

# NEGOTIATING MANICHEAN ALLEGORY IN MORRISON'S PARADISE

*Dr. Zia Ahmed*

Assoc. Prof. of English at the Institute of Social Sciences,  
Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan , Pakistan

*Zoobia Abbas Khan*

PhD Research Scholar in English Literature,  
National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan

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## Abstract

The colonialist mind is full of binary thinking. Their literature is abounding in nothing other than racial thinking in their deep structure. There are varieties of binary thinking that set a single outlook towards the colonial power: an ideology of self and other. The following descriptive study is a kind of confirmation of this ideology. Abdullah Jan Muhammad has discussed in detail the colonialist literature and the impact of European values on indigenous mind through the pieces of literature. He asserts that the colonialist literature depicts a stereotypical mindset of colonizers towards colonized, which is a product of social and cultural difference. Toni Morrison being a spokesperson of different racial issue is portraying the same stereotypical attitude on moral and intellectual grounds. She is making her novel **Paradise**, a device to articulate that there is no phase in-between their self and the colonized's other and there cannot be any reconciliation and settlement between the colonizer and the colonized.

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**Keywords:** Manichean allegory, Binary Structure, Postcolonial Discourse, Colonizer: Colonized, Good: Evil, Imperialistic Structures, Hegemony, Dominance, Symbolic Texts, Colonialist's Literature.

## Introduction

### Concept of Manicheanism

The term 'Manicheanism' is derived from a dualistic concept of theology. It has been coined from old religions who discussed the world in a dichotomized view of light and darkness. For Manichean religion (the ancient belief system) light stands for good and darkness stands for evil. This faith was one of the wide spread belief system of the world at that time. The term 'Manichean' was coined in third century AD that symbolized a duel

between God and Satan. They are considered as the coeternal and Satan is all evil. The followers of this concept take Christ as a spirit with twofold nature of both God and Man, who stands for good. So in the fight of good and evil, there is always a presence of God and Satan. God is the real commander with good intentions while Satan is the opponent with evil objectives.

The concept of Manicheanism is followed by contemporary postcolonial writers and critics who have adopted the binary structure of good: evil and modified it in postcolonial studies as colonizer: colonized in cultural constructs. Postcolonial discourses study the Manichean concept for binary structures of imperial ideology. According to Routledge's Key Concepts, Manicheanism is a process of polarizing the society, culture and the people into colonizer and colonized terms with their binary oppositional category of good and evil. According to postcolonial discourse, the Manichean allegory always tells the story of colonizer's effort for absolute wealth, absolute power and absolute domination over the colonized community. Peculiar feudal thinking and efforts of colonialist mind provides them many issues related to native nation, and different rationale to strengthen their concept of absolute domination on other nation. It is all because the natives are unable to govern their nation properly. The imperial powers want to civilize the other nation (the natives); they consider the natives as lacking intelligence, hyperemotional and lack capacity to develop or use their own natural resources.

The imperial manicheanistic thinking takes the natives as evil and avoids identifying themselves with natives as being, as they lack rationality and they are of contaminated mind. Therefore, they, for the apparent purpose of educating them, position themselves completely in the others land by subjugating the colonized. On the other hand, the colonized feel hatred for the colonizer as the later attempted (almost successful in this attempt) to spoiling their traditions by using their resources and treating with them as animals. A crash is seen between the colonizer's culture and the colonized culture. An education system was imposed on natives that were in glory of colonizer's illuminating past and a hatred for natives darker past that bring the natives into state of attraction to the colonial powers and a hatred for them as well.

The postcolonial writers and novelists have always attempted to write on the subject of self and other. No other colonialist literary studies are filled with the debate on colonized and, civilized and uncivilized, good and evil, white and black, and so on and so forth. There is a development of a tendency of western thoughts that establish a world into binary opposition and all the discourses were set up in a relation to dominance. The Manichean allegory provides no phase in-between. It is always in extreme position.

There is no phase between good: evil, human: bestial, white: black, Civilized: uncivilized etc.

