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■ THE MANNEQUIN AS AN ACTIVE AGENT: DECENTERED SUBJECTIVITY IN IAN MCEWAN'S "DEAD AS THEY COME"

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Priča Ijana Makjuana „Mrtva koliko to može biti“ besprekorno oslikava aktivan i prkosan objekat, izmeštajući subjekta iz centra, čime otvara put za razgradnju antropocentrizma. Iako je ova kratka priča ispitivana iz perspektive orijentisane ka subjektu, kritičari nisu posvetili mnogo pažnje njenim aspektima orijentisanim ka objektu. Stoga će ovaj rad, oslanjajući se na terminologiju objektno orijentisane ontologije (OOO), pokušati da analizira lutkinu subverzivnu i neposlušnu prirodu, koja prkosi antropocentričnom poretku i stvarnosti. Teorije iz oblasti OOO Grejama Harmana i Bila Brauna činiće teorijsku potporu ovog rada. Biće izneta tvrdnja da se antropocentrična dominacija postepeno urušava kako glavna oruđa koje antropos ima na raspolaganju, konkretno jezik i davanje imena, ne uspevaju da mu pomognu da kontroliše i poseduje ono neljudsko. Krajnji, fatalni udarac mu se zadaje kada izgubi razum i moć rasuđivanja, čime iz subjektivnosti propada u ambis ludila i bezumlja, što označava potpuno uništenje antropocentrizma.

Ključne reči: zavodljivi objekat, neuspeh jezika, nepokorni slomljeni objekat, lutka, nemisleće biće.

1. INTRODUCTION

Te British author Ian McEwan is renowned for the depiction of such startling issues and themes as "Sexuality, incestuous relationships, obsessions, fetishes" (Rahaman 2023: 58) in numerous unsettling "tales of sexual aberrance, black comedy and macabre" (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 2024) obsessive behavior in two short story collections, namely *First Love*, *Last Rites* and *In Between the Sheets*, written in 1975 and 1978 respectively. Due to the presence of such "behavioral aberrations and grotesque perversities" (Rahaman

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2023: 58) in his fiction, he has come to be known as “Ian McAbre” (Rahaman 2023: 58). Published in the above-mentioned series of short stories, that is *In Between the Sheets*, “Dead as They Come” portrays the picture of a disturbing, macabre, and grotesque sexual relationship of a female mannequin and a wealthy man, who acts as the embodiment of not only anthropocentrism but also of patriarchy in the short story.

Obsessed with and enamored of the mannequin, the unnamed male narrator of the story purchases the mannequin to have sexual intercourse with it/her, only to be frustrated by the recalcitrance and insouciance of the mannequin, and, eventually, he winds up murdering his beloved at the end of the narrative. The act of taking his loved one’s life shatters the remaining traces of his sanity and rationality and thus occasions his tragic downfall to the pit of insanity and madness. Unlike Ian McEwan’s other literary texts, be it novels or short stories, that have been analyzed by many a study before, his “Dead as They Come” has not been brought under much critical and analytical scrutiny. Some of the previous studies examining the short story have focused on the grotesque aspects of the narrative (Moghadam/Termizi 2013: 132; Rahaman 2023: 59) as well as the patriarchal “control, domination, and exploitation” of women (Malcolm 2002: 12), which can be deemed to be a subject-oriented or humancentric reading of the said fictional work.

As a result, never has any research delved into the ontic reality, agentiality, and subjectivity of the active object depicted in the narrative, namely the mannequin.

Given that the central figure in McEwan’s narrative is a recalcitrant and disobedient thing (Brown 2001: 4) or, in Graham Harman’s terminology, a “broken” object, the foregoing research intends to shift the critical focus from the subject onto the object, hence furnishing a novel reading of the story by examining object-oriented dimensions thereof.

