

**The Ultimate Truth in Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* (2000) from the Perspective of Graham Harman's "Object- Oriented Ontology" (OOO) and Wilfred Bion's "Binocular Vision" (\*)**

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**Abstract**

This paper proposes a systematic ideology of better approaching and understanding reality while posing a fundamental question: How far is the truth ultimate or absolute? To propose a satisfactory answer, the paper suggests a temporary departure from theories of subjecthood, that roughly divide human and non-human beings into subjects and objects, to one of objecthood that regards all entities as objects. However, this does not imply taking the side of one attitude against the other; it rather suggests serving the paper's fundamental argument by proposing other potential sides of reality that can broaden human vision. The paper builds on Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), as one movement of speculative realism, and Wilfred Bion's theory of thinking. It significantly highlights the search for an ultimate truth and man's single-sided view of things as mainly responsible for man's failure to understand reality. Consequently, the deep-rooted attitude of anthropocentrism and the hierarchical system of human and non-human beings are critically tackled since they reflect a single perspective vision of reality. Highlighting further perspectives, the paper proposes Harman's flat egalitarian ontology and its related concepts of real and sensual objects. It sets Bion's binocular vision of reality as its therapeutic part that can mitigate man's anxiety resulting from the elusive nature of truth and reality. The paper consequently proposes a definition of truth in light of the two suggested philosophical and psychoanalytic perspectives. To better achieve its objectives, it attempts a thorough reading of Paulo Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* that is a search-for-spiritual truth journey through which

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the nature of human beings either as good or evil is questioned. The paper significantly puts real and unreal worlds in sharp contrast examining Coelho's employment of the technique of magical realism with one question in mind: how far does it hinder man's attainment of the truth or does it rather serve to illuminate the mystery of the world?

### Key words

Object- Oriented Ontology- flat ontology- binocular vision

### الملخص العربي :

بنى البحث على إطار نظري يشترك فيه البعد الفلسفي والنفسي من خلال نظرية أنطولوجية الأشياء لجراهام هارمان ومفهوم الرؤية متعددة الأبعاد لويلفريد بيون، حيث يدعو البحث لانطلاقاً من كينونة الفاعل إلى كينونة الشيء التي تعتبر كل الكيانات من مخلوقات بشرية وغير بشرية ومعاني مجردة أو أشياء ملموسة جميعها على السواء يندرج تحت مسمى "شيء". كما يقدم البحث أفكاراً بديلة وأوجه مختلفة للواقع توسع من رؤية الإنسان له، كما يعزز البحث فكرة فشل الإنسان في فهم الواقع كنتيجة لرؤيته له من زاوية واحدة تجعل رؤيته للواقع يشوبها القصور. وبناء عليه يعمد البحث لنقد فكرة التسلسل الهرمي الذي يضع الإنسان في القمة مقارنة بكافة الكيانات والأشياء الأخرى والمستلهم من مبدأ مركزية الإنسان. وعلى الجانب الآخر تمثل رؤية بيون متعددة الأبعاد وسيلة للتخفيف من القلق الناتج عن عدم الوصول إلى حقيقة مطلقة. ولكي يحقق البحث غايته فهو يقوم بتطبيق هذا الإطار النظري على رواية الشيطان والأنسة برايم لباولو كويلو، وتعد الرواية رحلة للبحث عن الحقيقة الروحانية والتي تطرح سؤال بشأن طبيعة البشر هل هي الخير أم الشر؟ ويفحص البحث بالدراسة استخدام الرواية للواقعية السحرية وتأثير هذا بالسلب أو الإيجاب على فهم الإنسان للواقع.

Man has always been preoccupied with one of his persistent instinctive human necessities: the need to gratify his longing for the attainment of truth. However, according to pioneers of speculative realism, including Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux, the attainment of truth is constantly hindered by single-minded theories and attitudes like those of subjecthood, correlationist theory and anthropocentrism with its consequent autocratic hierarchy of creatures. Such theories roughly set man as superior to non-human beings that are under evaluated according to their relative significance to human beings and are consequently devastated, marginalized and distanced. In reaction, speculative realism suggests eradicating the notion of the subject and argues against the correlationist theory that situates humans, as subjects and initiators of reality, at the top of the hierarchical system (Harman, 2017, p. 57)). Following the cause of speculative realism, Harman, as a pioneer figure of Object-Oriented Ontology, highlights an anti-monism stance that proposes a heterogenic vision or rather a flat ontology of viewing objects as autonomous and denouncing the existence of one sole entity set at the top of a hierarchical system. Though Harman categorizes objects into human and non-human objects, no category of objects is privileged by him over the other and both are regarded with equal esteem and respect, the fact that categorizes Harman as an “objectocentric thinker” (Feero, 2019, p. 567-568). He can view reality as independent from mind and ideas and as not manipulated by “conceptual forces or conscious intention nor subject to any divinity specially committed to human well-being” (Harman, 2016. p. 27).

