

Concept of Ontology, Ontological Transformation and its Representation in The Wake of Pandemic Crisis in *Malorie*

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This research paper explores the ontological transformation of the image of human from being a rational, authentic and intelligent being into a distorted self in *Malorie*. This study also highlights the negation of metanarratives in the form of postmodern mini-narratives which describes the fragmented image of a postmodern man.

Methodology: The purpose of this study is to reveal the fragmented self of human and his ontological transformation in the light of Brian McHale's concept of 'ontology' from *Postmodernist Fiction*. By doing a postmodern reading of the novel, different characteristics of postmodernism will be explored with the support of Bran Nicol, 2009. P.'s *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009) and Hans Bertens' *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (1955). This research highlights Jean-Francois Lyotard's claim of postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives" from *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* in *Malorie*.

Findings: This research finds out postmodern mini-narratives such as fragmented narration, paranoia, nostalgia, intertextuality and temporal distortion or schizophrenia. These mini-narratives show ontological transformation of a human being from being the center of everything into a contorted self.

Conclusion: So this study highlights the contorted condition of a postmodern man in ontological terms. It also presents postmodern mini-narratives which elaborate the decentered image of a human from being the center of everything to be a contorted self.

Keywords: Ontological Transformation, Mini-Narratives, Post Modernism, Invisible Creatures, *Malorie*.

Introduction

The novel *Malorie* is written by a fecund American writer, Josh Malerman. He is an incredible short story writer, novelist, singer, and film producer as well. He is known for his astounding imagination. His novel *Bird Box*, written in 2014, later became popular due to its picturized form, also titled Bird Box. It deals with

Article History

Received:
August 21, 2022

Revised:
September 23, 2022

Accepted:
September 28, 2022

Published:
September 30, 2022

revenge, horror, loss, fear, the desire to invent something new, guilt, nature, and invisible powers. They also show the relationship of humans with Mother Nature and its nurturing effect. However, his novels revolve around the weird shades of unseen forces which terrify human beings and always push them to raise questions about their existence.

Malerman's famous novel, *Bird Box and its sequel Malorie*, also called *Bird Box 2*, unlocks again in the set-up of a pandemic. The conditions are worse here because the mysterious forces have become even stronger. Human beings have failed to overcome the situation because they are no longer in power. As narrated by the Daily Express in praise of *Malorie*, "The highly anticipated follow-up to *Bird Box* and it's even better. Deliciously dark, disturbing yet captivating...one of the best horror stories published for years" (Malerman, 2020, P.01). The novel *Malorie* deals with the multiple issues of the pandemic crisis, violence, fear of invisible creatures, human deformity and the struggle for survival in the pandemic. Although, postmodern world is chaotic in its nature in the novel and this chaos is enhanced by pandemic, yet everyone strives to cope with the pandemic as well as its upcoming crises. The characters still have an element of humanity in their hearts, such as when they help and share the sorrows of one another.

Research Objectives

- To discern the ontological transformation in the context of the novel *Malorie*.
- To trace the changes in the image of human from being a rational into a contorted self through the lens of postmodernism.

Research Questions

- What is ontological transformation? How does the novel represent it in the wake of pandemic crisis?
- How do the postmodern Mini-Narratives transform the image of the human being from being rational into a contorted self through different characters in the novel *Malorie*?

Literature Review

Significantly, the novel *Malorie* negates the Metanarratives "grand stories which structure the discourses of modern religion, politics, philosophy, and science" by presenting Mini-Narratives in 1979 (Nicol, 2009. P. 11). In postmodernism, Grand Narratives replaced by Mini-Narratives such as temporal distortion (Vonnegut 1998) or schizophrenia (Jameson 1991), paranoia (Tanner 1971 et al.), nostalgia (Jameson 1988), indeterminacy (Derrida 1960), intertextuality (Kristeva 1960), fragmentation (Jameson 1988) and randomness of chaotic world. Similarly, multiple realities are another important facet of Postmodernism (Cohen et al.). This study will explore how Mini-Narratives reveal the distorted meaning of life in Malerman's *Malorie* in the pandemic conditions.

