

TALES OF VIOLENCE: GOOD-EVIL WITHIN

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Abstract

The evil does not anymore lurk in the dark and hidden lands as in fairy tales or romance. It resides very near to the civilized societies appearing in many diverse forms. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the man, once glorified and placed at the centre of the universe, was portrayed as a morbid creature that has a serious potential for evil. As the line between the good and evil has become blurred, the novelists have produced texts depicting human nature in its bare form. Therefore, disregarding the outdated imaginary borders separating the good and evil, the novelists of the second half of the century, inspired by the developments in psychology and affected by the chaotic world of the Post-Second World War, attempted to reflect the evil and the urge for violence inherent in every man. In this study, three types of instinctive violence and evil presented in the novels of post-1950 English dystopian fiction will be analysed; firstly, violence committed by the innocent towards the innocent; secondly, the violence exercised by the victims towards another victim; and finally, the violence committed by so-called innocent society towards the previously evil. The scope of the study will be limited to the dystopian novels; William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*.

Anahtar Kelimeler: good and evil, borders, *Lord of the Flies*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *A Clockwork Orange*, dystopia, dystopian fiction .

řİDDET ÖYKÜLERİ: İYİ-KÖTÜ İÇİÇE

Oz

Kötülük, artık romanslarda veya masallarda olduđu gibi karanlık gizli diyarlarda gizlenmiyor. Medenileřmiř toplumlar içerisinde birçok farklı biçimde ikamet etmektedir. Yirminci yüzyılın başlangıcı itibariyle, bir zamanlar evrenin ortasında yüceltilen insan, kötülük konusunda ciddi potansiyele sahip hastalıklı bir yaratık olarak portre edilir oldu. İyilik ve kötülüđu ayıran çizgi bulanıklařtıçça roman yazarları insan doğasını tüm çıplaklıđı ile tasvir eden metinler ürettiler. İyilik ve kötülüđu ayıran miadını doldurmuş hayali sınırları dikkate almayan yüzyılın ikinci yarısındaki roman yazarları, psikoloji bilimindeki geliřmelerden ilhamla ve de İkinci Dünya Savařı sonrasının kaotik ortamından etkilenerek her insanın içinde var olan kötülüđe meyilli olma durumunu yansıtmaya çalıştılar. Bu çalışmada 1950 sonrası İngiliz distopya romanında temsil edilen üç tip içgüdüsel řiddet ve kötülük incelenecektir; ilk olarak masum biri tarafından başka bir masuma uygulanan řiddet; ikinci olarak kötülüđu'nun kurbanı olanların başka bir kurbanı uyguladıkları řiddet; ve son olarak sözde masum toplum tarafından daha önce kötü olana uygulana řiddet. Çalışma, William Golding'in *Sineklerin Tanrısı*, Margaret

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| Atwood'un *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü* ve Anthony Burgess'in *Otomatik Portakal* adlı distopik romanlarıyla sınırlı olacaktır.

Key Words: iyilik ve kötülük, *Sineklerin Tanrısı*, *Damızlık Kızın Öyküsü*, *Otomatik Portakal*, distopya, distopik kurgu.