Starting as early as 1990, Object-Oriented Ontology or “weird realism”, as Harman called it (Harman, 2007, 187), is one philosophical movement of speculative realism that is developed by a number of outstanding philosophers while its roots go back to Aristotle and Socrates to be later developed by pioneers like Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl and Harman among others. To better understand Harman's OOO, what is required is a more thorough extensive definition of objects that removes all borders to fundamentally comprise all objects whether humans, animals, inanimate matter and

fictional characters (Harman, 2017, p.55). In this sense, OOO regards all subjects, nouns and events as objects that are neither concrete tangible things nor conceived subjects. To put it simply, according to Harman, everything has its own ontological existence and has its own value in itself and everything is called 'object' (Harman, 2017, p.54). However, this does not necessarily mean that objects are equally self-governing nor that they are equally real, but that they are equally objects (Harman, 2011, p.9). Harman, moreover, argues that objects can never be defined out of context and a crucial issue for objects is "where it is" (Wilde, 2020, p.2). An object gains its meaning in relation to the place where it occurs to exist; in other words, its "whatness" is conditioned by being in a place. However, since objects constantly change their places and environments, they also constantly change their meanings. This merely affects who is the object rather than what he is. In addition, every object is in another object that is, in its turn, in another object. This makes objects themselves, as proposed by Heidegger, places and containers (Wilde, 2020, p.5).

Since things according to Harman are equally objects, an idea that goes well with Judith Butler's theories of drag that identifies humanness as a performance rather than an inborn nature, categories like human and non-human are to be dismantled (Connell, 2016, p.4). To further destabilize the human in face of the nonhuman, Harman follows what Levi R Bryant refers to in his *The Democracy of Things* as the strategy of "describing the impact of the nonhuman in the form of technology and other inhuman agencies"(2011, p.248). Hence, OOO argues for metaphysics, the belief in imaginative objects and the reliability of poetic language. Highlighting the conceptual value of fictional objects like ghosts, religion, myths and beliefs that have no physical existence, OOO argues that "Our minds give existence to anything we can imagine" (Ospina, 2019, p.3). This is why Harman's world is a carnivalesque that destabilizes human authority; it is one that is occupied with "circuses and clowns, vampires, unnamed monsters, fire and cotton, and a host of other frightening and delightful carnivalesque entities" (Bryant, 2011, p. 248). This grants much credit to the technique of magical realism as part of the paper's

critical argument.

As a theory of everything that seeks to play its role in uncovering the truth of reality, OOO dismantles the two lines of spirituality proposed by religion psychology: the theocentric (God as the center) and the anthropocentric (man is the center with his own desires, inclinations and requirements) (Jaworski 2015, p. 135). In other words, believing that every human and non-human being is nothing but an object and giving every object agency by describing it as autonomous, Harman strips off the authority of any object, including humans and God, over another. This inspires the dismantling of anthropocentrism and suggests an anti-theocentric tendency that casts doubts on the sovereignty of God and dismantles God's authority over all objects. Harman, therefore, seeks to move humans' attention from both the belief in God and the belief in man to the belief in objects (Jaworski 2015, p. 135).

Speculating upon objects in relation to man's persistent need of truth and the way they could be approached or comprehended to help understand reality, Harman significantly regards objects as the source of the true meaning of the world. He identifies two types of objects: real and sensual objects defining the real object (what the object is) as a hard-to-attain, independent, inhibited object that has no relations with others and that is not involved in an experience. Conversely, the sensual object, or the object of thought, is a dependent accessible reliant one that has no existence except in experiences and is rather experienced through its relation with other objects (Harman, 2017, p. 78). Sensual objects are caricatures of real objects; they are objects formed during a communication with real objects or qualities (Harman, 2017, p.100). For further clarification, the paper surmises to call the two types of objects as "the real object and its double (sensual object)" where the double is the sensual felt object that acquires its meaning only when felt or recognized by others. Accordingly, Ruslanas Baranovas puts it that "No object can know or encounter other object-in-itself, but only its appearance. The real object always withdraws" (2020, p.234). Hence, their relationship is commonly one of alienation that necessitates a go-between (a sensual object) to bridge the gulf and

help them connect.

For example, a rose is a real withdrawn object yet what we see, touch or smell is merely its replicated sensual object. Similarly, objects have both qualities: sensual and real where the first is attainable while the second is not (Holy, 2019, pp. 172-173). Sensual qualities are experienced perceptible qualities attached to the sensual object as part of the experience. However, those qualities of the sensual object that are not part of the immediate experience, the *eidōs*, withdraw and can only be referred to through “allusion and metaphor” (Heft, 2016, pp. 40-41). For example, the rose, given as a present has the sensual qualities of a sensual object whose real double is withdrawn with its real qualities. Such involved sensual qualities are its color, beautiful scent and its softness. However, still there are other qualities of the rose that are not relevant to the experience and they therefore withdraw keeping themselves inaccessible like, as an example, its performance of photosynthesis process and other specifics related to the rose as a plant.

However, the fact that real objects are withdrawn ones whose meanings are conditioned by the reflection of their sensual objects in varied experiences significantly endangers the correct reasoning of their exact meaning and the consequent stage of truth attainment. This casts doubts on all taken for granted knowledge and suggests that truth is always conditioned by experiences so that what is judged to be good in a given situation is judged to be evil in another. This is why Harman dissociates the link between knowledge and truth, identifying the two notions as separate rather than identical ones (Harman, 2017, pp.3-6). A typical example of an existential truth whose blurred nature caused a fundamental gap in human spiritual knowledge and becomes the source of man’s existential anxiety is that of the concept of God (Hanson, 2012, p. 485). Jacques Derrida’s definition of God, as never experienced by man, sets God as a typical withdrawn real object that could be experienced only as a sensual object with its sensual qualities related to an immediate experience. This makes the nature of God and all related spiritual notions a constantly highly controversial issue. In this respect, Derrida writes, “The real God is always becoming and never arriving, always in the future that never becomes the present, and

always at a distance beyond experiential horizons. It is Joseph Campbell's God of a thousand craven faces and therefore of no face" (Derrida 1995, p. 61). Similarly, Karl Barth suggests that God is "inaccessible to humankind" (Hanson, 2012 .p. 480). This recurrent concept of the inexperienced real God is typical to Harman's flat ontology and its argument against the theocentric spiritual attitude.