Other than Mini-Narratives, *Malorie* deals with the transformation of the human image which is another important aspect of postmodernism and this transformation occurs ontologically. According to Collinsdictionary.com, the term *Transformation* literally means 'to change' or 'to alter' and by keeping in view this meaning, the human image is changed into a decentered man ("transformation"). He is no longer the focus of everything, as in the past, when he was considered to be the center of everything. However, according to Merriam-webster.com, the term *ontology* means "a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being" ("ontology"). In postmodernism, Brian McHale has introduced the concept of ontology. He says in his book that the focus in postmodernism is on the world and its being such as what type of world is this and what is a role of man in it (McHale, 2001. P. 10). So, ontological transformation is a shift from one position of the human being to the other.

By keeping this view, human image has been transformed ontologically from being the center of everything into a decentered self. However, the consequence of this ontological transformation is that human's existence has now been called into question and the objections have begun to rise against his distorted self (Bertens, 1955, P.32). *Malorie* illustrates a perfect example of the pandemic crises as mysterious creatures

have decentered the image of human and anarchy has prevailed everywhere in the postmodern world of the novel. Dark shadows of unseen forces are present in the entire atmosphere of the novel and they are the center of everything. They control human beings and have created a havoc in the world of *Malorie*.

Postmodernism is the new phase of Modernism (Nicol, 2009, P. 02). Modernism favors rationality, originality and depth while Postmodernism refers to the broader study of phenomena such as human emotions, multiplicity, diverse truths, different realities, paradox, self-reflexivity, pastiche (Nicol, 2009, P. 02). Patricia Waugh explains the difference between Modernism and Postmodernism by saying, “Where modernism is preoccupied by *consciousness*...postmodernism is much more interested in *fictionality*” (Waugh 1984, P. 14). Likewise, the represented world of books is constructed, framed, and presented from the viewpoint of another. Most importantly, Postmodernism negates the Grand Narratives and supports Mini-Narratives like temporal distortion or schizophrenia, paranoia, fragmentation, intertextuality, nostalgia, multiple realities, and randomness (Nicol, 2009. P. 12).

According to a postmodern French philosopher, Jean-Francois Lyotard, who defines Postmodernism as “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1984, P. 22). Nicol, 2009. P. uses Lyotard’s definition of Metanarratives that are grand stories which design the discourses of religion, philosophy, politics and science (Nicol, 2009, P. 11). So, Postmodernism is an age of declining Metanarratives and postmodernists do not believe in totalizing grand stories, rather they fashion alternative little narratives (Nicol, 2009). “Postmodernity, Lyotard argues, prefers ‘little narratives’ (petit recits), those who do not attempt to present an overarching ‘Truth’ but offer a qualified, limited; truth’, one relative to a particular situation” (Nicol, 2009, P. 12). Hence, Mini-Narratives such as paranoia, fragmentation, intertextuality, irony, pastiche, temporal distortion, multiple realities and nostalgia explain the limited truth that supports Postmodernism stance in *Malorie*.

Additionally, the world of *Malorie* has pandemic of mysterious creatures, emotions, fear, the quest for happy life, supernatural things, existential crisis, darkness, isolation, uncertainty of human life and its limitations. In fact, this novel presents a complete picture of a dystopian world. Throughout the novel, Malerman does not let his readers escape the suspense. Till the end, his every word further contributes to horrify the readers

An interesting thing is that Malerman has introduced a new sense of terror in *Malorie* because in *Bird Box*, the creatures could not touch human beings but now, they can touch them and due to this reason, Malorie and “...her children cover their skin with hoodies and gloves to prevent the creatures touching them” (Wilkes 2020, P. 01). Different people have different perspectives related to these mysterious forces but it is mentioned in the novel that their power has tripled now because “they’re not necessarily taller than they were before... but wider. They take up more space” (Wilkes 2020, P. 01). They can hustle and even make noise which troubles the characters. They become more careful because a little step of carelessness can cost them their lives. Malorie’s children Olympia and Tom do not want to follow the strict rules of their mother. “Tom and Olympia both chafe against their rigid upbringing – neatly related to teen pop culture in which parents are ‘from another planet’ – and Tom, in particular, perceives Malorie’s stranglehold on his imagination and experimentation as abusive (Wilkes2020, P. 01). Also, they want to explore the world and that is why, Tom invents new things so that he can experiment his new discoveries on the creatures.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research encompasses a systematic division. The whole study is segmented into five sections namely, introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis and conclusion. Josh Malerman’s *Malorie* has been taken as a primary text for this research. Interpretive approach has been used to analyze the data. This research explores the ontological transformation of the image of human and the decline of metanarratives in a postmodern-pandemic world of the novel *Malorie* by Josh Malerman. Through the character of Malorie, the struggle to face the pandemic crises would be highlighted. Primarily, by applying the postmodern concept of ‘mini-narratives’ of Jean-Francois Lyotard from *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) and Brian McHale’s postmodern concept of ‘ontology’ from

