

The Epiphany of Symbolic Aesthetics, Narrative Architecture, and Object-Oriented Ontology through a Mythical Lens in Contemporary Fiction.

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Abstract:

In the realm of everyday life, a hidden depth of meaning lies hidden. This paper aims to examine how minimalist fiction is constructed using the material presence of ordinary objects that depict the emotional meaning and deep philosophy in narrative. It proposes to apply Bill Brown's Thing Theory to carry out a cross-theoretical framework of Symbolic Aesthetics, Narrative Structure, and Object-oriented ontology through a mythical viewpoint. To this, the probe focuses on three short stories: Ernest Hemingway's *A Clean Well-Lighted Place*, Raymond Carver's *Cathedral*, and Haruki Murakami's *Sleep*. In these chosen works, the commonplace items such as a Café Table, a Cathedral drawing, or a Wine glass are shown to surpass mere setting décor. Their insignificant function as a symbolic vessel for emotional tension, narrative structuring for space, and ontological puzzles to assert human interpretation through uncovering mythical archetypes, this paper posits that minimalism, both in narrative and in life, evokes deep metaphysical, aesthetic, and mythic palpitation.

Keywords: Symbolic aesthetics, narrative structure, object-oriented ontology, minimalism, metaphysical, aesthetic, palpitation

Introduction:

In Literature, objects are not merely used as background props, but at times, they hold more power than the prevailing characters. To this, Minimalist fiction is one such ideal model that is renowned for its brevity and convention of objects that subtly elevate the state of emotions. It also quietly shapes the space, rhythm, and presence of ordinary objects within the narrative. Through this, the dramatic events and the material world become meaningful when carefully overlooked. This paper investigates how minimalist fiction challenges to categorise the prominent roles between subject and objects that involve symbolic weight, narrative space, and worldly meaning in the context. Furthermore, from a mythical viewpoint, the sacred rituals, customs, and archetypal characters seem to trail off into human interpretation. By Close reading these attributes, the chosen works are Ernest Hemingway's *A Clean Well-Lighted Place*, Raymond Carver's *Cathedral*, and Haruki Murakami's *Sleep*. Here, the ordinary

items like a wine glass, flowers, lights & candles, a café table, and paintings. These objects also serve as metaphors, isolation, or insight into transformation philosophically. It builds a steady architecture, artistic state and standpoint in the narrative world. Therefore, the minimalistic fiction reimagines the role of objects that no longer serve as props or background elements but as a descriptive yet brief narrative.

Thing Theory and Its Application in Minimalist Fiction:

The Thing Theory was introduced by literary scholar Bill Brown. It analyses about the ordinary object in the narrative that plays a significant role than just existing within the context. The ordinary ‘thing’ here becomes something more that captures the essence of the plot. It drives the attention, emotion or philosophical implication. Brown further explains that the ‘thingness’ of the objects is only confronted when they obstruct to function of the perceived purpose. Thereby, in Minimalist fiction these disruptions commonly occur in stillness or repetition where the objects are no longer reduced to metaphor or utility. Instead, it plays its role that carries emotional or philosophical weight in the narrative.

In Ernest Hemingway’s *A Clean Well-Lighted Place*, the café becomes more than just a place or background but plays an emotional role in the old waiter as his survival space amidst the chaos of the outer world. In Raymond’s *Cathedral*, the Unfinished drawing on the church wall becomes more than an ordinary object; instead, its meaning is unexplained to both the blind man and the visitor. Even after frequent visits, the object here becomes a shared experience. In Haruki’s *Sleep*, *ordinary objects like the wine glass, books, and bedside lamp turn into a haunting symbol of the protagonist's insomnia*. They do not comfort her but project the spiral disconnection from the world. In all three chosen works, Thing theory voices out the presence of ordinary objects to allow something deep, like tension, transformation, or more than words can express.

Discussion:

1. The Café as a Sanctuary in Ernest Hemingway’s *A Clean Well-Lighted Café* minimalist narrative sets its observational inquiry within the restraint of a dimly lit café, where two waiters converse over a late-night customer. What appears is a deficient dialogue discussing the profound exploration of the systematic spaces amidst chaos. The Older waiter acknowledges and empathizes an old man who frequently visits the café at night, deeply thrives for psychological validation in need of a space that is well lighted café, which plays the role of a backdrop to the meaningless world outside. Thereby, the café does not serve coffee but a vessel that captures silence and emotional space. Symbolically, we tend to inherit ‘nada’ that imposes emotional regulation in life. The repetitive phrase “light is very good” intensifies the café’s emotional despair, pushing behind the surrounding that controls a dark, chaotic world.

Through the lens of Narrative Architecture, the structure of the story expands within a single spatial frame. The light, the cleanliness, and the quietness all come together to make the café a meditative, ritualised zone. Through the Thing Theory, the café governs the presence of emotional temperature, transforming from a utility space. From the Mythic viewpoint, Hemingway subtly desacralizes spiritual practices by replacing traditional temple rituals with drinking, lighting, and waiting.