A further major aspect of Harman's OOO that is bound to help render a near-to- reality image of object is that real objects should not be viewed through the lens of the two techniques of reductionism: undermining and overmining where "Undermining reduces objects to smaller bits, claiming they're too superficial and must be examined deeper. Overmining finds them already too small, pushing for definitions that locate objects as small bits in larger relationships" (Lawler, 2015, p.3). According to both techniques, objects are reduced to be a minimized part of a whole (atom) or are further overvalued (society). It is typical to art, for example, to rely upon both techniques to exaggeratedly render the meaning of its objects since art objects are more evocative and less superficial in meaning than conventional objects. However, set against both techniques, OOO neither undermines nor overmines objects; it sticks to the real nature of objects and reflects them barely as they are (Ospina, 2019, p.5). Accordingly, Harman's real objects are to be viewed as individual entities that should be isolated from their qualities without being reduced "either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things." (Harman,2017, p.43).

Harman propounds the view that all types of relations seriously harm the real nature and meaning of the object by reductionism or rather simplifying and reducing the object to one mere targeted side neglecting the others. When fire, for example, comes in contact with cotton, it perceives not its color nor softness but rather its flammability (Holy, 2018, P. 172). This suggests that OOO provides the ground for the revision of the way objects are perceived or presented by other objects since this presentation is built on encountering one aspect of the object neglecting the others. The point here is that what is required by OOO is to resist attaching the real object to a certain portrayal dictated

by its assumed profiles. This could be achieved if one can see the rose, for example, as a bird in a manner reminiscent to that of Haruki Murakami in *The Wind Up Bird Chronicle* where the protagonist writes: “We think it is natural to get rice pudding after we put rice pudding mix in the microwave and the bell rings, but to me that’s just a *presumption*. I would be kind of relieved if, every once in a while, after you put rice pudding mix in the microwave, and it rang, and you opened the top, you got macaroni cheese. [...] that would feel, in some way, a whole lot more real” (2007, p. 146). Besides, no given object is encountered in a similar way by other objects; in this concern Harman writes, “I encounter the cotton ball in one way, the fire encounters it in another, the boll weevil in still another” (Harman, 2013, p. 175). Similarly, human beings acquire their meaning by getting in touch with others. It is only through these evolved relationships between objects that the world acquires its real meaning. This is what makes the world “a system of relationships”. (Ospina, 2019, pp.1-5).

Bion’s theory of thinking and its related binocular vision, proposed as part of the paper’s suggested theoretical framework, both provide a means of viewing reality and help to therapeutically builds up a mentality that can positively deal with the anxiety of the disappointment of not attaining the ultimate required truth. Bion’s theory has significantly established the idea that one has to develop his thinking capability to be judged as well-balanced, stable individual who can better receive and understand reality and to therapeutically come to terms with the horrible thoughts generated by an emotional disturbing experience (Bion, 1967, p. 25). Bion’s theory assumes that the individual psyche is a group composed of different fragments of the persona that can initiate among themselves varied intrapsychic dialogues that can develop man’s thinking capability (Ogden, 2008, p.12). This inspires Bion with his notion of a binocular vision that corresponds with Harman’s rejection of reductionism. It is a vision that propounds the necessity of viewing reality from different perspectives rather than reducing it to a single one since “reality viewed from a single vantage point represents a failure to think” (Ogden, 2008, p. 16). This binocular vision of Bion’s that views



reality differently allows each involved way of “seeing/knowing/experiencing” (Ogden, 2008, p. 16) to come in contact with the others where a mutual conversation is allowed among them. On the other hand, according to Bion, the one who perceives reality from one single perspective is held as psychotic. For example a psychologically stable individual who studies medicine has to approach a corpse as an object of studying anatomy, a once living person who is now dead, a reminder of man's mortal nature, an object that inspires bad emotions due to a prospective similar loss of dear persons, a proof of life's meaningless, an end of one's suffering, etc. All means and angles of perceptions that can provide these varied perspectives come together in a profitable conversation (intrapsychic dialogues) where ends meet and thoughts are continually transformed (Bion, 1959, p.86).

Like Harman's OOO, Bion's proposed binocular vision of reality dissociates the link between knowledge and truth and render truth as multi-faced rather than single faced. Besides, Bion's perspective that renders truth attainment as nearly impossible is reflected in his idea that “every emotional experience of knowledge gained at the same time an emotional experience of ignorance unilluminated” (Bion, 1992, p.275). This highlights the two parts of the paper's theoretical approach as coming to the same direction. However, In his article, “Bion's Four Principles of Mental Functioning” Ogden accurately explains that Bion's theory of thinking condemns magical thinking, that sometimes plays a role in visual arts, as it renders the object in a way that lacks reality and truth. Accordingly, Bion believes that the need for truth is hardly satisfied by visual arts since truth is unattainable in the absence of reality (Ogden, 2008, p.14). Consequently, according to Bion, a thinking process that lacks reality is useless since it can never lead to truth that helps one to learn from experience and to develop psychologically and can never turn man into an initiator who can take action since he dreads of acting without a “grasp of reality” (Ogden, 2008, p.14). Therefore, Bion puts it that “a sense of reality matters to the individual in the way that food, drink, air and excretion of waste products matter” (Bion, 1975, p.42).

