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Research Article

EXISTENTIALISM, MAN AND ETERNAL RECURRENCE: A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF NETFLIX'S DARK

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ABSTRACT

The Biblical story of 'Fall of Man' is imbued with existential reality and crisis. Man is just a victim of some stronger power and thus tormented by an eternal ring of suffering. Adam and Eve were the first humans who suffered not only because of their own choices but also they were victimized. The temptation came from Satan. The whole story of 'Fall of Man' indicates the very fact that man is constantly being threatened by an external force that is bent on wiping out his existence. He is in a cruel world striving to achieve Heaven. But within this eternal cycle of trauma and humiliation, man sometimes may seek to break the ring to be free and to make the other people free. In Netflix's Dark, the two main protagonists, Jonas and Martha, became the representatives of this eternal struggle. The objective of my paper is to analyze the characters, especially Jonas and Martha, from a Biblical point of view to highlight their tragedies and their constant efforts to end further tragedies. This paper will aim to apply the concepts of existentialism and internal recurrence to expose the biblical connection in Netflix's Dark and to glorify the sacrifices of Jonas and Martha as a victory against the existential crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'existentialism' has been coined by Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher promoting the very concept that man alone can exist in this rather unstable world. According to Kierkegaard, only a concrete thing imbued with consciousness can exist and man, being a concrete individual, is capable of existence (More, 13). When we are talking about Jean Paul Sartre, it is to be noted that Sartre was mostly interested in promoting the idea that man has free will and therefore greater responsibility can be given upon him. For Sartre, either God exists or man is free. (Edeh, 18) But this is a direct contradiction to the biblical notion of the existence of God. If man is free, then how can God exist? It is because of Adam and Eve's betrayal, mankind lost its position in the Garden of Eden. Even that betrayal has resulted from the manipulation done to them by Satan. Then the question arises, is man really free? Most of the classical philosophers believed that man is bound by fate and destiny that cannot be altered and changed. And the very struggle of human beings to alter their fates promotes the crisis. It is an existential crisis where man, knowing his final destination, tries to fight against all odds to claim his freedom. When Adam and Eve lost their position in Eden, they were faced with a tremendous challenge- a challenge to overcome all the obstacles of the world only to

exist. Both of them became tools for both God and Satan. But despite this, human beings tend to fight back even in the face of all odds. As the Romantics have portrayed that man's potential is limitless, it is this very limitlessness that enables a man to fight on even in the face of existentialist crisis.

BIBLE, MAN AND NETFLIX'S DARK

"He created them male and female, and He blessed them and named them Man in the day when they were created." -Genesis 5:2

The concept of Adam and Eve played an important role in Netflix's 'Dark'. In the series, we see that two protagonists, Jonas Kahnwald and Martha Nielsen, are represented as Adam and Eva. The significance of these names is very important in the course of the series and it will be revealed gradually. It is not the fact that they were conceptualized as Adam and Eve from the beginning. But they were molded into the figures. This brings us to the issue of real Adam and Eve from the Bible.

God first created Adam and after that Eve came into existence. As they were God's favorites, they were given the 'Eden' to dwell and prosper. But only one thing was prohibited. In Genesis 2:16-17, God told Adam:

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“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it : for in the day that thou eatest there of thou shalt surely die.”

This was a warning for both of them which they neglected and was, eventually, banished from Eden and the grace of God to Earth where anarchy and death reigned. Here if we analyze the events of the Bible closely, we will find out that the ‘fall’ actually happened where Eve was tempted by Satan to eat the fruit. It was not the eating of the fruit but the desire to eat the fruit caused their downfall. It was more spiritual and psychological than physical (Madueme & Reeves, 30). Adam was warned by God, as he did through the ages,: ‘the soul, that Sinreth, it shall die’(Ezekiel 8:20). So, the soul was the immediate victim of the temptation. In ‘Dark’, Jonas and Martha were entangled with the cosmic conspiracy that actually led to their transformation into Adam and Eve. The conflict between Adam’s desire to destroy the two worlds with the apocalypse and Eva’s attempt to maintain the cycle of the two worlds led to the continual torment of human lives in both worlds. But, what propelled them to take such actions?