Postmodernist Fiction (1987); secondarily, Bran Nicol, 2009. P. and Hans Bertens' *Postmodernism in the light of two books The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009) and *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History* (1994), this paper contends that a pandemic crisis has ontologically transformed the human image from being a rational and intelligent being into a distorted self through mini-narratives. To consolidate the arguments, secondary research data has been used. Research article, journals, web resources and books have been consulted to conduct a thorough research.

Discussion

Ontology is an essential element of Brian McHale's theory of Postmodernism. He does not see how other postmodernists consider the postmodern world. However, his theory is concerned with ontology to know about the existence of this world and the purpose of a human being present in this world. According to the Dictionary.Cambridge.org, the term *ontology* means "the part of philosophy that studies what it means to exist" ("Ontology"). So, McHale's version of postmodernism deals with the knowledge of the existence or being. According to him, postmodern writers talk about the existence of this world (Nicol, 2009. P. 33). Bran Nicol, 2009. P. shares an idea about postmodernism which is presented by McHale giving his description of postmodernism in these words: "foregrounds the problems or inconsistencies regarding the creation of a fictional world which we explored above – elements which are integral to every work of fiction but are passed over or suppressed in some, such as realist ones" (2001, P.33). This shows that postmodern writers explore how the fictional world is created and what other vital elements are included.

Similarly, in Malerman's novel *Malorie*, the ontological transformation of the image of human from being rational and intelligent into a fragmented self occurs. According to Britannica.com, the word *transformation* means "a complete or major change in someone's or something's appearance, form, etc." ("Transformation"). Ontological transformation begins in *Bird Box* and it continues to happen in *Malorie*. Different characters such as Malorie and her two children Tom and Olympia, Gary, Tom the man; all these characters transform ontologically. Consciously or unconsciously they question about their existence and their surrounded world. "...man is a genuine question to himself and consequently he inescapably asks that question. Or perhaps it should be said that the sting of the anthropological question belongs to the very essence of man..." (Oshima 1974, P.107). The reason for this self-questioning is the transformation of the image of a human due to the pandemic occurred by mysterious creatures. Before the break out of the pandemic, human beings were considered to be the center of everything and they cared for one another. For instance, in *Bird Box*, when Malorie gets worried after seeing her naked belly in the mirror as she misses her periods, her sister Shannon says to her, "'Okay,' she says. 'Let's not freak out. Let's go get a test. That's what people do. Okay? Don't worry'" (Malerman, 2014. P. 17). Both sisters care for each other and maintain each other's needs.

In the same way, both children of Malorie; Olympia and Tom, are a perfect example of McHale's concept of ontology. Ontology can be understood in contrast with the concept of epistemology in modernism. "McHale's theory is that the 'dominant', or 'focusing component' of modernism is 'epistemological', or to do with knowing... by contrast, the dominant of postmodernism, is 'ontological', to do with being" (Nicol, 2009. P. 33). Modernists believe in knowing this world while postmodernists deal with the study of being. Although Malorie's children are born amidst the pandemic crisis and do not see the outside world because of blindfolds, they want to know about the world and its colors. They know that their mother is strict and she will not allow them to go outside at any cost. Despite strictness, Tom always tries to discover something new to experiment on invisible creatures but his mother only believes in blindfolds. "The last she saw of Tom he was in what was once the staff lounge, pieces of new invention at his knees. Malorie is responsible for those pieces. Only six, Tom the boy invents like Tom the man, his namesake, once did...now, here, she always destroys what Tom's made and reminds him that the blindfold is the only protection any of them will ever need" (Malerman, 2020, P.*Malorie* 04). Malorie gets worried whenever she observes the activities of her son because the extraordinary intelligence of her children may deprive her of them.