Yet, To Bion, unconscious illusions and dreams, for example are so essential for the individual's wellbeing as it is the way he thinks out his problems (Ogden, 2008, p.11). With this view of Bion, he asserts the significance of both reality and unconscious phantasies.

Reading Coelho's *The Devil and Miss Prym* in light of Harman's OOO and Bion's theory of thinking, the novel is obviously built upon the stranger's most controversial persistent spiritual question concerning good and evil. The paper traces the novel's search for truth and the meaning of reality in terms of its theoretical framework. For doing so, it highlights the way Coelho first established the anthropocentric paradigm and the consequent lack of balance as well as of ecological coexistence. He draws a picture of Viscos, a seemingly small poor deserted village peopled with a concise number of youth and elderly people where children are almost absent, a suggestion of a forthcoming extinction of human life there. The fact that Viscos depends on hunting wolves that almost disappear causing a retreat in the number of hunters who visit the town casually in season implies a comparable extinction of animal life. The subject-object relationship between humans and non-human objects typical to anthropocentrism is held responsible for both types of extinction. Having drawn upon the anthropocentric paradigm, the novel proceeds to establish Harman's flat ontology as a further alternative of this seemingly taken for granted paradigm. In doing so, the novel proposes the object-object example according to which all entities are nothing but equal objects as a potential alternative of the subject-object model.

Weakening the cause of human objects, as typical to Harman, Coelho employs the technique of magical realism that gives agency and power to supernatural creatures and helps to weaken anthropocentrism. This sets the novel as establishing Harman's flat ontology as an alternative for anthropocentrism and its anthropocentric hierarchy of creatures. Coelho portrays a carnivalesque that is harmoniously inhabited with animals, insects and supernatural beings like ghosts and devils as autonomous objects that are given agency more than human objects. This could be seen in the presentation of the ghost of Berta's husband and the devils of the

stranger and Chantal that play fundamental roles in the novel. Devils, for example, are depicted as non-human objects that are endowed with special luring powers and knowledge not available for their human counterparts. This is why the devil accompanying the stranger was aware that Chantal dug the gold out since he “can see into the human soul” (Coelho, 2000, p. 70). Similarly, empowering the influence of Chantal’s dead grandmother who had brought her up after her mother’s death, Coelho writes: “At one point, it seemed to her that God was much too far away to hear her, and so she began praying instead to her grandmother” (Coelho, 2000, p. 20).

The devil starts to preoccupy the stranger’s mind amidst his disturbing rage and agony over the loss of his wife and daughters as he lives “in the left-hand side of the man’s brain, in the part that governs logic and reasoning” (Coelho, 2000, p.51). This suggests that the devil does not allow the stranger to develop his thinking capability. The stranger has never seen the devil yet tried to imagine him like stereotypical devils and finally he imagines him as “a young man in his twenties, with black trousers, a blue shirt, and a green beret perched nonchalantly on his dark hair” (Coelho, 2000, p. 51). This suggests that the devil is a real withdrawn object that cannot be experienced by the man. However, he is responsible for instilling the stranger with disbelief in the existence of good as well as with aggression against God as the manipulator of fate. This is exemplified in the devil’s words to the stranger that identify virtue with terror believing that seemingly virtuous people are assuming the role of virtuous individuals out of fear. He says, “There is no such thing as Good: virtue is simply one of the many faces of terror” (Coelho, 2000, p. 51). The devil is the real gambler who devised the whole game that seeks to judge the people of Viscos either as evil or good. The novel significantly suggests that the devil’s plan, if once gains its fruits, is to turn the stranger into a forthcoming devil that experiences evil personally and has to “pass it on to others, in an eternal cycle of vengeance” (Coelho, 2000, p.53).

The two devils of Chantal and the stranger manipulate both of them making them, at the beginning, unable to develop a typical

unconscious binocular vision the fact that label them as psychotic. They rather inspire them with a conscious binocular vision that causes the individual to commit himself to the malevolent technique of reductionism that reduces objects to one simple aspect of its real nature. However, though devils are depicted as luring and misleading, as the events of the novel suggest, they are essential since they play the essential role identified by Coelho as the double of good that gives it meaning. A further significant supernatural object in the novel is the ghost of Berta's husband presented as having a haunting power that makes him more powerful than human objects. The ghost can foretell the future and warn his wife off any coming danger, a task that humans can never fulfill. Hence, despite being equivocal and confusing, the ghost is essential for her to unravel the mystery of the world since he is always there to give her good advice.

Beside the supernatural objects, Coelho establishes Harman's flat ontology by highlighting the novel's actions as significantly manipulated with the alluring power of gold as an inanimate object that can secure a prosperous life for every person in the village. Gold's enchanting influence is the stranger's criteria to judge people either as all evil or good to come up with a general conclusion that is, according to him, true to all humans. Coelho seemingly exaggerates the influence of gold as manipulating humans' moral choice to weaken the cause of anthropocentrism, establishing instead Harman's flat ontology. If gold manages to incite the people of Viscos to murder one of them, the stranger as a human object and a communicator of evil, will turn into a devil. This overemphasizing of the influence of objects implies Harman's condemned attitude of object overmining that distorts the true meaning of objects. However, such an attitude is erupted by Chantal as the novel develops and gold is viewed by her as useless.