In Genesis 3:4.5, Satan said: “ And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, they your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil” . So, it was the desire for knowledge that ruined Adam and Eve. The forbidden fruit opened their eyes to the desire and complexities of life and both of them were unable to withstand it. So, again it was the desire and their inability to control it that led Adam and Eve to their banishment. In the series, Jonas’s discovery of his father’s real identity, his mother's infidelity, and, ultimately, the experience where he (as Adam) has killed Martha, fuel Jonas’s transformation towards becoming Adam. The knowledge that his lover’s (Martha) youngest brother is actually his father and his lover is his aunt, destroys his mental integrity. The final blow comes when he sees his older self (Adam) killing Martha. Jonas, throughout season 1 and season 2 of the series, has tried to fill the gaps in his life – to keep his father alive and to stop the murder of Martha. These desires of his have led him to perform some unthinkable deeds, from manipulation and betrayal to the murder of his own mother stimulating his spiritual downfall. Martha's case is more or less the same. She is also ignited by her desire to save the life of Jonas in her world from herself. But the unique thing about Martha is that her desire shifts soon enough when she witnesses the murder of Eva (her older self) by Adam (Jonas’s older self). After the incident, her object of desire shifts from Jonas to herself. In the end, Martha is also a cunning manipulator and murderer. In Bible, the effect of temptation came pretty quick to Adam and Eve. In ‘Dark’, the effect came as the plot progressed. It is more vivid and analytical than the original biblical tale.

To understand the issue of the fall of man in 'Dark' more clearly, it is important to understand the role of the tempter in the Bible as well as in the series. The fallen archangel Lucifer or Satan was the main tempter that caused the fall of man in Genesis. Adam and Eve were his victims- perfect scapegoats to take revenge on God for his banishment to Hell:

“For now, and since first break of dawne the Friend,
Meer Serpent in appearance, forth was come,

And on his Guest, where likeliest he might finde
The onely two of Mankinde, but in them

The whole included Race, his purposed prey.” (Milton, 411-416, p. 259)

It is noteworthy that, Satan never displayed his supernatural powers to tempt Adam and Eve. He only took the form of a serpent to hide his true identity. Eve let her be tempted by Satan for her own curiosity. Satan was just a manipulator and he did only enough to ignite Eve's hidden desire to taste the forbidden fruit. Adam followed his wife in the act of crime against God:

“so gloz’d the Tempter, and his proem tun’d;
Into the Heart of Eve his words made way...” (Milton, 549-550, p. 262)

Satan used his charm and knowledge to deceive Eve and then Adam much like Claudia in the series. After understanding the grave situation they are in Claudia started to take things into her own hands. She was the one who decided everyone in the story through her knowledge and the way of giving the knowledge. While Adam and Eva were thinking that everybody else was a pawn to them, it was originally Claudia who was controlling everybody, including Adam and Eva, as her pawns. She was the one who told young Jonas about the time travel and set him on his way to fulfill his destiny, she was the one who told her younger self everything about the cycle and made her a part of the chain. Young H.G. Tannhaus was given the book 'A Journey through Time' by her to be written by him in the future. She manipulated Jonas's desire to break the chain and save his father and Martha to such an extent that Jonas never (nearly) suspected her motifs. It was her wisdom and knowledge of everything which was happening surrounding her that enabled her to manipulate others, just like Satan:

“To whom the Tempter guilefully repli’d.
Indeed? Hath God then said that of the Fruit
Of all than Garden Trees ye shall not eate,
Yet Lords declar’d of all in Earth or Aive?” (Milton, 659-663, p. 265)

By asking the questions to Eve, Satan was able to fuel her curiosity from within to attain the knowledge:

“To happier life, Knowledge of Good and Evil;
Of good, how just? Of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunned?
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just;
Not just, not God; not feared then, nor obeyed:
Your feare if self of Death removes the feare.” (Milton, 655, p. 267)

Claudia did the same to Jonas. She tempted him not to lose hope, but to search for a way out and in that temptation was her success. But all this time she was actually fulfilling her own desires using the other characters. She was the ‘white devil’ or Satan of ‘Dark’.