In the current article, it will be argued that the narrator of the short story, whom the researcher regards as the antagonist, is decentered or decentralized by the mannequin, that is the central character, throughout the narrative. In other words, at the outset of the narrative, the process of the subject’s decentralization is set in motion by the seduction of the nonhuman or the object, and, as the story unrolls, the subject’s subjectivity and agency wane, despite his constant desperate attempts at regaining or reclaiming some semblance of control and agency. The decline of the anthropocentric dominance and ascendancy subsists until the subject finally collapses to the bottom of madness, hence the complete dismantlement of the anthropocentrism or the humancentric dominance. As contended later, the loss of language and reason, the two most pivotal tools in the arsenal of the Anthropos, marks the deconstruction and annihilation of the anthropocentrism, thus the rise of non-anthropocentric dominance and objective reality.

To substantiate this line of argument, the article will rely on the theoretical framework of Object-Oriented Ontology, thus having recourse to the theories put forth by such OOO theorists as Graham Harman and Bill Brown. In the first analytical section, attempts will be made to elucidate that the decline of anthropocentrism or the downfall of the Anthropos is initiated by how the subject is seduced by the mannequin, acting as an object-seducer or a seductive object. In the second section, the article will strive to illuminate how the failure of the anthropocentric process of naming objects and the linguistic system, caused by the defiance of the disobedient nonhuman, further exacerbates the decline

of humancentrism. In other words, it will be averred that the mannequin refuses to submit to the anthropocentric rule and reality by revealing its/her inner reality and being defined by the subject; therefore, the subject fails to subjugate, control, and manipulate the object as he wishes, hence the further collapse of the Anthropos. Finally, it will be contended that the loss of human reason and rationality delivers the coup de grace to Anthropos, pushing him over the precipice into the unfathomable abyss of madness and irrationality, hence the total dismantlement of anthropocentric dominance and rule. As a result, the thinking being metamorphoses into an *unthinking* being.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The subject has been centralized and put on pedestal as a mythologized and divine being, responsible for meaning-making and structuring the world based on cognitive, linguistic, semiotic categories, throughout the history. One of the culprits in the centralization of human being or the subject was the Enlightenment philosopher Rene Descartes, whose major statement "I think, therefore I am" (Descartes, as cited in Moriarty 2008: 12), or I doubt, therefore I think and, therefore I am, put the subject on the pedestal as a "thinking being" (Descartes, as cited in Habib 2011: 116), whose reasoning and thinking faculty bestows divine quality on the human beings, thus the centralization thereof. As a result of this principle, the being of the god-like subject was deemed to be rooted in the cognitive apparatus, which was capable of shaping and forming the external world.

Numerous upcoming philosophers have followed in Descartes' footsteps, glorifying and placing the rational or thinking subject at the center of linguistic system and the world. Some of the philosophical systems that have glorified the world-shaping power of the subject's mind include Immanuel Kant's "transcendental idealism", George Berkeley's "subjective idealism", Hegel's absolute idealism, and Martin Heidegger's assumption that "objects are outside human consciousness, but their being exists only in human understanding" (Bogost 2012: 4). According to those philosophers, the objects' existence or being is rooted in the understanding or consciousness of human beings, which implies that objects have been bereft of some independent ontic reality. All in all, objects have been regarded as passive and "dead" entities that were simply there, in "some specific set of spatial-temporal coordinates, whereas subjects have been deemed to be active, creative, and agential, hence the source of "perception, rationality, cunning, dignity, autonomy" (Harman 2016: 131). Consequently, while the subject, that is to say, human has been centralized in the Western Philosophy throughout the history, object has always been marginalized and neglected in different trends of philosophy.

Going against the grain of traditional subject-oriented philosophy, a new philosophical movement, namely, Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), has emerged in recent decades, which has attempted to decenter or decentralize the subject from the center of meaning-making system and the world, hence the dismantlement of the anthropocentrism and the process of demythologization of human beings. As Harman has mentioned in his article *Editorial Introduction for the Topical Issue "Object-Oriented Ontology and Its Critics"*, Object-Oriented Ontology "As a group research program ... is less than a decade old, stemming from a pair of conferences held in 2010 at Georgia Tech (April)