Weakening at once both the ecocentric and the theocentric attitudes, Coelho puts the power of gold in sharp contrast with God's in the Ten Commandments. The stranger confides to Chantal that he would like to use gold to lure people to go against the Ten Commandments about which the girl, who had never been religious,

knows nothing (Coelho, 2000, p. 16). He identifies the two commandments "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not kill" as his criteria of judging the moral commitment of the people of Viscos (Coelho, 2000, p. 16). The stranger's deal allows the people of Viscos to take possession of the eleven bars of gold if within the limits of seven days, they kill one of them proving that all human beings are evil, an answer the man would prefer to receive because this means that all human beings alike are suffering. But, if only few people are destined to suffer, he would never be satisfied since this means that "there is something very wrong with Creation." (Coelho, 2000. p.17). However, if Chantal steals the gold and no murder is committed, human beings are judged to be both good and evil people who are indulged into an everlasting spiritual struggle won by one of the two sides (Coelho, 2000, p.16). Accordingly, the eleven bars of gold create an inner moral conflict in almost all the inhabitants of Viscos including the priest whose faith proves to be ingenuine.

A further non-human manipulator of the fate of the village is symbolized in the village's wolves whose prospective extinction threatens the people of Viscos who feed upon wolf hunting. The pardonable attitude of hunting is highly anthropocentric since wolves are being hunted for the mere interest of human beings. This anthropocentric attitude is put in sharp contrast with the offer given by the stranger according to which one human is to be murdered so that Viscos people can get the gold. Coelho has obviously and deliberately reversed the situation delineating a parallel replica of fox hunting exemplified in human- hunting for the sake of money (the gold). However, though the first case of animal disintegration is justifiable, the second is regarded, by the stranger, as a proof of the domination of evil.

Furthermore, wolf hunting is put in sharp contrast with Ahab's story of the man with a dog and a horse that were all thirsty passing by heaven and hell asking to be allowed in to drink. The man's moral commitment is judged by his compassionate and merciful refusal to be admitted in a heaven, that proves latter on to be the hell, to drink leaving his thirsty animals outside. This qualifies him to belong in real

heaven where both humans and animals are equally treated (Coelho, 2000, p. 59). This highlights the fact that in heaven, the anthropocentric attitude that favors human objects is dismantled giving way to a more egalitarian flat ontology that treats both human and non-human objects on equal terms.

Coelho's portrayal of the stranger as a bundle of contradictions established a perfect example of a typical binocular vision as that proposed by Bion; he is a liar who tells false data about himself, a victim that lost his wife and daughters, a seducer who is tempting the people of Viscos to murder one of them, a disbeliever, a prospective devil and he is himself the rogue wolf. When Chantal told him the story of the rogue wolf who once attacked the Blacksmith defending his youngster, tasted blood, and as a result and as typical to wild animals, it is no more a wild animal but rather a killer, the stranger thought that it is his own story (Coelho, 2000, p. 39). On a deeper level, focusing on the significance of developing a binocular vision of things, Coelho suggests that one should have a binocular vision of himself as well as of other objects. This is highlighted in the issue of the priest who can see himself from two different contrary perspectives reflected in the words written on one paper in his right pocket: "*I am nothing but dust and ashes*" and the words written on another paper in his left pocket "*I am the manifestation of God on Earth*" (Coelho, 2000, p. 89). In a similar manner, the priest of Viscos reflects the way Jesus Christ views himself as "bad" which means according to the priest that he, as a human is bad and as a God is good (Coelho, 2000, p. 75). Similarly, the stranger defines himself in different contradictory manners saying: "I'm an extremely rich and famous industrialist, who held sway over thousands of employees, was ruthless when necessary and kind when I had to be" (Coelho, 2000, p.15). He adds, "I am, a man who has been both good and evil" (Coelho, 2000, p.15). Asserting himself once again in terms of Bion's binocular vision, the stranger identifies himself differently as a sailor, responsible for arms industries and one who has left everything behind to live in a convent in search of God (Coelho, 2000, p.18). The stranger is not faking falsified identities of himself; he is rather

reflecting his varied sensual manifestations in different experiences.

The novel has further highlighted Bion's notion of the binocular vision, yet it is sometimes a conscious malicious one coupled with what Harman condemned as reductionism. This is highlighted in the atonement day initiated by Ahab to the people of Viscos during which they submitted two lists to God, one that has the sins of the people while the other has the sins of God. Submitted to God, the list, says "I have been unjust towards You and You have been unjust towards me. However, since today is the Day of Atonement, you will forget my faults and I will forget Yours, and we can carry on together for another year" (Coelho, 2000, p. 74). This suggests a conscious malicious binocular vision that reduces God to be both an object and a subject so that He owes them forgiveness just as they do. Similarly, arguing about the stranger's proposition, people in Viscos develop a conscious, deliberate binocular vision of the demanded murder sin as well as the perfect sacrifice that depends upon the technique of reductionism criticized by Harman as distorting the object's meaning. For example, the priest has gradually developed a malicious binocular vision of the stranger's proposition believing it to be both a sin and a benevolent sacrifice that brings atonement. He says, "The only thing I know well is my religion, in which the sacrifice of one individual saved all humanity" (Coelho, 2000, p. 64). He further justifies his cause as he says, "if one day we have to accept a wager with the Devil, let us remember that our Father who is in heaven did exactly the same in order to save the soul of His servant Job" (Coelho, 2000, p. 77). The priest reduces murder to be an act of sacrifice that brings about atonement.