The post colonial writers took the duty of describing these thoughts through their text symbolically. One example is E. M. Foster, who through **A Passage to India** has discussed British Raj in subcontinent and its pertinent effect on the social economic and physiologic life of natives. Similarly Joseph Conrad through **Heart Of Darkness**, Zora Neal Hurston through her novels, Richard Wright's **The Native Son** describing the environment in which blacks are livings as victims and last but not the least Toni Morrison as a spokeswoman of Africa Americans.

### **Conceptual frame work**

Here, the concept of Manichean allegory is discussed with particular reference to a novel **Paradise** written by Toni Morrison in 1998. A tug of war is presented by the author through out the novel. This is a fight between victimizer and the victimized. A fight between good and evil and symbolically a quest for understanding the exact psyche of binary thinking of colonizer: colonized and self: other.

The present study is based on Abdul Rahman JanMohamad's article "**The Economy of Manichean Allegory**" in which he argued in details the Manichean concept of good and evil. The binary thinking of colonizers: and colonized along with imperial understanding of self: other, good: evil, civilized: uncivilized are kept in researcher's mind while debating on the issue. As JanMohamad has, throughout the article, showed his main concern with the symbolical text, **Paradise**, being a symbolical text is selected to discuss the issue of good and evil in a colonized society. The theory of Manichean allegory is applied on the novel to find out the purpose of the writer to discuss there binary thinking side by side for getting knowledge of Manichean theory through applied in a symbolical text.

During the application process, all the upcoming aspects of Manichean allegory are explained as much as possible. The study of such aspects through its application on the novel will help the reader to understand the values and basis of imperialist culture in a colonized society and the writer's attempt and ability to subvert an avoid the economy of Manichean Allegory

### **Literature review**

#### **JanMohammad's Treatment of Manichean Allegory**

Abdul Rahman JanMohamad discusses the concept of Manicheanism in the backdrop of postcolonial perspective of self/other. He takes the colonialist literature as an attempt to destroy the civilization of colonized world. In his view the colonialist literature takes their own ideology while

describing a colonized culture and such cultures are always discussed as evil, chaotic and with shattered moral values. In JanMohamad's words:

*“That world is therefore perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable and ultimately evil.” (18)*

Jan Mohamad through this theory of Manichean Allegory is creating a world with binary opposition. Colonizer/colonized with their perception of good/evil respectively. A construction of cultural values along with the deconstruction of colonized culture is discussed in detail.

Colonizers have always a purpose of profit in Marxist terms in their mind. They have always an indication of significance for their culture in their thinking. So cunningly and skillfully, the imperialists (colonizers) see their economic advantage while dealing with the colonized. If they guess that there is any kind of benefit or profit through the colonized's ideology, they skillfully attempt to cope with them and adopt their ideology in relation to colonized culture. On the contrary, if the colonized culture is hindring the progress of imperial culture, they tend to turn against them by declaring the native's civilization as evil, barbarous and ghastly. JanMohammad argues that colonizers are always with a type of superiority complex and belief that they know the native psyche and culture and try to negate their real essence by declaring them uncivilized.

JanMohammad states that a colonialist literature always tries to develop 'ethnocentric assumption'. It never tries to explore the hidden truths of colonized other, i.e. the effect of colonizers on the colonized. It just works on the frame work codified by imperialistic modes. The purpose of such texts is to harp on the same string that the imperial riles are the best. Such texts work on binary thinking as civilized/uncivilized., good/evil, literate/illiterate, self/other. These literatures are not constructive in nature rather a universal propaganda of colonizers 'so-called civilized mentality. JanMohammad has categorized a colonial text into two categories: imaginary text, symbolical text. In imaginary text, the native is always imagined as an image of imperialist's self. It shows the internal rival nature of the European mind of ignoring the indigenous people, individual intentions and indigenous circumstances. They inflict a fixed hostility of Self/other by calling the native 'evil'. To quote JanMohammad:

*“in the 'imaginary' colonialist realm, to say 'native' is automatically to say 'evil' and to evoke immediately the economy of Manichean Allegory.” (19)*

Thus the colonizer uses the signifier of native to signify them as evil.