The evil does not anymore lurk in the dark and hidden lands as in fairy tales or romance. It resides very near to, almost within, the civilized societies of the twenty-first century. The evil raises its ugly head in the wars, in the rise of mass destruction and nuclear weapons, terrorism, homicides, rapes and in many other forms. Even though the human mind and nature have the capacity to create timeless works of art and to produce technological devices, it is the same human intelligence that can be accused of perversion and violence. It seems that the project of Enlightenment failed and liberal humanist ideas concerning human nature as rational and blissful have now been demoded. Moreover, while the rigorous scientific and materialist advancements lessened the power of religion, it failed to provide any substitution. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the man, once glorified and placed at the centre of the universe, was portrayed as a morbid creature that has a serious potential for evil. As the line between the good and evil became blurred, the writers, beginning especially with Modernism, have produced texts depicting human nature in its bare form. As Peter Walsh, in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, lamented "the death of the soul" (1987: 53), Rupert Birkin, in Lawrence's *Women in Love*, identified the human civilization as "the dark river of dissolution" (1996: 201). Likewise, there was no room for the simple binary world of good and evil; also it was pointless to locate the evil within the selected groups that do not look like a European civilized man. Therefore, regardless of the simple binary structure of the good and evil of the previous eras, the novelists of the second half of the century, inspired by the developments in psychology and affected by the chaotic world of the Post-Second World War, attempted to reflect the evil and the urge for violence inherent in man. In this study, three types of instinctive violence presented in the novels of post-1950 English literature will be analysed; firstly, violence committed by the innocent towards the innocent; secondly, the violence exercised by the victims towards another victim; and finally, the violence committed by so-called innocent society towards the previously evil. The scope of the study will be limited to the dystopian texts; William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*.

The popularity of dystopian and utopian texts is not a matter of coincidence in the second half of the twentieth century. The chaotic world inspired many authors to create their own alternative universes; the complexity of the period invited them to offer their imaginative lands in which either the evil rules or the good survives, but are always in a continuous battle. The rise of this popularity is strictly connected with the breakdown in the social order that was experienced in the after-math of the Second World War. The gruesome atmosphere of the time was further darkened by the Cold War.

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Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of: the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war; genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (Moylan, 2000: xi)

Similarly, Northrop Frye asserts that “it was inevitable that the utopia, as a literary genre, should be revived at the time of the Renaissance, the period in which medieval social order was breaking down again into city-state units or nations governed from a capital city” (1965: 325). Considering that within the century borders in the European political map had been drawn and re-drawn on one hand, and the turmoil in the social life caused by economic and socio-political changes on the other, the revival of utopia, but different from that of Plato’s or More’s, was inevitable. While some, like Ursula Le Guin and J. R. R. Tolkien, ventured to be called “escapist” by giving shape to fantastic lands, others produced imagined lands in which dark perspectives of human nature were represented; this is also what Frye distinguishes in his article:

A certain amount of claustrophobia enters this argument when it is realized, as it is from about 1850 on, that technology tends to unify the whole world. The conception of an isolated utopia like that of More or Plato or Bacon gradually evaporates in the face of this fact. Out of this situation come two kinds of utopian romance: the straight utopia, which visualizes a world-state assumed to be ideal, or at least ideal in comparison with what we have, and the utopian satire or parody, which presents the same kind of social goal in terms of slavery, tyranny, or anarchy. (1965: 326)

In the article, Frye never uses the term dystopia, though it is certain that William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* can be collected under the title of utopian satire.

As the types of utopias varied, the evil characters placed by the authors into these imagined lands also underwent transformation. The conceptualization of evil in dystopian literature is crucial because its “foremost truth lies in its ability to reflect upon the causes of social and ecological evil as systemic” (Moyan, 2000: xii). Angus Wilson in his article called “Evil in the English Novel” (1967) presents a detailed account of the representation of the evil and violence committed by the evil agents in the novel starting from Samuel Richardson’s *Clarissa*. For him, the English novelists from its very beginning up to the Modernist phase tried to form a citadel. Wilson suggests that this citadel was reduced to the social level in the Victorian era:

The result is a certain kind of desperation. In Jane Austen’s case, the desperation is primarily religious, but becomes social in later writers. A middle-class way of living is made to represent the basic moral code. A middle-class view of right and wrong is considered sufficient to explain human conduct. This would seem to me to be one of the greatest limitations that the English novel has fallen into. (1967: 171)

Wilson believes that the novelists should search for a transcendental evil with an in-depth psychology. His criticism marks that the English novelists accepted England as their citadel of middle class morality. It then became “a defensive smugness” which brought forth “a note of provincialism, often of chauvinism” (Wilson, 1967: 179). Maybe due to the effect of insularity, the novelists up to the Modernist phase desired to cling to the idea of probable evil and violence coming from outside, not within. It was impossible, they believed, any kind of “violence could ever invade their citadel” due to the fact that “this sort of violence has not happened here in England, which makes it more difficult to persuade people that it still can and may” (Wilson, 1967: 193). Wilson selects Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* as the text which could eventually come to terms with transcendent good and evil:

I should say that in *Lord of the Flies*, in one particular way, he has solved the problem of expressing transcendent good and evil more satisfactorily than any other living English novelist. *Lord of the Flies* is a remarkable fable because it includes Piggy, who stands for intellect, and Simon, who represents imagination. Intellect and imagination too often get left out in the transcendent novel. Again, by using the idea of the primitive, the primeval, Mr. Golding manages to bring his fable of good and evil within range of the Christian concept of “Before the Fall” and “The Fall”-which is the common stock of all his readers, agnostic or believing. (1967: 190)

Moreover, Wilson specifies that Golding did not participate in the attempts to build England as the citadel and to “create absolutes out of right and wrong” (1967: 190). The novel is Golding’s response to the context of the Second World War, especially Holocaust and other atrocities. Golding’s innovation is that he does not solely point out the German as the source of evil but “subverts these notions of racial and cultural superiority, of scientific progress, notions casting long shadows over atrocities against the Jews carried out in World War II” (Crawford, 2002: 55). By drawing “a parallel between the violent history of English imperialist adolescent masculine culture and the extermination of the Jews”, Golding displays “the grim fact that English colonial warfare against ‘inferior’ races, modelled on hunting and pig sticking, was not a million miles away from the extermination of the Jews” (Crawford, 2002: 55). The horror of the war laid bare the evil side of human nature and its potential urge for violence. It had a deep impact on those who had a belief in the glory of human nature and Golding was not an exception:

Before the Second World War I believed in the perfectibility of social man ... but after the war I did not because I was unable to. I had discovered what one man could do to another. I am not talking of one man tilling another with a gun, or dropping a bomb on him or blowing him up or torpedoing him. I am thinking of the vileness beyond all words that went on, year after year, in the totalitarian states... I must say that anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wronging the head . . . I believed then, that man was sick-not exceptional man, but average man. I believed that the condition of man was to be a morally

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diseased creation and that the best job I could do at the time was to trace the connection between his diseased nature and the international mess he gets himself into. (Golding, 1996: 251-252)

However, contrary to the common idea that the Germans are the evil side of the human civilization, Golding himself points out his stance: "I condemn and detest my country's faults precisely because I am so proud of her many virtues. One of our faults is to believe that evil is somewhere else and inherent in another nation" (Golding, 1996: 255). As Golding subverts the established binary structure of good and evil, he also destroys the citadel of England as the home of absolute right; "I know it could happen in any country. It could happen here" (1996: 255).

For the experiment, Golding chooses English schoolboys. Himself a schoolmaster, Golding is sure that he knows them best. As they are students, they are under the effect of English education system and they are trained to be English gentlemen and, therefore, they are expected to behave like a gentleman. As if to prove this, Jack says "We're not savages. We're English; and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things" (Golding, 1996: 55). These English gentlemen nominees are taken from their civilized society and thrown into a desert island. Golding's island is specially designed to avoid all other exterior factors in the relations of the children. Food is abundant; children are below the age of sexual consciousness; there is no sense of private property, class distinction or inequalities except Jack and his choirboys who wear identical uniforms. They can only be separated in terms of their age. Therefore, the island is the desired utopia in which all factors that lead humankind into struggle and battle, or violence, for possession is omitted: "Here at last was the imagined but never fully realized place leaping into real life" (Golding, 1996: 21).