2. The Cathedral as Vision in Carver's *Cathedral* acts as a feature of minimalist fiction that transcends spiritual insight through the act of shared action. The narrator begins from an emotional perspective where he cannot connect with the blind visitor. The story shifts where two men begin drawing a Cathedral together. There is this moment, where the narrator closes his eyes and follows the instructions of the blind man. Thereby, this act of drawing transforms into a connection between the two. Symbolically, the portrait of the Cathedral, which is merely an architectural representation, takes a metaphorical turn into a connection that can only be felt rather than seen.

From the Structural perspective, the act of collaborative engagement builds the tone of the narrative, which connects the readers in an emotional tone. Here, the Cathedral shapes the way towards emotional direction. Through Thing Theory, the objects in the cathedral, like Candles, an apron, flowers, and the portrait of the Cathedral, become an emotional space rather than just a sacred gathering. From a Mythically Point of View, the blind man acts as a spiritual guide who initiates the narrator to a new vision in life through imagination and faith. Thus, the portrait portrays personal transformation.

3. Objects of Insomnia in Murakami's *Sleep*, the narrator explores the psychological dissociation through a woman who unfathomably loses the ability to sleep. Her world becomes more internal, where the ordinary objects appear more material. Though her nightly routine- drinking wine, reading Anne Karenina, moving around has been altered from the tableau where the material world around her becomes louder in the absence of sleep. Symbolically, the wine glass, the book, and the lamp reveal her identity in different facets. From the Narrative architecture standpoint, the narrator showcases the oxymoron of her life. The wine glass becomes a mute companion to her nightly musings, and the bed mostly functions as an awkward place of resistance. According to Thing Theory, these objects refuse metaphorical clarity; they "withdraw" and become strange, unfamiliar even to the eye. Their strangeness asserts itself not through signification, but through mere existence, untranslatable. The mythic layer of Sleep takes from descent myths: the woman's insomnia is parallel to an underworld downward journey of the self, wherein the silent objects mark points within this liminal state, wherein the woman is neither fully awake nor fully asleep.
4. Common Threads: They are the primary bearers of emotional and philosophical significance. Symbolic Aesthetics examines how these things represent pain, awakening, and distance. Narrative Architecture demonstrates how these stories employ items to create rhythm, flow, and climax. The emotional essence

of the narratives stems not from what the characters say or do, but from how they interact with their surroundings.

Thing Theory and OOO add an important interpretive layer by demonstrating that these objects are more than just symbolic; they have an ontological dimension. They withstand full comprehension, reminding the reader that the world is not always clear. In this opposition, they encourage thought rather than decision. Mythicism reveals how these items contain echoes of ritual, holiness, and transformation. These aren't overtly fantastical stories, but they do echo old concepts like initiation, descent, and sanctuary, all depicted in minimalist settings. These techniques, taken together, show that everyday things in minimalist literature serve as doorways to the extraordinary.

5. Quotation as Silent Revelation: Though the dialogue is brief, each story offers quotes that emphasize the object's importance. In *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, the older waiter's inaudible prayer, "Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name," is a gloomy parody of religious supplication, placing the café as a substitute for heavenly order. In *Cathedral*, the narrator's quiet epiphany "It's really something" captures the indescribable power of the artistic experience. These lines do not explain but point to something beyond words, much like the objects themselves. Murakami's *Sleep* narrator reflects, "I had become a new person," indicating a transformation not caused by any event, but by the sustained interaction with silent objects. In all three cases, quotes work in alongside with the objects to reveal psychological and spiritual truths. They allow the reader to gain insight into character indirectly, not through exposition, but through material encounters. These quotes are subtle, even dismissive becomes literary pressure points where the object's influence becomes briefly visible.
6. The Myth of the Ordinary: Ultimately, minimalist fiction reveals that the ordinary is never truly ordinary. The stories explored here challenge us to reconsider our understanding on objects not as lifeless props, but as bearers of weight, rhythm and mystery. By embracing = theories of Symbolic Aesthetics, Narrative Architecture, Object-Oriented Ontology, and Mythicism, we recognize that the material world in literature holds as much power as plot or dialogue. Minimalism distils meaning rather than removing it from fiction. In this distilled space, objects speak. They anchor characters, reveal emotions, and trace the contours of invisible transformation. Whether it's a cup, a drawing, or a bed, these things become silent myths of modern life, carrying within them the depth of what it means to feel, to lose, and to change in a world too quiet to notice.

Conclusion:

Minimalist fiction, far from being emotionally hollow, reveals a layered and contemplative world when interpreted through Symbolic Aesthetics, Narrative Architecture, Thing Theory, and Mythicism. In Hemingway's *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, Carver's *Cathedral*, and Murakami's *Sleep*, everyday objects like a café, a sketch, or a wine glass become central to the emotional and philosophical texture of the story. These objects do not merely symbolize human feeling they shape narrative rhythm,

structure interior space, and resist reduction to metaphor. Thing Theory and Object-Oriented Ontology suggest that these objects exist independently, evoking presence and meaning beyond human control. At the same time, Mythicism reveals archetypal echoes beneath minimalist surface rituals, awakenings, sacred spaces that link the personal with the ancient. Together, these lenses show that minimalist fiction does not minimize meaning; instead, it invites readers to slow down and perceive how silence, repetition, and things speak volumes about the quiet complexities of human experience.

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