In the 'symbolic' texts, the native acts as a 'mediator of European desires' (19). The authors of symbolical text present the binary oppositional

thinking of self/other in a modified form than the authors of imaginative texts. There is an examination of different cultures and an understanding of the disparity of colonizers and colonized culture. These texts discuss the particularity of the concept of 'otherness'. There is a type of understanding that cope to 'free itself from the Manichean Allegory' (20). JanMohammad in '**The Economy of Manichean Allegory**' mainly focuses on 'symbolical text', written by both colonialist writers and the natives. In material and economical perspective, if a nation bases its desire on the assumption of an attempt to fulfill the desire of the other nation it is in fact a type of exercising superiority on the other nation it has no significance for the other nation rather it is an imposition of foreign culture on the economy, politics, law and justice of the native nation and just for the purpose of power relation subjugation as economic exploitation of that nation. This builds a thinking of self and other that creates self always as good and other as evil in Manichean terms.

JanMohammad takes colonialist text as their self image in their desire for fetishizing the native they are unconsciously producing their own image the imperialist text by giving their colonizers a central place and stereotyping the natives variously. They unconsciously discuss the natives and render them the same gravity and decorum that is the native's soul. In this way, they work in a fixed Manichean Allegory for motivating their material practice and literary representations both in structure of the narrative and plot of the narratives.

All canonical texts deal with issues and elements as universals. The writers always take the blacks in their accounts as barbarous. The stories of blacks and that of whites are, for imperialist mind, are nothing except a universal account with changing names and places. The central aspect (the essential) remains the same. JanMohammad quotes Dinesen<sup>1</sup> in this context:

*"The natives were Africa in flesh and...(the various cultures of Africa, the mountains, the trees, the animals) were different expressions of idea , variations upon the same theme. It was not a congenial up heaping of heterogeneous atoms, but a heterogeneous heaping of congenial atoms, as in the case of oak-leaf and the acorn and the object made from oak."* (21)

So, according to Dinesen, if we abolish such physical differences, then all the fight for identity, social and historical cultural formations will end. But if the process on the side of natives remains assiduous then the process of civilizing them will be continued. In Manichean term, if evil of

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<sup>1</sup> Dinesen, Isak. *Out of African*. London: Puthnam. 1937

the natives remain in practice of spoiling the universal ideology, the good of colonizers will continue its preaching of excellence directly or indirectly.

The symbolical texts attempt to resume the harmonious relationship between self and other. The stubborn nature of other colonialists' literature has made it almost impossible in the field of imaginative texts because these texts are based upon the Manichean Aesthetics of racial difference-----self/other binary thinking. The relationship between imperial ideology and literary ideology in a colonialist literary study is always advantageous as they serve the purpose of benefiting each other that result in the barbarity of other because of a clear difference between self and other.

### **Salient Features of Manichean Allegory put forward by JanMohammad**

JanMohammad has described the following features of Manichean Allegory in a foreign invaders mind in his debate on '**The Economy of**

#### **Manichean Allegory'**

- The imperial powers always respond to the other in terms of identity or difference. If they find a type of advantage in identifying themselves with others, they assume an identity with them or the otherwise.
- The colonizers are morally, and intellectually superior to colonized. They rely on their own inflexible theory about their moral superiority and never try to understand the real energy of colonized.
- The colonialist literature has its own 'ethnocentric assumption', they never depict reality; rather fulfill the structures of their own mentality.
- The colonizers use their literature to project their own ideal image in the native's eye and there is no place of syncretic possibility.
- Through colonialist texts the European's show their internal rivalry towards natives, depicting natives as all evil that 'evoke the economy of the Manichean allegory'. (19)
- The colonialist writers fetishize a non-dialectical and predetermined antagonism between self and other.
- The writers of symbolical text are on the other hand dialectic in approach and open to discuss the binary thinking of self and other. There is an examination of different cultures, European values and its impact or effect on indigenous mind. These texts are reflexive and schematize the colonialist outlook and their dealing with the concept of self and other.

