



Reimagining Grendel: Subversion, Catharsis, and Mythic Transformation in Suniti Namjoshi's *Aditi and Her Friends Meet Grendel*

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Abstract

*The figure monster in fantasy literature especially in children's literature has persisted across myth, folklore, fable and placed in one of the most enduring archetypes which highlights fear, danger, disorder, violence and the unknown edges of human psychology. From ancient epics to modern literature fantasies, the monstrous characters in general performed as a symbolic storehouse of violence, bloodshed, collective anxieties, social tensions, and moral hierarchies. Yet, contemporary young adult (YA) literature increasingly challenges this inherited stereotypical tradition. The monster characteristic which is once fixed as the absolute antagonist, in this paper undergoes a striking re-evaluation, re-visioning process through subversion, and psychological interiority. S. Namjoshi works beyond the boundaries. Her works are related to global connotations, displacement and transformation is the base of Suniti Namjoshi's *Aditi and Her Friends Meet Grendel*. The writer here juxtaposes the legendary tale of Grendel where the famously brutal creature from Beowulf is reimagined not as a monstrous terror but as a complex, emotionally vulnerable child capable of transformation through empathy, catharsis, and re-education which brings anthropocentrism and broadens the horizon by blending myth and modernity. Namjoshi explores the interconnectedness between the human world and the mythic world in almost each of her work. This paper deeply elucidates the process by which Namjoshi subverts the inherited myth of Grendel, reframes monstrosity within a pedagogical and psychological way which is suitable for young adults. The writer also aligns her narrative with postmodern feminist storytelling that dismantles rigid binaries between hero and villain, human and monster, self and other. The Paper will thus endeavour to critique the discourse on displacement by analysing the parallels between mythic and modern characters, highlighting the shared vulnerabilities across human and non-human species*

Keywords: catharsis, monster, myth, revision, subversion

Introduction

The approach of monster in classical literature has long been functioned as a structural counterpart to heroism. In the epic Beowulf, the character Grendel is not just an rival but a necessary shadow through which Beowulf's heroism is created in the history.

His monstrousness is very essential for ancestry because he was the descendant of Cain and his uncontrollable rage, bloodlust, and exile makes him different from human society. The literature frames him as devilish character whose death is essential for the restoration of social order. As Tolkien famously



observed, “The significance of a mythic monster is not confined to its shape but lies in its place in a poet’s imaginative structure” (Tolkien 17). Grendel’s suppressive archetypal actions are wellknown worldwide and followed by every genre of literature from generations to generations. It increases the embodiment of chaos, darkness, mystery and develops the thought of negativity which should be eradicated for civilizations to come. This research paper investigates how - across the boundaries, continents, literature regenerates, refreshes the concept of displacement which is disproportionately borne by the marginalized and vulnerable.

In contemporary reinterpretations or in the intellectual literature society, the monstrous characters are not mere a symbol but treated as an object of psychological research and ethical reconsideration because these characters sets an example for the future ahead. The same scenario is the bases of this research a paper as S. Namjoshi’s *Aditi and Her Friends Meet Grendel* is a seminal text, telling the story from Grendel’s own perspective which is very close to a modern child’s irrational behaviour, revealing existential frustration rather than pure malevolence. S. Namjoshi reframes Grendel as a thinker—alienated, misunderstood, and capable of philosophical insight (Gardner 34). Gardner’s reinterpretation transforms monstrosity into a pedagogical space for children because re-contextualizing Grendel as a child with memory problems, emotional insecurities, and developmental struggles connects with the psychology of a child and the child readily puts himself close to the child Grendel. Through this shift, exemplifies many things firstly, dismantles mythic hierarchies, brings human and monster into the same surface, pores human emotion into the monster and brings the monster within the domain of nurturing, learning, and emotional growth.