Likewise, Tom's inventions always scare Malorie. He does not want to live the limited life that his mother has set for him rather he wants to explore the world. In the context of exploration of the world, McHale foregrounds questions as, "which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted...What is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?" (McHale, 2001, P. 10). These types of questions Tom thinks in his mind but he cannot ask his mother. Therefore, he secretly does his experiments and shares everything with Olympia. She prevents him from doing so and reprimands him for worrying their mother. It is an acknowledged fact if a human being is not allowed to see anything, his curiosity begins to develop. To satisfy his need, Tom discovers new ways to find out the secret of mysterious creatures. He wants to enjoy his life as "He wants to feel the night upon him. The open air...the world...the stars, the sky, the moon, the darkness...He's sixteen years old, he's hungry for a new life" (Malerman, 2020, P.102). Instead of his wishes, he is not permitted to put off his blindfolds even in his house. He wants to see the creatures and feel their presence but he has to follow the rules of his mother.

Moreover, Malorie and her two children present the ontological transformation of the image of a human from being an intelligent into a fragmented self. "Postmodernism posits a fragmented self that has no essence, only images...The postmodern self is fragmented and decentered with a kind of emotional flatness or depthlessness. According to Gergen, postmodern culture erases the category of self. The self is erased as the person is saturated with images..." (Allan 1997, P. 01). As Malorie is born before the pandemic crisis and in this sense, she is presented as an intellectual being while her children portray the distorted self of a human. They are born when mysterious creatures created havoc on the earth. Malorie has to struggle hard to teach her children how the new world has been created and what elements are present in it. However, she faces many difficulties in their upbringing. "Wires run from under the back door into the first-floor bedrooms, where amplifiers alert Malorie and the children to any sounds coming from outside the house. The three of them live this way" (Malerman, 2014, P.07). Malorie always takes precautionary measures because she cannot take any risk regarding her children. She uses different things to make them differentiate among them. She not only trains them in listening but also creates a new world for them. "Malorie remembers thinking she'd have to catch every beast on the planet and bring it home for the children to know what they looked like. What else might they like if given the chance to view it? What would the Girl think of a fox? A raccoon...she would have had to re-create the globe for them" (Malerman, 2014, P.19). She gives them training with the help of her drawings, paintings, and animals near them because her children are born with unique traits and she wants them to hear beyond the blindfolds.

Afterwards, Malorie's children become perfect in their art of listening and they can even hear the breathing of hidden creatures near them. Their mother prepares them for the confrontation of two different worlds in front of them. As McHale expresses, "close encounters' between different worlds, placing them in confrontation' and, as a result, 'foregrounds their respective structures and disparities between them'" (McHale, 2001, P. 60). On one hand, one world is their house where they live while on other hand, the second world is outside which they have not seen. "The children have never seen the world outside their home. Not even through the windows. And Malorie hasn't looked in more than four years" (Malerman, 2014, P. 07). This is the situation of the pandemic because all the doors and windows are covered with black paper. "The world outside, the empty malls and restaurants, the thousands of unused vehicles, the forgotten products on idle store shelves...It all whispers of what awaits them" (Malerman, 2014, P. 10). In this way, mysterious creatures dominate the world. They transform the image of humans and become the center of attention. People around the globe, news channels, and social media; everyone talks about them.

Furthermore, before the outbreak of the pandemic, Malorie and her sister Shannon live happily with their family. They enjoy the golden days of their lives but they do not have any idea how the pandemic is in war with their world. Likewise, McHale elucidates in his book *Postmodernist Fiction* about the conflict of two worlds, "What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated" (2001, P. 10). Malorie and Shannon do not know what can happen to their

world of humans. They cannot guess that such circumstances can be created which may force them not to meet their family again because both the sisters live in another apartment in the other city. "...both dreamed of living downstate, near Detroit, where they imagined there were parties, concerts, job opportunities, and men in abundance" (Malerman, 2014 P.16). These are the reasons to live separately from their parents because Malorie and Shannon want to fulfill their dreams. They do not know a pandemic will break out which would be the reason of their transformation in ontological terms. Though the hidden creatures violate the boundaries and devastatingly play their role, human beings still try to cope with the ongoing situation of the worst pandemic.