But, what forced her to do these things? In biblical mythology, Satan opposed God’s omnipotence. As a result, he was hunted down to Hell along with his companions. It was a punishment for disobeying the supremacy of God:

“Th’ inferral Serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stird up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv’d

The Mother of Mankind, what time has pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his Host
Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equal'd the most High,
If he oppos'd, and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
Rais'd impious war in Heav'n and Battle proud
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th'
Ethereal skie
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In Adamantine Chains and penal fire,
Who durst defie th' Omnipotent to Arms." (Milton, 33-49, p. 18-19)

Satan's downfall made him crafty and shrewd as he knew he never had the power to defeat God directly. His anger came from his loss of Heaven and all the merits that came with it. In the case of Claudia, her manipulation came into existence because of her desire to save her daughter Regina from death. So, in the series, it can be said that Regina, symbolically, represented Heaven. The fact that Regina was the only character in the whole story who went nowhere near the complexities of the eternal cycle of damnation. She remained innocent of the knowledge. So, her death can be symbolically portrayed as the loss of Heaven for Claudia. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, BK-I, we see Satan's philosophical side-defeated but, not yet broken:

"All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
The Glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me." (Milton, 106-111, p. 20)
Like Satan, who says of free will, Claudia refuses to submit to the will of omnipotent 'Time' and she wanted to create her own destiny become a victim. She used her own wit and knowledge to pull every string to find the loophole in the cycle and break the cycle of repetition.

Hanno Tauber is another character from the series who can be compared with the biblical character, Noah. It is again important to understand that Adam himself named Hanno 'Noah' in the story. Why is Noah important? The answer again lies in the fact that it was Noah who was manipulated much by Adam and Claudia. In the biblical myth, Noah, son of Lamech, was ordered by God to save a portion of living beings from the great flood so that life could flourish in the new paradise. Noah did everything and was successful to fulfill his destiny. In the series, Hanno or Noah was told by Adam that in order to gain paradise he had to do his part properly igniting the Apocalypse. But unknown to Noah, it was a manipulation by Adam. Believing the concept of paradise and Salvation, he murdered his own father, killed the innocent children, and exploited Helge, only to be betrayed by Adam. The biblical Noah and Dark's Noah, both, had the same notion about paradise and Salvation and they blindly followed the doctrine of God. The only difference was that biblical Noah got his salvation, but Dark's Noah found agony and death.

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, we live in a world that is full of meaningless suffering. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he has stated that people are "surrounded by fearful void" (28) and they are afraid of meaningless suffering. But meaninglessness is a part of our existence. We live in a cosmos that is empty and unstable. The very reality of the statement can lead us towards our destruction. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he has pointed out, "...it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish..." (39). To him, we are entangled in a vicious cycle of struggle that we cannot break- the ring of 'eternal recurrence' (Solomon, 343). The recurrence has the power to weigh us down; it can force us to live a miserable life again and again without end. According to Solomon, it "would change you as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and everything, 'do you want this once more and innumerable times more?' would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress." (343). Our world is an absurd world with no chance of salvation. We are here to suffer for eternity and that is absurdism. The essence of it has been echoed in the lives of the two tramps in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, "Nothing to be done" (Graver, 29).

In *Dark* also, Jonas and Martha, along with the other characters, are trapped in a repetitive cycle of horror and terror. The fearful fact is that the more they try to destroy the cycle, the more they are bound to it. It is a tragedy of human life. And if we draw the biblical parallels, we see that the external and internal agents, both are responsible for this recurrence of eternal misery for all the characters. It is an existentialist crisis for them. Jonas and Martha have tried to neutralize the cycle of violence, but only to create complex paradoxes of life. But, the ending of *Dark* carries a sense of reconciliation through the acceptance of existentialist crisis- in the case of *Dark*, it is the sacrifice of Jonas and Martha. Both of them sacrificed themselves in order to eliminate the cycle and to protect the innocents trapped in the vicious ring. Now, their sacrifice was a willing sacrifice, they choose to wipe themselves out of existence. It can be symbolized as the sacrifice of Adam and Eve to protect the rest of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Netflix's *Dark* is a complex ride from the beginning to the end. Biblical references have been used again and again only to highlight the complexities of life and the cycle of violence. Man is bound to suffer, either because of him or some other forces. It is the very concept of existentialist crisis that we cannot escape. At the same time, when we accept the crisis, the absurdity of our existence, we find a sense of reconciliation. Jonas and Martha, at the end of the series, accepted their reality and, thus, were able to end the cycle of saving humanity.

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