The narrative of Aditi and her Friends meet Grendel begins with an immediate reconfiguration of power dynamics where Grendel and his mother Beowulf is introduced to Aditi and her friends not through terror but through memory problem, relational bonds, and intergenerational friendship. Aditi’s grandmother, who knew Grendel and her mother Madame G, instructs Aditi and Friends to

visit Devon and send flowers to her friend. This commemorating visit subverts the foundational expectation of the reader that monsters must only be approached with fear, danger and violence. Instead the setting of the battlefield as there use to be in epics, Namjoshi placed her monster character within the familiar homely topography of Devon where the mother monster and the child monster are vegetarians, fond of cleanliness, enjoys roaming around inheriting human emotions such as fear, pity, responsibility and facing psychological issues but above all living a very simple life having deep connectivity with Aditi’s grandmother. It collapses the boundaries between human and monster worlds, thereby this shifts prepares the reader for cathartic transformational process. This narrative gesture resonates with Aristotle’s concept of catharsis with anagnorisis, purgation wherein pity and fear must be evoked in order to purge emotional cleanliness and lead to ethical clarity. In this paper, the theory of Aristotle, catharsis extends beyond aesthetic emotional juncture and leads the characters with inner transformation and inner space; this technique works on the character as well as on the reader. It becomes a developmental tool for understanding self and other by mirroring self on the other side.

Grendel’s characterization in Namjoshi’s work centres on vulnerability and openness to the psychological issues within human traits. Initially Grendel does not want to grow or accept responsibility; he forgets things; he behaves erratically not out of malice but out of confusion, he shows anger and rage when his mother go out with the adventurers for an ice-cream treat. These traits reframe monstrosity as a psychological and behavioural struggle, which is there in every creature in this world. We all possesses monstrosity in our emotions sometimes it takes a bigger picture sometimes it hides beyond the self or sometimes enters in our sub-consciousness. Through this re-contextualization and transformational consciousness, Namjoshi shifts the question from “Why do monsters attack in epics?” to “What emotional wounds produce monstrous behaviour?” The adventurers’ engagement and emotional attachment with Grendel embodies a therapeutic process, wherein empathy, compassion, trust, dialogue, and curiosity begin to dissolve fear,



danger, threat etc. This acts as a narrative analogue to child psychology, reader-response theory and emotional intelligence theory, which holds that problematic behaviour in children often emerges from miscommunication in his environment, unfulfilled emotional needs, or environmental stressors. The text thereby invites parents and educators to rethink the patterns of modern-day-parenting aligned with discipline, behavioural interpretation, and childhood “otherness”.

The subversion here is not merely thematic but newest fantasy literature which changes the structure of monstrous characters in a very humanistic way. By removing Grendel from the moral absolutism of Beowulf and placing him in a YA fantasy setting, Namjoshi disrupts the binary logic and gives ‘alternative perspective’ to the young readers. As Jack Zipes argues, revisionist fairy tales and myths “make visible the ideological underpinnings of traditional narratives, thereby enabling readers to imagine new possibilities of identity and community” (Zipes 56). Namjoshi’s storytelling is aligned with the tradition of feminist revision and feminist transformation. Her diction does not aim to defeat or colonize the monster but tries to understand him with the mirror technique, suggesting that the true subversion lies not in reversing power but in transcending the hierarchies, equalization of every creature in the world such as hero–monster dichotomy.

This aligns with broader tendencies in Young Adult literature, where monsters often resembles as metaphorical extensions of adolescent anxieties and internal conflicts. In texts such as Patrick Ness’s *A Monster Calls*, the monster functions not as an antagonist but as a guide for emotional healing, helping the protagonist confront grief (Ness 102). Similarly, Catherynne Valente’s *Fairyland* books and Ransom Riggs’s *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* reframes monstrous identities, features and characteristics which are misunderstood, marginalized, stereotypical and socially constructed and deviates the readers mind. These narratives emphasize that the label “monster” which reflects societal fears, violence, distress minutely rather than inherent evil which shows anger, bloodshed and death. Namjoshi’s Grendel fits seamlessly within this contemporary children’s literature tradition

for changing the young minds from the scratch or from their childhood growth and concludes that his monstrosity arises from neglect, isolation, and emotional turmoil rather than innate wickedness which brings cognitive development of a child rather than mimic the monster character.