and UCLA (December)", although it "has existed since the late 1990s as an outgrowth of my interpretation of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger" (Harman 2020: 592). Therefore, a strand of Speculative Realism, which has stemmed from phenomenology trend of Continental Philosophy, Object-Oriented Ontology, has been erected on the 000 philosophers' personal interpretation and critique of the said phenomenologists' philosophical notions, especially Heidegger's tool-analysis in *Time and Being* (Harman 2002: 2). The founding figures and the original members of Speculative Realism (SR) were Graham Harman, Hamilton Grant, Ray Brassier, and Quentin Meillassoux, who were united by the repudiation of "Correlationism", a term coined by Meillassoux that adverts to the human-world correlate, that is to say the idea that thought and world, ineluctably intertwined with each other, cannot exist in isolation from one other but only in mutual correlation (Harman 2018: 56–57). As Robert Booth has adumbrated in his paper *Merleau-Ponty, Correlationism, and Alterity*, written in 2018, "Speculative realists claim that phenomenologists cannot address other entities in the more-than-human world on their own terms because phenomenology is paradigmatically correlationist. The standard charge of correlationism holds that because the phenomenological subject actively structures its entire experience, phenomenology effectively reduces the world to a correlate for the subject, rather than addressing the world as it exists beyond, or before the (human) subject" (Booth 2018: 37). It can be contended that, according to the philosophers of Phenomenological Circle, the human beings have defined and structured the reality of the world around their own subjective reality based on their mental linguistic and cognitive categories and constructs. That the objects have been anthropocentrically "drawn through the sieve of humanity" and regarded merely as tools at the service of human beings, thus deprived of ontic reality of their own, can be construed from the following excerpt from Ian Bogost's *Alien Phenomenology*:

When we welcome these things into scholarship, poetry, science, and business, it is only to ask how they relate to human productivity, culture, and politics. We've been living in a tiny prison of our own devising, one in which all that concerns us are the fleshy beings that are our kindred and the stuffs with which we stuff ourselves. Culture, cuisine, experience, expression, politics, polemic: all existence is drawn through the sieve of humanity, the rich world of things discarded like chaff so thoroughly, so immediately, so efficiently that we don't even notice. (Bogost 2012: 3)

Therefore, critiquing the correlationism lying at the heart of phenomenology, the 000 philosophers are essaying to draw our attention to the objective and ontic reality, that is, the reality of non-and-more-than human, thus averring that objects are endowed with their own subjectivity, agency, and independent subterranean reality. Withdrawn into their own world as they are, the objects can make "direct contact" with neither each other nor with human beings but need a "mediator for such contact to occur" (Harman 2018: 12).

All in all, Object-Oriented Ontology has reduced the subjects to the status objects and regards them entities amongst other entities, thus eliminating the subject/object binary opposition and anthropocentric worldview that have dominated Western

Philosophy throughout the history. This underlying notion, formulated by Levis Bryant and reiterated by Harman, in *Object-oriented Ontology: A Theory of Everything*, and Ian Bogost, in *Alien Phenomenology*, is denominated as flat ontology, which lies at the heart of OOO:

First, humans are not at the center of being, but are among beings. Second, objects are not a pole opposing a subject, but exist in their own right, regardless of whether any other object or human relates to them. Humans, far from constituting a category called "subject" that is opposed to "object", are themselves one type of object among many. (Bryant 2011: 249)

Stripped of their divinity, human beings have fallen onto a flat ontological plane, where all entities are of equal ontological status, regardless of whether they are human or nonhuman, gigantic or infinitesimal, concrete or abstract, etc.