Subsequently, in the beginning, the characters in *Malorie* cannot understand what is happening around them because unexpected events occur in some of the parts of the world. The media highlights such events and scares the people round the globe. With the increasing numbers of suicides, the characters become panic and do not understand what to believe and not. At first, Malorie does not bother such strange happenings unless Shannon continuously talks about them in front of her. "A major advantage of social media and other digital platforms is the ease of access to information...Such provision of key information can help reduce the mental health consequences of the pandemic" (Williams, 2022, P. 01). This is the reason Shannon does not become worried rather she behaves in a calm way. She consoles her sister as well as takes care of her. In the recent days, the internet telecasts first incident named 'the Russia Report' of the pandemic. In this report, a man was driving a truck outside St. Petersburg with her friend but he took his life using a saw. This is the first incident of the pandemic which Malorie and Shannon hear about on television. At first, they do not consider it important but the increasing numbers of such mysterious suicides force them to believe in the ongoing situation. "But then, a second story appeared. Similar circumstances. This time in Yakutsk...And a third story, in Omsk, Russia nearly two thousand miles southeast of St. Petersburg...This time there was video footage" (Malerman, 2014 P.16). All these occurrences in the world confuse both sisters because nobody knows the reasons for these suicides. Whatever is happening, it is increasing within minutes and the characters are no longer the center point of the world rather the hidden creatures become the pivot.

Correspondingly, the image of a human transforms ontologically after the pandemic. Everyone talks about them such as social media, websites, and television only show the damage and suicides of people around the world. It means the pandemic cuts the people off from the outer world. They make the houses their inner world and the second is the world outside them which has become the place of invisible creatures. Malorie's son Tom has a curiosity about the outer world and that is why he does not want to be blindfolded all the time. He takes great interest in knowing the outer world and mysterious creatures. He wants to know his existence, the purpose of the world, and what is his role in this world because "ontologically, the story creates and describes a world or worlds. In this new world or existence, the text does not care whether its perceptions are correct or not, rather it tends to experience and explain the reality" (Pourmoradi and Shahpar, 2019, P. 01). In this way, Malerman tries to explain the reality of both worlds in *Malorie* and he also describes the different experiences of the characters. Malorie thinks only blindfolds can save them however, Tom does not think like this. "Tom loathes the blindfolds. Sometimes, when he's feeling particularly lazy, he doesn't use one at all. He keeps his eyes closed" (Malerman, 2020, P.17-8). Malorie does not want her son to be like Tom (the man) whom she met in the house. She wants her children to be in front of her eyes. This is the reason she does not like the inventions of her son.

Additionally, when the pandemic flares up, Malorie along with other characters presents a picture of distorted self. The self of Malorie becomes fragmented. "The self is erased as the person is saturated with images from the media that '...furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. The images of the postmodern self are the reality of the postmodern self'" (Allan, 1997, P. 01). In the postmodern world, self is fluid and distorted. This fragmented self of postmodern man is explored in the world of *Malorie*. Malorie has seen her sister's dead body and her housemates' suicides. She has brought up her children alone and she has faced the pandemic crises which change her ontologically and psychologically. She wants to behave lovingly with her children but the environment around her has forced

her to behave rigidly. “She wants to hear farther up the hall, past the breathing, to the screams of the people who live here, to the exact things they say, to the exact location of her kids” (Malerman, 2020, P. 05). Her children are her legacy because, despite her ontological transformation, she only thinks about them and even takes risks to give them protection. Tom sometimes gets angry with his mother while “Olympia has told him in private about the differences in generations that she’s read about in her books. She says it’s common for teenagers to feel like their parents are ‘from another planet’” (Malerman, 2020, P. 19). This is how both the children think about their mother because the mysterious creatures have transformed everything in the world along with the ontological transformation of the image of a human.

Equally, the hidden creatures have not only transformed the world but also have left deep influences on the newly born children ontologically. These creatures generate different questions in their minds. There is no doubt McHale holds his opinion about postmodernists that they talk about ontology. In this sense, Pablo G. Wright says in his article named “*Postmodern Ontology, Anthropology, and Religion*”:

...postmodern ontology can be viewed as a Western ‘regional ontology’ that is gradually transforming the entire world through mass media, information technology, and the processes of globalization and transnationalization. It exhibits a tendency to think of the individual as an open, ambiguous, dynamic entity, which means that there is less confidence in the autonomous, modern individual (2000, P.85-6).