- The purpose of colonialist literature is nothing than heaping the imperialist's superiority, providing an ideal context to impose its craving on indigenous people.
- There is a fixation and stereotyping of the other, that project a violent and inhuman hatred of the native all the evil practices of the natives are projected in the colonialist literature not as a product of social and cultural difference but as the typical attribute of the other.
- Through Manichean Allegory the imperialist try to get specific benefit as their process of material practice and text representation. The colonialist strategy does not contain any concrete vision of civilized future for natives; it just wants to maintain its privileges by its representation of a world without any history, culture or social values anyway. Through stereotyping the natives, the generate a variety of binary opposition with no phase in-between i.e. good: evil, civilized: uncivilized, light: dark, white: black, and many other constructs like this
- The basic ideology of imperialistic literature is to articulate and justify the authority of colonizers, insisting on the symbiotic relation that motivates the Manichean circle of superiority, control and authority upon the colonized.

### **A manicheanistic analysis of *paradise***

**Paradise** is an influential novel by Toni Morrison in which we see the town of Oklahoma reeling from racial and political confusion. A small territory of Convent is there on the edge of the town Ruby. Symbolically Morrison has presented a dominant area of ruby with a weak neighbor Convent... a larger community in an unfriendly relationship with a smaller community. One morning the Ruby men took aim of Convent women and raided them for the purpose of occupying the locale. They consider the convent ladies as evils:

*"Bitches, more like witches."* (276)

There were five women living in convent independently, whom the men of Ruby think as evil doers. They consider these ladies as wicked, aborted, adulterous and drifter. In Manichean terms these ladies were symbolized darkness and evil in them. Where as, in Ruby the power and dominance is portrayed through the Morgan twins. They are all in all for the benefit of their community just like colonial powers in a territory.

Through **Paradise** Morrison has challenged the issues related to gender and race; here the researcher is willing to discuss the novel in a different perspective of Manicheanism. The study of the novel from this postcolonial perspective will help in explaining JanMohammad's views on Manichean allegory and how texts deal with these aspects in a symbolical

touch. Morrison has presented the concept of colonizer/colonized with their manicheanistic attitude of good/evil, self/ other, civilized/uncivilized and victimizer/victimized.

JanMohammad asserts in his **The Economy of Manichean Allegory** that the colonizers always consider themselves superior to the colonized especially at moral and intellectual grounds. They never bother to know the colonized mind and look at them from a distance with their own perception of their presence. There is no care for the colonized people's sentiments and likes and dislikes. Same authority is presented in **Paradise**, when the author sketches the town of Ruby and calls it

*“All black town worth pain” (5)*

The twin brothers in Ruby, Deacon Morgan and Steward Morgan control all the affairs of the town inside and outside. They are the power and money of that area as stated in the novel:

*“...have powerful memories. Between them they remember the details of everything that ever happened---things they witnessed, things they have not...and they never forgotten the message. Especially the controlling one, told to them by their grand fathers. An s tory that explained why neither the founders of Haven nor the descendents could tolerate anybody but themselves.” (13)*

There is a control , a supremacy is present of these twin brothers everywhere who are consider everything keeping their Self in mind and ignoring other at any rate. Ruby is presented as an ideal state with all good in its environment. Convent is presented as a binary opposite of Ruby they are misfits of society who help other misfits of that society. Ruby men take them as evil and wanted to end this evil. In this attempt the take God as their helper and motivator.

*“bodacious black Eves unredeemed by Mary, they are like panicked does leaping towards a sun that has finished burning off the mist and now pours its holy oil over the hides of game.: (18)*

The plot construction of the novel along with art of characterization is very systematic. Morrison has taken a larger community in relation to a smaller community with a master: slave relationship. In the first place the novel tells the story of African Americans that how they were rejected by White Americans and then these black Americans has decided to build an all black town on the rule of Exceptionalism---an American alchemy. The history of Ruby men is described as:

*“For ten generations, they had believed the division they fought to close war, free against slave and rich against poor. Usually, but not always*



*white against black. Now they saw a new separation: light-skinned against black. Oh, they knew the difference in the minds of whites, but it had not struck them before that it was of consequence, to Negroes themselves” (194)*