Another cardinal concept that lies at the heart of Object-Oriented Ontology is the term "broken tool", a Heideggerian philosophical concept which has been reevaluated and critiqued by Graham Harman and OOO theorists and put to use in a different manner in object-oriented philosophy. According to Martin Heidegger, when an object or tool is fully operational, we tend to forget about its existence. Denominated as ready-to-hand, this stage is related to the functionality of the tool in question. When an object malfunctions or breaks down, thus losing its value and usefulness, it draws our focus to its presence and asserts its dominance. At this stage, human beings tend to "regard an object in isolation and study it with an attitude like that of a scientist, of merely looking at the object's bare facts as they are present" ("Ready-to-hand and Present-at-hand – Heidegger" 2021). However, the stage of being present-at-hand does not last long, for the tool gets replaced and thus disposed of very soon. The final mode of the tool's existence is called unready-to-hand. Challenging Heideggerian tool-analysis, Graham Harman has dispensed with the last phase of tool being, putting emphasis on the "broken" object as a defiant and recalcitrant entity that is endowed with its own inner reality, and, therefore, it violates the Anthropos' linguistic, semiotic, and mental categories. In other words, in Harmanian object-oriented philosophy, when an object is broken, it becomes noticeable (Harman 2018: 153) and thus asserts its dominance and presence over the subject. The same line of argument recurs in Bill Brown's thing theory, which has drawn a distinguishing line between the object and the thing. According to Brown, whilst an object is a passive and obedient entity, which does the subject's bidding, a thing is assertive, active, recalcitrant, and disobedient, as it malfunctions and thus refuses to serve the human, hence the embodiment of Non Serviam attitude. The suddenness with which things assert their presence and power, as Brown avers, helps us discover their physicality, and he explains metaphorically that we must learn to appreciate the window in its opacity rather than looking through it to the world:

A thing, in contrast, can hardly function as a window. We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, how-

ever momentarily. The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation. (Brown 2001: 4)

3. SEDUCTIVE OBJECT AND THE ONSET OF THE SUBJECT'S DECENTRALIZATION

In Ian McEwan's "Dead as They Come", the nameless narrator and, in fact, the antagonist of the story functions as the epitome and embodiment of humancentrism. He is an emblematic example of the *Anthropos* whose self-righteous, supercilious, and self-centered nature embodies anthropocentric snobbishness and the belief that human subjects lie at the center of the world as the rightful heirs and overlords of the planet Earth as well as all the things contained therein. It is quite evident that the character wants to possess, manipulate, and control anything that happens to cross his path, for as a privileged and wealthy individual and capitalist, he regards himself completely capable of doing anything he sets his heart on, or else bending everything (and everybody) to his will. His pompous and sardonic personality can be construed from the following excerpt, which epitomizes the Enlightenment anthropocentric belief that humans, as rational and consciousness beings, are superior to the other beings, hence having the right to do control and own everything, including the nature, which has culminated in detrimental activities wreaking havoc on the environment and all the beings in the modern period:

I am wealthy. Possibly there are ten men resident in London with more money than I. Probably there are only five or six. Who cares? I am rich and I made my money on the telephone. I shall be forty-five on Christmas Day. I have been married three times, each marriage lasting, in chronological order, eight, five, and two years. Each marriage was better than the one before if for no other reason than that it was shorter. But these last three years I have not been married and yet I have not been idle. I have not paused. A man of forty-four has no time to pause. I am a man in a hurry...I have no time to stay with a woman, listen to her story, know her soul, grow dependent and sluggish. I have no time for the analysis, the self searching of frenzied relationships, the unspoken accusation, the silent *de fence*. I do not wish to be with women who have an urge to talk when we've finished our coupling. I want to lie still in peace and clarity. Then I want to put my shoes and socks on and comb my hair and go about my business. I prefer silent women who take their pleasure with apparent indifference. All day long there are voices around me, on the telephone, at lunches, at business conferences. I do not want voices in my bed. I am not a simple man, I repeat, and this is not a simple world. But in this respect at least my requisites are simple, perhaps even facile. My predilection is for the biological fuck, pleasure unmitigated by the yappings and winnings of the soul. (McEwan 1979: 62-63)

His egotistical nature, which incontrovertibly borders on egomania, can be deciphered from the number of "I"s he has employed in the above-cited passage so as to put himself at the center and underscore his power and high social status as a wealthy

capitalist, in the same way that humans have egotistically centralized themselves as mythologized and divine beings, ruling over the world. Moreover, his uncaring and ruthlessly exploitative attribute, that is, his preposterous propensity to care only about himself and unscrupulously exploit others, in this case women, for the sake of his own sexual pleasure and gratification as if they do not have feelings and emotions, reflects the deleterious and abusive aspect of humancentric way of thinking. His parasitic and nonsymbiotic existence or way of living is deniably detrimental to other people and beings' physical, psychological, and mental well-being. One cannot help but think that his parasitic tendency to abuse others is quite sadistic, evident in the fact that he wants docile women who silently and submissively indulge his unruly and "unmitigated" sexual desires without any complaint, even though it might end up hurting them. In addition, he constantly engages in snobbish and vainglorious self-praise, priding himself on the wealth he has accumulated and the goals he has achieved over the time due to his industrious nature. In a nutshell, he describes himself as a powerful and active man, who can own and control whatever he lays his hands on, be it human beings or objects.