This quotation shows that due to technological advancements and globalization, there are multiple interpretations of the people in the world of *Malorie*. Some characters call the creatures a dreadful consequence of science while some say they are just human’s false notions. However, Malorie’s children do not think this way about them. They can hear and touch the invisible creatures but their mother cannot do this. “Her kids have taught her a lot about listening since arriving at Jane Tucker School for the Blind. And while Malorie will never hear the world they do, she can try” (Malerman, 2020, P.04). She yells at Tom when he invents something new and tries to experience it on the creatures. She thinks that the mysterious creatures may be the advanced form of technology that has been designed to ruin mankind from the world while some other characters think they are the inner fears of a human. These different ideas make the characters confused personalities who have very little confidence in themselves. They cannot say a definite statement about these mysterious creatures.

Moreover, information technology, mass media, and science have transformed the image of a human. Before the progress of science, the concerns of humanity were considered supreme but after the development of technology, everything has turned into an ambiguous entity. The people interact with representations and not actual things. Media does not present the news rather it produces the simulation of reality which appears more real. “Postmodern media no longer provide ‘secondary representations of reality; they affect and produce the reality that they mediate’. Moreover, in our postmodern world, all events that ‘matter’ are media events” (Mambrol, 2018, P.01). Thus, the role of media in postmodern age is very important. It does not circulate the news but it produces it. It has changed the lives of the people and due to the advanced media and digitalized world, technology has become the center of attention and nobody has time for the other. In the same way, Shannon sees the early signs of outbreak of the pandemic on the television. Both sisters observe unusual changes in their surroundings. These are the signs which show not only the outbreak of the deadliest pandemic but also the technological growth in the world. Malorie does not bother what her sister says but deep down, she is worried. “The Russia Report media explosion worries her, but she does not take it as seriously as her sister. Others online are, like Malorie, more skeptical...” (Malerman, 2014, P.20). Such early signs emerge and show the outbreak of the pandemic as well as the ontological transformation of the image of a human.

Definitely, after being transformed ontologically, the characters face the devastating effects of mysterious creatures. Nobody knows their reality whether they are man-made products or they are the creation of science and technology. “The postmodernist paradigm suggests that social reality is diverse, pluralistic, and constantly in flux” (Trivedi 2020, P. 01). Due to this fluidity, every character generates his truth and comes

under the spell of those merciless creatures. Nobody is sure what the reasons behind all the suicides are rather everyone shows a soft corner to the other. Though the invisible creatures are hidden, still they are prevailing chaos and destruction in the world. “Blankets cover every window in the house. The front door is never left unlocked and never left open. Reports of unexplainable events have been surfacing with an alarming frequency. What was once breaking news twice a week now develops every day” (Malerman, 2014, P. 25). Now, people are confirmed about the self-immolation of a person that it happens when he sees something but that something is problematic for all the characters. “Days passed in which Malorie experienced a sort of double life” (Malerman, 2014, P. 25). Malorie does not understand what she would do in this time of crisis. Neither she knows the reason behind the chaos nor can she believe what media is presenting. In this way, the reality is in continuous flux.

Without a doubt, Malorie’s step not only can put her in the danger but also can take her children’s lives. The people call these creatures with different names such as ‘The Problem’, ‘The Devil’, ‘Self-destruction’, and ‘Self-immolation’ etc. This problem is very violent because they are not considered as intelligent as they were before the outburst of the pandemic. The hidden creatures have changed the environment of the world. Malorie lives in isolation along with her children. She cannot do shopping for them; however, she tries to manage everything in the house even she entertains them. “According to research, from shopping, working, and school to traveling and entertainment — the pandemic has changed how people navigate daily life” (Drake, 2022, P. 01). There is no doubt that the pandemic changes not only the daily lives of the characters but also transforms their image ontologically. It is pathetic that Malorie has been raised on sight but her children have been brought up on hearing. “Malorie trained herself as she trained them. But she would never hear as well as they one day would. She was twenty-four years old before she was able to discern the difference between a raindrop and a tap on a window, relying only on her hearing. She was raised on *sight*” (Malerman, 2014, P. 18). This is how Malorie and her children confront with their ontological transformation. She can easily distinguish between a raindrop and a rattle on a window. Unlike their mother, they cannot differ among these things. She blames herself for their upbringing.