Though children are not considered as purely innocent in the Christian culture, it is generally accepted that children are far from the material world of the civilized man which is built upon greed, jealousy, power struggle and fight for possession; hence the sense of utopia is further strengthened. In this utopic land, the only enemy for the man is himself, man again. Simon, apparently the philosopher, as he often secludes himself and goes into jungle and is often being narrated in a mood of trance, is the first one to anticipate this fact: "Maybe there is a beast. . . . Maybe it's only us". (Golding, 1996: 110-111) Again, in a mood of trance, when he gets into connection with Lord of the Flies, or a stick with a pig head on it as an offer by children to the Beast, Simon believes Lord of the Flies is talking to him:

"Fancy thinking the Beast is something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. "You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?" (Golding, 1996: 177)

In this moment of trance, Simon is completely under the control of the Lord of the Flies. In fact, the children in the island create the Beast in their imagination as they see a dead soldier hanging on a tree as the ropes of his parachute remain attached to the

tree on the top of the mountain. From that moment, the hunters, Jack's group, decide to hunt the Beast. However, the Beast causes separation in the group. While Ralph and Piggy insist that there is no beast, Jack and his hunters and also "little'uns" believe in its existence. Gradually, they are separated into two groups and Ralph and Jack are excluded. Deprived of their rationality and sense of order imposed by Ralph and Piggy, Jack and his group begin to exercise the rituals of primitive tribes as they chant "Kill the Beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!" In a moment of delirium, the group takes Simon, who is just coming out of the forest to explain that the Beast is in fact the dead soldier, for the Beast and forming a circle around him they attack; "The sticks fell and mouth of the new circle crunched and screamed. ... There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws" (Golding, 1996: 188). The group performs an instinctive violence on Simon and he is killed. Likewise, when Ralph and Piggy attempt to negotiate with the other group, due to the quarrel between Jack and Ralph, Piggy falls down on a rock and dies. From that moment on, Ralph becomes the hunt for the hunters. They set the forest on fire to trap him. Fortunately, a British soldier arrives on island with a disappointment as he believes "a pack of British boys would have been able to put up a better show than that" (Golding, 1996: 248). The case in the novel shows the transformation of a group of children from innocence, or good, to evil; the violence they commit is an instinctive one. The union established at the very beginning is disturbed as they begin to categorize themselves. Children, who are far from any kind external factor that could contaminate their nature, commit acts of violence instinctively and, thereby, Golding shows the potential evil inherent in the human nature. This type of violence is the violence exercised on the innocent by the presumably innocent.

Another type of violence that can be observed in post 1950 dystopian fiction is the violence committed by an already victim. This case is best depicted in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel in which many layers of violence is represented. The novel is written in 1986 and the fiction is set up in the 1990s. "Atwood's writing is set in an imaginary land where women wake up to their self-consciousness, to struggle with the patriarchal social order, and to forge connections among themselves." (Özer Taniyan, 2012: 252). Additionally, "science fiction and fantasy mainly serve to achieve two main purposes: to enable the reader to make his/her own interpretations (because most science fiction and fantasy texts are readerly texts), and to prove that social reality is not fixed and unquestionable" (Goc, 2018: 51) Therefore, while forging connections and raising awareness, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* also achieves to enable the reader to produce their own interpretations derived from an unreliable and ever-changing notion of evil. Even more, there are moments in the novel when the victimized women become the evil by exercising instinctive violence.

A revolution takes place in the USA and The Gilead Republic is founded. The constitution is cancelled and the martial law is exercised. The totalitarian regime tries to put on a new order in which women are stripped of all their rights and are divided into various groups; the wives, econowives, aunts, daughters, marthas and handmaids.

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There are also other groups which are superficially unrecognized by the totalitarian state; the unwomen who are infertile and sent to the colonies and the jezebels, the mistresses of the commanders. In this new order, violence emerges in various forms. There is the state violence performed by the state on the citizens; the gender violence which is exercised on the female by the male and also female as well; or sexual violence as the handmaids are forced to have sexual intercourses with the commanders for reproduction. The regime puts on strict rules and the punishment in any case of violation of the rules is death or being sent to the colonies which also means death. Except those outcasts and political dissidents who are sentenced to death, the handmaids are placed at the lowest level of this social order; therefore they become victims.