Besides, trying to secure a perfect sacrifice with the least terrible consequences, people deliberately develop a conscious binocular vision of Chantal that views her not as a victim but rather as a sacrifice; following the technique of reductionism severely denounced by Harman, the vision reduces her to be a bundle of privileges that qualify her to be the perfect sacrifice. Hence, she is seen as a lonely orphan who would be missed by nobody and could disappear without trace. In addition, she is a proud girl believing herself to be different

from all villagers, she is infidel since she intends to leave one day and she is held responsible for this air of inner conflict inside all villagers (Coelho, 2000, p. 82). However, the girl is to be missed by the landowner as a working maid and she is the only one who saw the gold (Coelho, 2000, p. 82). Nonetheless, against this fake vision, Coelho seems to inspire the reader with a different binocular vision of her by his alteration between the two names: Chantal and Miss Prym. While the first may suggest that she is a helpless orphan that has no family, the second may give her more power, respect and agency. On a similar ground, the issue of selecting Berta to be the perfect required sacrifice suggests both reductionism as well as a binocular vision that is conditioned by a pretentious malevolent desire that seeks to validate an evil intention of murdering an innocent woman claiming that by this murder crime “a good soul will go to heaven and find eternal joy, rather than remain suffering here on Earth” (Coelho, 2000, p.84). As a sacrifice, people does not judge her as a helpless wretched edged woman but she is rather reduced to be an old deserted useless mad one who is expecting inevitable death to come. The murder is not regarded as a shameful sin but is rather reduced to be a favor done to old Berta who is eager to meet her dead husband in the other world.

Similarly, people develop a conscious binocular vision of the stranger’s proposition that is coupled with reductionism. Being an evil deal that incites people to commit a crime, the proposition is reduced to be a call for redemption by sacrificing one of the people of Viscos who is to be a Christ-like figure that grants people salvation just like Jesus. This is made clear when Coelho refers to the priest’s willingness to be the chosen victim as an act of “martyrdom”. The priest himself claims it to be “the sacrifice that redeems, the victim who saves, decay transformed anew into glory” (Coelho, 2000, p. 67). Besides, people of Viscos ends up calling the murder “ritual sacrifice” (Coelho, 2000, p. 109). According to this vision, the gold itself is reduced to be a reward that people can attain once they redeem themselves through a sacrifice that becomes the savior of the people of Viscos (humanity).

On the other hand, set against this gone astray deliberate binocular



vision, Coelho depicts a typical gratuitous binocular vision developed by Chantal at the end of the novel. The once lacking a binocular vision, Chantal manages to develop a typical-to- Bion binocular vision of herself. She first views her own reality from one single perspective, that of self-pity, conceiving herself the way others view her as a poor orphan who worked in the bar after her grandmother's death and failed to get herself a husband from those older men who sleep with her (Coelho, 2000, p. 73). Nevertheless, the inner conflict the issue of the gold arises inside her calls upon all parts of her persona to view the experience from different perspectives resulting in an intrapsychic dialogue among them that help her to reach a mature binocular vision of gold and then of herself. This is highlighted in the way she views gold at the end of the novel as a trap and source of danger rather than a source of a secured future since it has got "serial numbers on it and a date. This gold is easy to identify." (Coelho, 2000, p. 114). Besides, Chantal's binocular vision of gold that renders her as non-psychotic is further testified in her reciting of the legend of Midas. Though given the magical power to turn anything he touches into gold, Midas discovered that he would soon die starving since touching food itself would turn it into gold (Coelho, 2000, p. 113). Chantal here takes to pieces the technique of reductionism as she recognizes the multi-faced reality of gold that was first viewed as of precious rescuing value for the village, however, she ends up believing it to be "of no value" (Coelho, 2000, p.113). It is only then that the girl starts to be a stable personality that discovered a lot about herself and develops a binocular vision of her own self (Coelho, 2000, p. 118). In this respect, the stranger says: "You should be grateful for all that's happened, because by showing you the gold, I gave you much more than the possibility of simply becoming rich. I forced you to act, to stop complaining about everything and to take a stand" (Coelho, 2000, p. 116). The development occurring in Chantal's character could be traced in different situations. For example, though declared to be irreligious in one situation, she later on seeks God's help in another when she is unable to take a decision concerning the proposition made by the stranger (Coelho, 2000, p. 20). In addition, she intelligently

revises the stranger's wager so that if no murder is committed, people of Viscos would receive the gold bars as a reward (Coelho, 2000, p. 49).

Building on both Harman's and Bion's theories, the novel weakens the concept of the ultimate truth revealing through its actions that a stable non-changeable truth is an unattainable goal and that what is taken to be the truth of things is constantly revised. This very fact is suggested by Coelho who highlights real objects as withdrawn entities reflected in luring sensual ones whose presentation differ according to the given situation and experience that decide the object's qualities that withdraw and those that relatively arise. The ultimate truth is also weakened by the characters 'developing a binocular vision of reality that itself implies diversity and the absence of one single stable truth. Accordingly, Like any object, truth is luring and always has its contrary double. For example, there is no single truth about the wolf that has two faces; the shocking scene of the wolf puts in parallel two contradictory conceptions of it as an object: a prey and a predator. Since Chantal and the stranger are not seeking a good hunt when they encounter the fox, it is not viewed as a prey animal with attractive valuable fur. They rather perceive it as a frightening source of danger. Here, the sensual qualities of the fox are relevant to the immediate experience.