Additionally, as Malorie has seen the golden colors of her life by enjoying them with her sister and family, she feels pathetic when she thinks of her children. She blames the modern era which is responsible for this devastation. For instance, Steve Cornell says in his article named “Change (ontological transformation)” “...we all (or, at least, all sane people) recognize that something is desperately wrong with humanity. Consider that the most progressive century of human history (the 20th) was also the most violent” (2020, P. 01). This violence and destruction have been depicted in the world of *Malorie* which transform their existence into fragmented selves. Malorie thinks of her children as she is to raise them alone without any assistance. She ponders, “Malorie swallows hard and imagines raising them by herself...Could she even do it? Could she protect them another ten years? Could she guard them long enough for them to guard her? And for what? What kind of life is she protecting them for? *You’re a bad mother...You are saving their lives for a life not worth living*” (Malerman, 2014, P. 08). She fulfills all her duties devotedly but one question always keeps hovering in her mind is she a good mother? Do mysterious creatures exist or they are her inner fears?

Following this, these two questions specifically the first one disturbs Malorie. She cannot do away with this but this is how she has to survive. Malorie and other characters think science has discovered them so that the population of the world can be controlled through suicides of the human beings. “Human capacity for evil appears to be limitless...We are both complicitous in and molested by the evil of our race. We both discover evil and invent it; we both ratify and extend it.... By disposition, practice, and habit, human beings let loose a great, rolling momentum of evil across generations” (Cornell, 2022, P.01). This is how a human being has the power to discover anything. Tom presents such kind of state of mind and so, he keeps on trying to discover new things. They want to enjoy life but their mother’s aim is to survive. “And Tom and Olympia both have pondered aloud, in their ways, the worth of a life in which the only aim is to keep living...” (Malerman, 2020, P. 20). Malorie’s children do not like her strict nature. They want to explore this new world. They want to dream but their mother has already told them their purpose of living is just to

survive instead of enjoying it to the fullest. Sometimes, Malorie thinks “How can she expect her children to dream as big as the stars if they can’t lift their heads to gaze upon them?” (Malerman, 2014, P. 58). Although she wants her children to live their lives according to their choices, she cannot do anything in this regard. She has to do what is better for their survival in the pandemic. So, she remains adamant about her strict nature with her limited knowledge.

Moreover, the characters make different assumptions depending on their knowledge and information. Science and technology have invented such things which can be a reason for the destruction of mankind and mysterious creatures can be taken as an example of this discovery. She wishes the pandemic may end soon and she would enjoy her normal life with Tom and Olympia. As Kimberly Drake in his article named “How has the pandemic changed our behavior?” says, “the experience was truly different for us all but similar at its core. Most of us longed for connection and a return to ‘normal’” (2022, P.01). So, when the pandemic breaks out, she prays it may end so that she can meet her loved ones. She also wants her children to live a normal life. In this sense, her children become extra smart. “Olympia’s baby book, Malorie recalls, taught her many things. But there was one sentence in *At Last . . . a Baby!* that really struck a chord: *Your baby is smarter than you think*” (Malerman, 2014, P.70). Thus, Malorie’s children are transformed ontologically. The new generation such as Tom and Olympia are born smart because they can see and feel the presence of creatures around them. While the old generation such as Malorie, Tom the man, Felix, Olympia the woman, Don, etc. were raised on sight but now, they have to live blindfolded. They are unable to feel the presence of hidden creatures. Somehow, they try to cope with the ongoing situation.

Likewise, despite all the ontological transformation in the wake of the pandemic crisis, one thing becomes more prominent in the world of *Malorie* and *Bird Box*; this is to help others selflessly in crucial circumstances. This shows the soft and good side of the human heart. In spite of all evils and crises that prevailed in the world, humanity still exists. “Our use of resources to work for the good and to help organize society, then we can see and say that we are being transformed, that we are undergoing an ontological change, a change in our very being” (Rankin 2013, P. 01). Assisting others in hard times transforms the characters ontologically and makes them valuable in the eyes of others. Malorie sees Shannon’s suicide and does not know what to do because she finds all the windows of the nearby houses covered with black paper. Then, she reads an advertisement in the newspaper, “A home in Riverbridge is opening its doors to strangers. A ‘safe house’ it says. A refuge. A place the owners hope will act as a ‘sanctuary’ as the grim news mounts daily” (Malerman, 2014, P.24). Hence, during the crisis of the pandemic when almost everyone closed the doors of his house, at the same time there were some merciful people who were opening their doors for other human beings.