Considering the scope of the study, these major types of violence will not be the focus point. Rather, a type of violence that occurs in a single chapter, in chapter forty-three, will be analysed. A ceremony is held in a place which was previously a school campus. "Salvagings", or hangings, are witnessed by the audience who are formed by the wives, daughters, handmaids and the others. It is Aunt Lydia who runs the show. After hangings, Aunt Lydia announces that "a particucution" will take place. Interestingly, as the children in *Lord of the Flies* do, Aunt Lydia orders the handmaids to "form a circle" (Atwood, 1996: 289). A guardian who has been convicted of rape is brought forth. The penalty for rape is death. As Aunt Lydia reads out his crimes, including killing of an unborn baby, even the handmaid Offred, the narrator, who is conscious of all the suppression and violence committed by the regime, cannot help being agitated:

A sigh goes up from us; despite myself I feel my hands clench. It is too much, this violation. The baby too, after what we go through. It's true, there is a bloodlust; I want to tear, gouge, rend. (Atwood, 1996: 290-291)

Throughout the novel, Offred reflects and meditates on the systematic and organized violence exercised by the regime, by the male and female on herself and her life; she is a victim. However, at that very moment, she becomes the practitioner. Her and other handmaids' violent behaviour is instinctual, though motivated and organized again by the regime. She depicts herself like a hunter animal whose "heads turn from side to side" and "nostrils flare, sniffing death"; the hatred is visible (Atwood, 1996: 291). As Aunt Lydia blows her whistle, the particucution gets started:

There's a surge forward, like a crowd at a rock concert in the former time, when the doors opened, that urgency coming like a wave through us. The air is bright with adrenalin, we are permitted anything and this is freedom, in my body also, I'm reeling, red spreads everywhere ... Now there are sounds, gasps, a low noise like growling, yells, and the red bodies tumble forward and I can no longer see, he's obscured by arms, fists, feet. A high scream comes from somewhere, like a horse in terror. (Atwood, 1996: 291-292)

The act of violence is narrated as a primitive rite; the handmaids are fallen into trance like mode. As they cannot hear the whistle guardians have to intervene "pulling them

off, from what's left" (Atwood, 1996: 292). They are entranced; "some lie on the grass where they've been hit or kicked by accident. Some have fainted. They straggle away, in twos and threes by themselves. They seem dazed". From the crowd Janine appears with "a smear of blood across her cheek, and more of it on the white of her headdress" and carrying "tightly, in her right hand ... a clump of blond hair" delivering "a small giggle" (Atwood, 1996: 292). Offred is heavily disturbed; though she believes it is "monstrous", she admits she is hungry; "death makes [her] hungry" and in her head appears "the word *relish*" (Atwood, 1996: 293).

This instinctive violence occurs between victims. According to Stephanie Barbé Hammer, the regime in Gilead "preaches biblical virtue but where vice reigns everywhere—from the brutal executions of dissidents to the institutionalized sexual promiscuity enjoyed by the commanders" (1990: 40). To exist, handmaids are forced to support "a system of values which denigrates and threatens to annihilate them" (Hammer, 1990: 40). Therefore, "an allegedly profoundly Christian society ironically transforms every citizen into a sinner in so far as each person must become a liar and a hypocrite in order to exist within the system" (Hammer, 1990: 40). The motivator of the violent practice is the system; however, the practitioners are the victims of the system. In other words, as in *Lord of the Flies*, the potential of human nature for evil is highlighted. The innocent children are this time replaced by adult women who are transformed into solely breeding animals.

The violent side of human nature is also one of the major themes of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*. The novel has been controversial since its first publication in 1962. The controversy it has created has been immense and after its film adaptation by Stanley Kubrick even Anthony Burgess himself was so disturbed by the misperception of the film as the glorification of violence and disorder by the audience that he thought he should not have written the novel.

