them and while that may be a different perspective to justify the interruption of truth, our focus is on the theoretical framework.

In the realm of politics, interruption of truth may be viewed as a strategy to manipulate the ballot or pass a motion by swaying the masses in favor of a political agenda to maintain power or cover up for mistakes. Within ancient Asia, strategic counsel is offered, emphasizing the necessity of resources—money, manpower, and cavalry—for achieving dominion over diverse nations and peoples (Pickett). This demonstrates the relationship

between truth and power, where individual political interests force people to manipulate what is known to be true and impose a different perspective to influence public opinion.

3. Pressure

In order to understand the key concept of pressure, we can shift our focus to contemporary issues in our society today whereby individuals struggle with pressures of familial expectations and the anticipation towards fulfilling their destinies. For example, in the *Odyssey* by Homer, in the realm of ancient Greece, within the context of familial dynamics and succession struggles, Telemachus expresses his frustration with the pressure from his parents and the encroachment of suitors on his estate, highlighting his readiness to take charge of his affairs. There exists a conflict between individual autonomy and societal expectations in that people are forced to conform to the norm.

In the context of our critical theory, however, pressure not only comes from external forces but rather from internal forces in the form of individual expectations and self-drive toward success. Having a self-drive is a good thing because it propels us to achieve our goals. However, sometimes our self-drive may cause us to be too ambitious and lead us to disregard the limits of our boundaries and essentially self-destruction and the destruction of those around us. For instance, Machiavelli's advice to rulers reflects the intense pressures of political leadership, where the imperative to succeed often overrides ethical considerations (Machiavelli, *The Prince*).

4. Individual Interests

In the middle of the chaos that is worldly pressures, and expectations, others seek to achieve their personal goals and shape their destinies. Whether malicious or not, personal interests make or break an individual. In the context of ancient Asia particularly within the narrative of the *Ramayana*, Rama declares his identity and purpose, reflecting themes of duty, honor, and pursuit of justice (Dutt, 1917). This a great example of an individual who lets his

interests shape actions and influence the course of events for good rather than pursue malicious agendas at the expense of those around them. For instance, Adam Smith's theory of self-interest, as articulated in *The Wealth of Nations*, posits that individuals acting in pursuit of their own interests within a free-market system can lead to overall societal benefit (Smith).

However in the context of our critical theory, when we apply it to the world literature we notice the emergence of different ideas and perspectives on individual interests. The existence of malicious individual interests has been present even in ancient civilizations. These interests have led to the birth of hardships and greatness in equal measure. When we consider the narrative of Ibn Yassin, and how his commitment to religion created a holistic environment for the spread of Islam, we encounter additional narratives regarding the credibility of historical accounts in North Africa regarding their questionable deeds which even led to the rise of great cities and empires, came at the expense of other stable communities and regions at the time.

Conclusion

As we consider world literature to deduce the truth about our history and the history of other cultures, religions, and traditions, can agree that there are broad and sometimes confusing interpretations of truth, evil, and individual interests. However, in our quest to seek out the truth and formulate the right questions, we apply this critical theory to world literature and try to separate what we already know, and what is documented. By following this approach we stand a better chance at deducing the truth about cultures and communities across the globe.

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