Similarly, no single character in the novel could attain the sought truth about his/her own self as well as about God. The stranger, for example, could not grasp a true image of himself. This is expressed in the way he described himself as "A man who found paradise when he thought he was a prisoner to the hell of routine and family, and who found hell when he could at last enjoy paradise and total freedom" (Coelho, 2000, p. 15). Even the question of God's nature is a controversial one that has got no decisive answer. Coelho presents God as a real withdrawn object that is experienced differently as a sensual object in different situations the fact that makes it impossible to reach an ultimate truth about God's nature either as benevolent or rather malevolent. Hence an evil incident would resurrect the image of a malevolent God with His sensual malevolent qualities. Whereas an

incident of goodness would resurrect a benevolent God with His benevolent sensual qualities. However, both images are required Just as evil is seen as a prerequisite to good.

Similarly, the novel's argument question concerning the truth of good and evil seems to reach an impasse proposing them as inseparable. This is why Coelho writes, "So you see, Good and Evil have the same face; it all depends on when they cross the path of each individual human being"( 2000, p.27). To further support the view that evil and good are two sides of one coin, the novel revises the Biblical myth of Ahab in a way that is meant to show that what was evil could be good and vice versa. Ahab, the wicked king of Israel is depicted in the Bible as a greedy King who, encouraged by his domineering wife, oppressively took by force Naboth's vineyard (Krisnawati et.al, 2014, p. 119). Nevertheless, revising the myth as a whole, the novel presents Ahab as a murderer who believes not in the existence of Good and "who has already slit a number of throats" (Coelho, 2000, p. 21). However, keeping up with Saint Savin's good expectation of him, he has turned out to be a good man. Once Saint Savin spent a night with him and slept peacefully, safety and trustfully fearing not his reputed wicked nature, this was a turning point in Ahab's life who said to the saint, "Because you believed I was capable of behaving decently, I did."(Coelho, 2000, p. 21). Being alerted by Saint Savin to the potential good in himself, Ahab develops a binocular vision of himself and reaches a state of self-reconciliation that makes him no longer psychotic and From this point on, Ahab was no longer the wicked killer but rather the savior of the village from evil and, thanks to him, Viscos was no longer a border village inhabited with criminals and outlaws but rather a famous trading center (Coelho, 2000, p. 21). Coelho writes, "Savin and Ahab had the same instincts—Good and Evil struggled in both of them, just as they did in every soul on the face of the earth. When Ahab realized that Savin was the same as he, he realized too that he was the same as Savin" (Coelho, 2000, p. 117). Coelho seems to suggest that the stranger is a further replication of Ahab who changed the life of the people of Viscos and who would turn to be good just because they

believe in his goodness. In this concern, the stranger is torn in between the people's good expectations of him and the devil's bad expectations of him. If he sides with the people's good expectation he would be a replication of Ahab. However, keeping up with the devil's expectation, he would become a devil.

Coelho's concept of good and evil is repeated in the stranger's comments on the fake painting of the Last Supper hung on the hotel wall; it is a cheap reproduction of da Vinci's original painting that personifies good in Jesus's person and evil in Judas's. According to the stranger, the model taken by da Vinci to portray Jesus was one boy of the church's choir. Yet three years later, unable to find a model for evil/Judas, da Vinci selected the same Choir boy, who has turned out then to be a beggar, to be a model for Judas failing to discover that both models are but one person (Coelho, 2000. P.27). This issue blurs the edge of the divide between Jesus and Judas as well as between good and evil. The painting inspires the people in the bar with a philosophy of good and evil believing them both to be essential for a meaningful life that attains its meaning and significance from the bundle of contradictory objects that are always in tension: angels and devils, good and evil, happiness and sadness, etc... For example, life in Viscos was once meaningful before the good natured Ahab has dismissed evil from village leaving good without its indispensable other (evil) and this consequently disturbed the course of life making all days seem dull and alike. This is why the villagers look at the painting and lament the fact that they are no longer touched with an angel or a devil. (Coelho, 2000, p. 27). In the issue of the painting, Coelho casts doubts on visual arts as he views it as lacking truth. This is highlighted in the issue of Leonardo da Vinci's painting that underscores the changing nature of the sensual object according to the changing situation. Casting more doubts in visual arts, Coelho referred to the bar's painting as cheap (Coelho, 2020, p.26). Similarly, the decorated walls of the church are described as decorated with "cheap reproductions of paintings of the saints" (Coelho, 2000, p. 87). This suggests that visual arts as reflection of real objects reflect nothing but cheap reproduction.

Believing himself to have reached the ultimate truth about good and evil, the stranger said “I discovered that confronted by temptation, we will always fall. Given the right circumstances, every human being on this earth would be willing to commit evil.” (Coelho, 2000, p.15). However, though tempted, at the very beginning, to commit evil, the people of Viscos have gone against the proposition at the end of the novel. Coelho's conclusion about good and evil is echoed by the philosopher's binocular vision that says that “*Man needs what's worst in him in order to achieve what's best in him*” (Coelho, 2000, p.72). This is repeated once again as follows, “Evil had to manifest itself and fulfill its role, so that ultimately Good could prevail. If there was no betrayal, there could be no cross, the words of the scriptures would not be fulfilled, and Jesus' sacrifice could not serve as an example” (Coelho, 2000, p. 90). This implies that good and evil are to be accepted as two sides of the same coin rather than two alternatives that do not exist at one and the same time. At the end of the novel, asked by the stranger to answer the question of good and evil, Chantal says that all human beings have both good and evil inside, however, “It was all a matter of control. And choice. Nothing more and nothing less” (Coelho, 2000, p.117).