In the first part of the novel, Alex, who is considered as the villain protagonist, performs acts of "ultra-violence" in collaboration with his "droogies" which results in murder that leads to Alex's imprisonment. The second part relates his days in prison and the application of "the Ludovico technique" which makes him ill when his desire for violence arises. For a while he is exposed to violent scenes such as war and rape. After doctors are sure that he is cured of his urge for violence Alex is set free and introduced to society. The third part of the novel, then, relates his release from the prison as a rehabilitated, healthy person. However, the society, as if in a frenzy, rebuffs him. When he arrives home he realizes that his room and his place in his family are usurped by a man called Joe. His parents do not welcome him and seeing that he leaves his family. Not knowing what to do, he decides to go to "Public Biblio" lest he "might find some book on the best way of snuffing it with no pain" (Burgess, 1972: 112). First he takes a medical book but upon seeing "it was full of drawings and photographs of horrible wounds and diseases" makes him sick (1972: 112). "Thinking that might give [him] like comfort as it had done in the old Staja days" he picks "a big book or Bible, as it was called" (1972: 112). The religious book, however, does not give

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him any relief as it was “about smiting seventy times seven and a lot of Jews cursing and tolchocking each other” (1972: 112). These two books, a medical book signifying the science and the Bible signifying the religion, are the cornerstones of human civilization. The two disciplines aim to give shape and order to the human civilization. Yet, their books are full of images of violence. Through them, the urge for violence permeates into the so called civilization. As if to strengthen the idea, Alex comes across with an old man whom Alex and his droogies attacked two years ago. The old man is one of the regulars of the library, probably an intellectual, and he calls other old regulars explaining that Alex is the one “who ruined the books on Crystallography” (1972: 113). Reminding the ritual chant in *Lord of the Flies*, the group attacks Alex shouting “Kill him, stamp on him, murder him, kick his teeth in” (1972: 114). The depiction of the act of violence is similar to those in *Lord of the Flies* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*:

There was now like a sea of vonny runny dirty old men trying to get at me with their like feeble rookers and horny old claws ... Then I got such a real painful tolchock on the nose that ... I opened my glazzies and started to struggle to get free. ... But these starry avengers still came after me, panting like dying, with their animal claws all trembling to get at your friend and Humble Narrator.” (Burgess, 1972: 114-115)

The old library regulars are described as wild animals with horny claws. They are transformed into evil as they beat Alex. After the violence in the library, Alex is then tortured by the police; politicians try to use him in their own interests; even he is driven to suicide. Throughout the story, there are reversals of roles; the first part is structured around the “insane” and “violent” behaviours of Alex and his mates. In the following parts, with a reversal, the social institutions and the society itself practice insanity and violence on Alex whose violence and attributed insanity function as the antithesis of society; the Ludovico treatment of the government wildly tortures Alex for the sake of transforming him into a “sane” citizen against violence; the society ferociously attacks Alex to revenge his past deeds. Therefore, it is possible to assert that once Alex was the villain (insane, mad) and the society was the victim (sane, rational) of his deeds. However, in the end, becoming the villain, the society victimizes Alex.

The three selected dystopian novels for the study clearly exhibit the potential of human nature for violence without regard to their age, gender, education they receive or the social position they are in. As Golding remarks, it may happen anywhere. After the humanity witnessed the atrocities of two great world wars, a cold war, the rise of weapons of mass destruction, smaller but devastating conflicts that had taken place in different parts of the world, the faith in the everlasting good has become groundless. The sense of glorified human nature was gradually replaced by the idea of human as animal. The similarities and parallels in the above mentioned acts of violence taken from three different novels are highly interesting. It is certain that they all act instinctually; they form circles and chant the songs of primitive man; their teeth become jaws and their hands turn into claws. They are all dazed and entranced in the

course of violent action; their urge for violence is their desire. Therefore, after their violence they feel relieved and satisfied. Then, it is fair to argue that these novelists' portrayal of human violence is totally different that of previous eras' sense of violence as they manage to form a transcendental evil by deconstructing the established binary opposition of the good and evil. The formulation of the "good-us" and "evil-the other" is surpassed to exhibit the good-evil-within.

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