The transformation of the character Grendel through the theory of Aristotle’s catharsis also challenges conventional notions of heroism which is set form the history. But here the Grendel is here presented as a child character having issues closely with child psychology. Aditi’s role is not to raise swords, slay, suppress, or punish but to empathize and transform the characters from the core. This positions heroism within an ethical role keeping the older definitions of dominance aside connecting human and monster on the same ground. It subtly critiques the classical heroic role model and suggests that absolute victory is all about understanding your rival better and with the mirror technique transforms both the sides equally. This moral shift reflects the pedagogical change in priorities in children’s literature but then equally in every genre, where emotional maturity, cooperation, and critical thinking increasingly replace martial valour, suppression and domination.

Namjoshi’s narrative generally centers the politics of otherness and always tries to give alternative perspective to the world which is a seen virtue in children’s literature. Grendel’s alienation mirrors the experience of many young readers who feel marginalized, misunderstood, or constrained by societal expectations or in their environment after aligned with the character Grendel they reach to the possible solutions. His fear of growing up resonates with adolescents who experience anxiety about identity formation and responsibility and doesn’t want to grow. The writer restores the difference by giving voice to the “monster” character because this irresponsible monster child character can be any of the child reader. This aligns with contemporary diversity-oriented YA fiction, which reimagines the “monstrous other” as a figure of potentiality, patience, perseverance rather than threat.

Furthermore, this reimagining, revisiting, reinterpretation, aligns with feminist goals of dismantling entrenched hierarchies which creates gap



and holds inequality by creating space for alternative epistemologies. Namjoshi situates woman in centre by possessing grandmothers, mothers, adventurers—at the center of her narrative because it is mother who is always in the centre of a child's journey, thereby foregrounding feminine modes of knowledge and care. The transformation of Grendel possesses not only for fantasy world or children's literature but also a representative of humanistic world. It becomes a communal, resilience, dialogic process rather than an individualistic, suppressive, heroic trial. This shift resonates with Anne Susan Koshy's observation that fairy tales possess the potential to "highlight the possibilities of alternatives" and reveal the structures missing in real life (Koshy 74). Namjoshi's text embodies this by offering children an alternative model of conflict, resolution grounded in empathy, calmness, patience rather than aggression.

As the narrative matures, Grendel moves from fear-provoking to pitiable, and eventually to redeemable, easily approachable and having practises of being mature for holding the responsibilities. This emotional journey aligns with cathartic theory : firstly, readers feel fear at his unpredictable behaviour, then pity at his vulnerabilities, and finally relief at his transformation the three stages leads to the inner transformation and growth of a monster character Yet unlike the Aristotelian model, where catharsis reaffirms social order by eliminating the disruptive force, Namjoshi uses catharsis to integrate, heal, and reimagine the disruptive force. Catharsis becomes restorative, showing different shades of life not punitive.

Through this transformational process, Aditi and Her Friends Meet Grendel becomes a commentary on the nature of monstrosity and the vampire characters. It suggests that monstrosity is neither inherited nor immutable but socially constructed and emotionally mediated which carry forwards to the generations. The real "monsters" may be fearful, mis communicative, or lack of empathic sense rather than individuals themselves. This philosophical insight aligns with YA fiction's broader ambition: to help young readers interpret their internal landscapes and confront psychological "monsters" as much as external threats in this paper.

Namjoshi's subversion thus serves several critical functions of the behaviour of a child which must be resolved in the very initial stage such as, irresponsibility, superiority complex, anger and may more. It revisits classical myth to question inherited narratives, it re- contextualizes monstrosity within psychological growth, and it positions YA readers at the centre of ethical inquiry. By transforming Grendel—arguably literature's most infamous monster—into a child seeking emotional stability, the writer demonstrates that the stories we inherit shape our perception of the other if we read form the others perspective then our inner conscious will be different. It will be the same for the generation but rewriting these stories breaks the traditions shapes our capacity for compassion and new perspective for the writers and readers.

The reimagining of Grendel is therefore not simply a reinterpretation of the writer but the inner conscious of her; it is a pedagogical, ethical, and literary interpretation for breaking the tradition giving a fresh psychological development in the literature. It embodies a transformational shift from hierarchy to relationship, from confrontation to dialogue, from evil to good, from devil to human and from essentialism to fluidity and many more comparison in contrast. In doing so, Namjoshi contributes to the contemporary redefinition of the monster in YA fiction and demonstrates the genre with transformative potential for the future generations to come.

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