So, keeping their history in mind, they are in Ruby with authoritative and self protective voices. JanMohammad writes about colonialist’s attitude in their texts as these texts are:

*“Essentially spectacular: instead of seeing the natives as a bridge towards syncretic possibility, it uses him as a mirror that reflects the colonialist’s self image.” (19)*

The same element of separateness and isolation is seen in **Paradise**. There is no love, no affection and no sentimental relationship between Ruby people and the Convent ladies. The convent is for them:

*“ ...the mansion floated, dark and malevolently disconnected from God’s earth.” (18)*

In respect to JanMohammad’s Manicheanistic discussion of other, the Ruby people fetishize the convent socially and morally. They had the ideology to hate these ladies, therefore they started on a journey to set their path towards right. As ruby men say:

*“ God at their side. The men take aim. For Ruby.” (18)*

Jan Mohammad throughout the article has pointed out that the colonizers are always against the natives. There is no phase in-between their self and the colonized’s other. They show an internal rivalry in their eye for the natives. Such elements are discussed symbolically in **Paradise**. In chapter *Grace*, of the novel from the discussion of K. D. and Reverend Misner it is obvious that the ruby men consider themselves as superhuman aloof from the savage natives:

*“Oklahoma is Indians, negroes and God mixed, all the rest is fodder.” (56)*

A type of hatred is visible in Convent ladies who are the racial other of Ruby men. In mavis words:

*“that stupid, fucked-up town make anybody puke.” (165)*

Such lines affirm Jan Maohammad’s arguments about the relationship between colonizers and colonize as well as in ironical way, their intimacy too that clarifies that there can not be any reconciliation and settlement between the colonizer and the colonized.

Morrison has depicted the colonialist code of good and bad masterly and in perfection. The archetypal hatred between self and other is visible throughout the novel. This hatred in the eyes of Convent women hark back a reader to the hatred in colonized eye. Patricia Best in *Paradise* says about Ruby men:

*“ the sign of racial purity they had taken for granted, had become a stain.” (194)*

Jan Mohammad states an ideology of colonizers mind of getting profit and personal benefits from the others. In **Paradise** this concept is artistically represented. Patricia Best while describing the hatred of Ruby men from her mother being an outsider and does not belong to their community , tells how had the Ruby men used the services of her mother for their special benefits.

*“Remember how they needed you, used you to go into store to get supplies or a can of milk while they parked around the corner? That was the only thing your skin was good for.” (200)*

The Ruby men hate Billy Delia because she was an outsider. She was not a native of all black towns but when these authoritative people needed her services for bringing food from other dominated areas i.e. white dominated, they un-reluctantly took the advantage of that lady. She is in Jan Mohammad’s term was not an object of their representation but a racial other.

The Manichean concept of thinking the self as superior and all good for them is frequently discussed in the story of **Paradise** people of ruby presented an inside of America ---isolated and puritan in nature. Ruland and Bradbury remarked about the puritan nature of America in following words:

*“ that recurrent conflict between the real and ideal, the utopian and the actual, the intentional and the accidental, the mythic and the diurnal can be read.....an essential legacy of the puritan imagination in American mind.” (13-14)*

Byer in **A City Upon a Hill** discusses the same concept of isolation and remoteness from the other communities as discussed in **Paradise**. The Ruby people adopted the theme of separateness for their town in which no outsider was aloud. Morrison has tried to depict an ideal image of self in Manichean terms by mapping out the town of Ruby. The community of Ruby consider themselves as mentally superior, and they were rigid towards other i.e. convent in this case. The Ruby men were ‘Chosen people’ with a ‘promised land’ and God is their benefactor and supporter in their acts.

*“He is with us”, said Zechariah, “He is leading the way.” (34)*

Elevn. E. Shockley about **Paradise** reviews that the novel is an entitled work for postcolonial understanding of Manicheanism. The critic discusses here that the binary thinking of self/other is entirely present throughout the novel.