His ascendancy, subjectivity, and agency, however, begin to be chipped away by the nonhuman, that is, mannequin, from the very outset of the narrative, hence the onset of gradual decline and decentralization of anthropocentrism. Acting as a seductive object or seducer, the mannequin generates deep-seated desires in the subject, thus manipulating and controlling the *Anthropos* in an unprecedented manner, which deconstructs such traditional binary oppositions as active/passive, dominant/submissive, alive/dead, with the words in the left side of each set of binary opposition referring to the human and those in the right side to the nonhuman or the object. In other words, the seduction of the mannequin, functioning as a recalcitrant broken object, as Harman has put it, reverses the conventional or traditional roles assigned to human and nonhuman, as a result of which the object turns into an active, dominant, and manipulative agent while the subject experiences a tragic fall from subjectivity and agentiality, hence metamorphosing into a submissive and passive being or entity. Losing his status as the almighty *Anthropos*, he turns into a subject-in-process, or "*le sujet-en-procès*" (Kristeva, as cited in Allen 2011: 34), who does not have a fixed identity; in fact, even his identity and limits of his agency are determined and shaped by the nonhuman.

As Graham Harman has put it in regard to the Baudrillardian concept of object as a seducer, the seduction of the objects acts as a catalyst for "overthrowing the reign of the subject", as it completely reverses the roles of the subject and the object (Harman 2016: 132). To put it in a nutshell, the subject will fall under the control of the object, as it is the latter that seduces and controls the former. The moment of seduction by the object has been immaculately depicted in the beginning lines of McEwan's short story: "I do not care for posturing women. But she struck me. I had to stop and look at her" (McEwan 1979: 61). As evident above, the object-seducer succeeds in exerting a great deal of control and dominance over the nameless narrator when it/she seduces him. It is crystal-clear that it is the nonhuman that is in charge henceforth rather than the human, which marks the decline of anthropocentric rule and control. Indeed, even the title of the short story, that is "Dead as They Come", which refers to the mannequin, insinuates the fact that lying at the heart of this narrative as the central character is the nonhuman rather than the *Anthropos*.

4. LANGUAGE AND NAME-GIVING AS A MEANS OF SUBJUGATING THE NONHUMAN

Throughout the history, language has invariably been the most pivotal weapon in the arsenal of the Anthropos, whereby the subject has managed to structure and demarcate the external world and reality based on his linguistic and semiotic categories. In doing so, the human subject, as a god-like being, has been able to exert his supremacy and ascendancy over the entire world and objects contained therein. Simply put, language has functioned as a *modus operandi* whereby human beings have gained power and control over other beings, hence the centrality of language in the anthropocentric tradition. According to Borkfelt, one of the cardinal tools underpinning the Linguistic system is the process of naming, which facilitates the anthropocentric dominance over other (nonhuman) beings:

If language is, as has been argued, a means of power—providing a “technique for knowing” places, people, animals, and things ...—then naming is at the very centre of this power. (Borkfelt 2011: 117)

On the whole, it is the naming process that assists the Anthropos in defining and identifying what some object is or what it does. In other words, human beings create some sort of reality for nonhuman beings, be it objects or animals, by the virtue of giving a name to things. Therefore, naming is based on the Anthropos's subjective interpretation and understanding regarding whatness and functionality of an entity rather than that object's own ontic and inner reality. As Kim and Jung have averred, name-giving functions as “a symbolical act of subjugating and ‘taming’ its object to the namer's will” (Kim/Jung 2022: 468). Thus, the driving force behind the naming process is “subjugating” (Kim/Jung 2022: 468) and possessing an object, thus bringing it under one's control and dominance. As a consequence, the object is forced to bow to the subject's rule.