## **Conclusion**

The paper highlights man's persistent need to see through the reality of things to gratify his lust for truth. It suggests the two models of handling the reality of things proposed by Harman's OOO and Bion's binocular vision with one question in mind: what is the real nature of truth and what is the real nature of human beings (good/evil)? Seeking to provide a reasonable answer, the paper reflects upon the much symbolic question posed by Coelho's protagonist concerning whether human nature is utterly good or evil. Throughout a journey in Coelho's novel, the paper proves the question to have no single-aspect answer since the proposed philosophical perspective, exemplified in Harman's object-oriented ontology, suggests that the ultimate truth is an impossible target since truth itself, as dictated by the theory, is a real withdrawn object whose reality is differently reflected by different individuals in changed experiences by sensual objects. This means that everything is

manipulated by constant changeability and the existence of never-ending alternatives.

On the other hand, the paper's psychoanalytic standpoint, represented in Bion's notion of a binocular vision, helps to therapeutically release man's anxiety caused by the shocking discovery that his persistent need for truth would always remain ungratified since every psychologically stable individual should develop what Bion calls a binocular vision of reality. This binocular vision indicates that truth should always have more than one face. This is why Harman's OOO seeks to highlight further faces of taken-for-granted truths like anthropocentrism, theocentric philosophy and subjecthood. This is achieved in proposing instead his egalitarian flat ontology that is contradictory to the three of them. In line with Harman, Bion identifies the binocular vision of objects as a criterion that judges the individual as either psychotic or psychologically balanced. Hence, the paper suggested that Harman's concepts of objects as withdrawn real objects and sensual ones and Bion's notion of binocular vision are nothing but two sides of the same coin. Hence, the paper proposed a necessary synchronization between Harman's concept of OOO including flat ontology and Bion's binocular vision that enables a conversation between different perspectives of reality. In other words, OOO still has left gaps in understanding reality that should be made up for by Bion's notion of a binocular vision. It is only then that the vision of reality is made reasonable, comprehensive and therapeutic as well to the individual's anxiety of not knowing.

In line with Harman and Bion, Coelho suggests a hermeneutic view of all taken for granted single-faced truths to provide further perspectives, a better vision of reality as well as a free-of-tension psychic mind. This is highlighted in the paper's conclusion that the answer of the stranger's question is that good and evil are so indispensable that neither of them acquires meaning without the existence of the other, an idea that is repeated in presenting Jesus and Judas as two faces of one artistic-model person. This is further highlighted in portraying parallel philosophies such as the anthropocentric and theocentric attitudes and suggesting a world governed by no hierarchical systems. It is rather a world of co-existed objects wherein inanimate and non-human objects like the eleven

bars of gold, the wolf and the ghost are major objects that are of no less significance than human objects. Every object of them has both its real and sensual existence the fact that provides different faces of truth. The paper also suggests that one should have other potentialities of his own self rather than believing himself as single-faced entity. This is made clear in the novel that starts depicting most of Coelho's characters as real withdrawn objects that prove to be withdrawn even from their own selves since they can view no other potential versions of themselves. This is illustrated in the example of the once wicked Ahab, who, being helped by saint Savin to see a further potential good image of himself, had developed into a good person. This was also the case of Chantal who was helped by the stranger to see a different potential image of her own self. Hence, the paper traces the development of Coelho's characters that mostly starts as psychotic personalities since they are single-face truth believers or seekers. However, they have gradually stopped being psychotic when they managed to view reality differently by developing a binocular vision of everything around including their own selves. The stranger, for example, was first a psychotic character who has gone astray seeking a single-faced truth: either good or evil. However, he gradually developed a binocular vision of human nature that compromises both good and evil as two alternatives.

However, the paper concludes that Coelho differentiates between two types of binocular vision: a benevolent involuntary one that instinctually views reality from different perspectives that, in their turn, indulge into an intrapsychic dialogue among them causing balance and stability to the individual and a malevolent deliberate one that is coupled with the technique of reductionism and is devised by the conscious mind of the individual to serve his own interest. Coelho highlights the former type as therapeutic as it helps one to develop his thinking ability to comply with tough experiences whereas the latter is a sign of the individual's psychotic nature. This malevolent conscious binocular vision is highlighted in the character of the priest and the villagers while the benevolent unconscious one, typical to Bion's notion, is depicted in the case of the stranger and Chantal. What is required for all psychotic characters is an enhancement of their thinking capability, identified by

Bion as one norm of his theory of thinking. This is bound to help them to reach a state of reconciliation with thoughts engendered by a troubling emotional experience.

The paper regards Coelho's use of the technique of magical realism, exemplified in the devil of the stranger and that of Chantal, as significantly successful as it highlights the fact that they are psychotic characters manipulated with hidden powers that keep them away from coming to term with the real meaning of life as well as of themselves and prevent them from grasping further potential faces of truth. On the contrary, the ghost of Berta's husband was always trying to help her see through hidden reality revealing to her different potentials and faces of truth.



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