*“Nothing is simple. Paradise, a novel whose working title was ‘war’ tells the story about ‘us’*

*verses ‘them’ with a man shooting a gun. Only the reader unfamiliar of Morrison ‘s pervious work would expect the battle lines to be clearly drawn.”*  
(719)

The novel is heart rendering with its stories on topics like suppression, tyranny, misery and hatred etc. the sense of superiority is overwhelming the Ruby men from the very outset of the novel to the end. They have hard and fast rules for themselves and for the outsider, they want to subjugate the Convent ladies, when they see their own men violating the rules of their community, they were full of rage as it was like sully the pure blood of their community.

*“he is bringing along the dung we living behind.”* (201)

For them the town of Ruby is all good. With good qualities in it.

*“Unique and isolated, his was a town justifiably pleased with itself. It neither had nor needed a jail. No criminal had ever come from his town. And they one or two people who acted up, humiliated their families or threatened the town’s view of itself were taken good care of;”* (8)

On one hand the town of Ruby is the symbol of protection, on the other hand the Ruby men are even not allowing the convent ladies to live an independent life of their own. What a dual temperament is beautifully depicted by the author with no comparison of it anywhere at all. Morrison through her characters is conveying a message to the world having Manichean thinking in them that this world is a God made world. There is no separateness on gender and class basis. Through the character of Lone Morrison writes:

*“ you need what we need: earth, air, water. Don’t separate God from his elements. He created it all. You stuck on dividing Him from His works. Don’t unbalance his world.”* (244)

Reverend Misner from the novel represent the same idea and Morrison declares all in one sentence that:

*“Isolation kills generation, it has no future.”* (210)

## **Conclusion**

Jan Mohammad has discussed and argued in his theory of Manichean Allegory elaborately the concept of self and other in a colonialist mind. He has identified the colonialist mind in the deep structure of their literature. Their literature resulted into nothing but the racial differences with varieties of binary thinking....the most important among such thinking is the ideology in the colonialist’s mind of self and other. They don’t only negate the

individual thinking of other but also through ethnocentric assumption affirm it as of servile nature. They depict the limits of native's thoughts and indirectly '*preserve the structur of their own mentality*' (84) as JanMohammad has indicated. Morrison's Paradise also describes the same mentality of the colonizer's mentality in a symbolical way. She has not taken the people of different race as her ingredient of novel rather she had made a prey to victim the people of her own race i.e. Blacks. Morrison has affirmed Jan Mohammad's assumptions on colonialist's literature and portrayed them throughout the novel. She has created a town of Ruby with a sense of superiority in them. She has tried to represent all the dominant aspects of binaries in Ruby men. They are civilized, good and literate people. On the other hand convent ladies were depicted an embodiment of the minor aspects of binaries. They are inferior, uncivilized, evil and atrocious ladies. As JanMohammad says that other is always evil in colonizer's eye, same is the case with convent ladies. They are not evil in real sense rather they are evil for Ruby men only. They are racial other for them. A visible transmission of colonialism is seen in Ruby men's eyes. As in Manichean Allegory the internalization of foreign policy create a hegemonic influence on the mind of the public same is the case with ruby men. They had made up the rules and convent ladies are beyond the obedience of that policy. They are without any chief in their lives to be instructed by. They are all women, therefore, for Ruby they are witches. Ruby men say:

*"They don't need man and therefore they don't need God."* (276)

No doubt the principle of love and equality was there in the town but this principle was not for an outsider. As for colonizers there is no reconciliation with colonized. Similarly there is no love and equality for the Convent ladies. In Morrison's word:

*"They think they have outfoxed the white man when in fact they imitable him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them. And when the maimed children ask for help, they look else when for the cause".* (306)

In short, while writing the story of Ruby, Morrison is writing the history of America with is slogans of equality along with prejudiced attitude towards other nations of another race. They can be black, they can be Asian. There is no boundary of this narrow minded approach. JanMohammad and Morrison jointly have created an atmosphere of meditation and deliberation. there is an open show of colonizers mind in symbols, a series of dominance and slavery is presented with acceptance and rejection of that dominance in such a tremendous style that it baffled and frozen the reader's mind.

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