Apart from these things, some other characters help humanity in the form of introducing a new mode of traveling i.e. ‘The Blind Train’. After hearing about this blind train, she wants to leave the camp but at the same time, she cannot do this. “She’s not leaving this camp. The camp that has kept them safe. The place where Tom and Olympia have grown from children into adults, immensely intelligent teens who can hear all the way to the gates of the camp...She will not jeopardize their lives for closure in her own” (Malerman, 2020, P. 51). Therefore, Camp Yadin is not only their house but also their small world which plays an important role in their lives. After deciding to leave this camp for the sake of unification with her family, Malorie begins her journey on the train with her two children.

Furthermore, Malorie meets the owner of the train named Dean Watts. She compares him with Tom (the man) because there are other characters such as Michael and Tanya who work in the train and assist the passengers as well as help Watts to run the train. They do not think about themselves but they have sympathy for others. This is how interpretations vary from person to person because not all the people are same and there are no hard and fast rules to abide by. As some characters force others to hurt themselves like Gary, however, there are such people as Malorie, Dean Watts, Felix, Jules, Michael, Don, Cheryl, Tom the man, Tanya, etc. who work altruistically for others. So, some people think about others before their interests while others prioritize their benefits even in the crisis. Malorie finds Watts a kind-hearted person who helps humanity. Amidst the crisis of the pandemic along with the ontological transformation of human

beings, some characters become the source of assistance for others and Dean Watts is its best example. He restores the train and facilitates the people in harsh times. Malorie inquires him about his train and he replies, “We deliver all sorts of things. Furniture. Blankets. Canned goods. Even the dead...I want everyone who rides to be as comfortable as possible. It’s not like we’re making money here. There’s no such thing anymore. But I do care. You’ll just have to trust me that much” (Malerman, 2020, P.135-36). This reply of Watts shows his selfless nature and care for others.

In addition, Malorie becomes overwhelmed with Gary and his thoughts. Even after sixteen years have passed, Gary still hovers over her mind. Basically she is scared of him and is constantly in fear. It is a fact whenever a pandemic breaks out; people become scared of one another because they do not know who is infected and who is not. In the presence of Gary, Malorie thinks not only about the well-being of her housemates but also of her children:

“With the entire population at risk, the necessary restricting measures have created an unparalleled scenario, dominated by fear and uncertainty. Even though fear is an essential adaptive mechanism that humans and other species have developed to cope with threats in the environment...there have been numerous reports of suicidal behavior due to fear-related issues, for instance, fear of being infected, fear of infecting others, fear of being quarantined” (Pedrosa et al. 2020, P.01).

Similarly, it shows that Malorie is in a state of imbalance. Gary is always in her mind and behind this behavior; there can be various reasons specifically the fear of being infected. When an unknown person named as a census man, visits Camp Yadin where Malorie lives along with her two children, he delivers a list of papers on their doorstep. She thinks, “The man could be staying here. He could be camping out in the woods, she will say. Who knows how long he’s been watching them, she will say. And the name *Gary* will come up again. As it always does in times of trouble” (Malerman, 2020, P. 25). When Olympia reads those papers delivered by that census man, she comes to know about different incidents in which many people went mad and committed suicides. Malorie thinks Gary may urge them to do so. She cannot forget that time what he did to her lovely housemates and how he killed all of them. Consequently, McHale’s concept of ontology is an important part of postmodernism. No doubt all the characters of *Malorie* portray ontological transformation in the wake of the pandemic crisis; however, Malorie along with her two children Tom and Olympia and Gary are the perfect examples. Ontology has not only transformed the characters’ existence but also has changed their complete way of living and their world.

Conclusion

Conclusively, the nitty-gritty of the whole discussion is by looking at the image of human presented in *Malorie* by Josh Malerman, this study has explored the ontological transformation of the image of human from being rational into a fragmented self through postmodern lens of Brian McHale. In the pre-pandemic times, a human being was considered to be the center of everything. However, after the pandemic hit the world of *Malorie*, the human being has become decentered and he has been replaced with the mysterious creatures.

Acknowledgments

None

Conflict of Interest


Authors have no conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The authors received no funding to conduct this study.

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