In Ian McEwan's “Dead as They Come”, the subject, that is the unnamed character, goes to great lengths so as to control and possess the mannequin. To that end, he relies on the name-giving technique in hopes of owning and subjugating the said nonhuman. The name that he has chosen for the mannequin is “Helen” (McEwan 1979: 69). Characteristic of the anthropocentric perception, the character has a deeply-rooted desire to not only “own” or “possess” the mannequin, but also smash its/her subjectivity, agency, and identity by bringing it/her under his absolute control so much so that the mannequin will not be a being in its/her own right anymore and thus will be one with the subject, hence symbolically devouring her: “But soon I loved her completely and wished to possess her, own her, absorb her, eat her” (McEwan 1979: 62).

Despite all the subject's attempts at dominating, possessing, and controlling the mannequin, it/she defies his anthropocentric rule. In other words, the nonhuman refuses to submit to the humancentric naming and meaning-making, or linguistic, system, hence acting as a Harmanian “broken” (Harman 2018: 153) object or a Brownian “thing” (Brown 2001: 4), imbued with the agency, subjectivity, and subterranean reality of its/her own. On the whole, by malfunctioning or refusing to do the subject's bidding, the object turns into an active and rebellious agent that does everything on its own terms. Consequently, the decentralization of subject is further exacerbated by the recalcitrance of the broken object.

"Withdrawn" and inaccessible (Harman 2018: 12), the mannequin evades or withdraws from the anthropocentric act of interpreting and defining objects. A recalcitrant entity as it/she is, the nonhuman, much to the chagrin of the subject, conceals its/her real internal reality, nor does it accept to be categorized by the constructed human-centered reality that the subject desperately attempts to impose on it/her.

Therefore, the character tragically fails to comprehend the inner subjective reality and experience of the "dummy", or create a reality for it/her based on his mental and linguistic constructs for that matter, hence the failure of the linguistic and name-giving system. As a result, the human subject finds it impossible to possess and subjugate the mannequin. Indeed, how can someone dominate an object that refuses to reveal various layers of its inner reality by submitting to the humancentric linguistic and semiotic categories? On the whole, understanding and categorizing an object operates as a springboard for dominating it.

The subject's inability to comprehend the mannequin's inner subjective experience and reality can be observed in the following passage:

Life was generated in her by the sheer charge of her beauty. The delicate mould of her eyebrow, the perfect line of her nose, the smile, the eyes half-closed with boredom or pleasure (how could I tell?). (McEwan 1979: 63)

As evident above, the subject fails to interpret the object's subterranean reality, nor is he capable of forcing his own subjective interpretation on it/her, for his perceiving, comprehending, and categorizing faculty does not bear any fruit.

Consequently, despite the subject's attempts at controlling and possessing the dummy, it/she remains uncontrolled, unpossessed, and withdrawn. In other words, defiant and recalcitrant as it/she is, the mannequin, which has assumed agency and subjectivity of its/her own, refuses to submit obediently to the Anthropos's demands, be it ontological and functional or ontic, with the former (ontological dimension) referring to the whatness of the nonhuman, that is to say its existence being possessed by the subject, while the latter (ontic facet) adverts to the functional aspect thereof, that is its serving the human, which has been deemed to be the main function of objects in the traditional or anthropocentric philosophy.

Characteristic of the Anthropos, he expects the dummy to do his bidding, that is, quench his sexual desires as immaculately as it/she can, for he is laboring under delusion that the mannequin is his possession, in spite of his defeat in owning it/her, and, therefore, he can treat it/her however he desires. Nevertheless, functioning as a broken object, the mannequin refrains from being exploited as the object of the human's lust, which is a major factor in the onset of his madness, to be further explored later.

Having been neutered and emasculated at the hands of the mannequin, the character loses his status as a subject and thus falls painfully onto the ontologically flat plane of the objects, hence an object himself. Moreover, with the character stripped of his subjectivity, the mannequin obtains agency and subjectivity, hence climbing up the ontological ladder to the status of a subject.

As clear in the following text, his anthropocentric "waiting games", intended to get an upper hand and thus gain control of the situation, are defeated and nullified by the

insouciance or indifference of the mannequin, which delivers a fatal blow to the hubris and self-righteousness of the human subject. To put it in a nutshell, the Anthropos's bubble of self-importance gets punctured by the "futility" of all his desperate attempts at obtaining power and ascendancy over the nonhuman: "I was losing. I was beginning to understand the futility of my silent waiting games with Helen. In reality there was no situation between us to play with" (McEwan 1979: 75).

Many a time does the character in "Dead as They Come" strive to regain his ascendancy and agency and thus become a subject; however, he gets emasculated and humiliated again and again, hence compelled to climb down the ontological ladder to the status of an object.

He resorts to the most important tool at the Anthropos' disposal, that is to say language, so as to manipulate and shape the reality in line with his own interests and desires. As Bennett and Royle have put it, there exists no such thing as an absolute "immutable" truth or reality (Bennett/Royle 2004: 35). But rather, it is merely a social-linguistic construct, generated by the preexisting values and belief systems, language, human cognition, etc. (Bennett/Royle 2004: 35), hence the divine or god-like attribute of the Anthropos, placed at the center of the linguistic system, who employs the language to shape and structure the reality however he desires. In McEwan's narrative, defeated by the nonhuman, the subject relies on the reality-shaping power of language in order to convey a semblance of power and control by flaunting his wealth and (financial) dominance; however, every time he tries to take the situation into his hands, he gets neutered agonizingly and tragically at the hands of the mannequin: "You're a rich man. You could buy the shop if you wanted. You could buy the street. Of course I could buy the street, and many other streets too. But listen. This was no business transaction" (McEwan 1979: 64).

Observable above is the anthropocentric display of power; in other words, he presents himself to be powerful, rich, dominant, and important, to gain some traces of his subjectivity, only to be foiled and taken down a peg by the defiant object. In other words, the man bends over backwards to be a subject, but he fails catastrophically, falling back to the plane of objects. On the whole, he constantly oscillates between subjectivity and objectivity, as he desperately attempts to be a subject, blessed with agency and power, only to be thwarted and forced to assume his real role as an object, bereft of subjectivity and agentiality.

5. SUBJECT GONE MAD: THE INABILITY TO CONTROL THE NONHUMAN

As mentioned earlier, since the inception of Enlightenment and modern philosophy, the human subject's reasoning and thinking apparatus has been deemed to be the distinguishing feature of the Anthropos, as evident in the renowned Cartesian philosophical proposition putting the human cognition on pedestal: *cogito ergo sum*. Therefore, the mental and logical faculty has been of paramount significance to the subject, without which he would lose his status as the privileged "rational being" (Descartes, as cited in Habib 2011: 116). In "Dead as They Come", with the failure of linguistic system and name-giving process, intended to exert ascendancy and dominance, the only anthropocentric weapon left in the character's arsenal is reason or rationality, the loss of which delivers the coup de grace that paves the way for insanity and the

ultimate annihilation of the subject. In McEwan's narrative, having failed to exert his control and dominance over the mannequin by the virtue of language and other subtler means, the character desperately resorts to violence in hopes of regaining some vestiges of his ascendancy, agency, and identity as a dominant individual.

It is the mannequin's indifference, nonconformity, and supposed contempt that provokes him to opt for violence and atrocity with the intention of asserting himself. The character's act of brutality and destruction is accompanied by sexual violence or "rape". In other words, having had enough of the mannequin's defiance and constant emasculation, he has desperate recourse to sexual abuse and asphyxiation in order to exercise his power. Given that his pride has been wounded due to his failure to be dominant, violence is the only course of action left at his disposal, whereby he manages to save face:

'Helen,' I cried, 'it's meant so much to both of us. We must fight to save it.' There was silence. My eyes were closed and I thought I saw my own soul recede from me across a vast black void till it was a pinprick of red light. I looked up, I looked into her eyes and saw there quiet, naked contempt. It was all over, and I conceived in that frenzied instant two savage and related desires. To rape and destroy her. With one sudden sweep of my hand I ripped the smock clean off her body. She had nothing on underneath. Before she had time to even draw breath I was on her, I was in her, rammed deep inside while my right hand closed about her tender white throat. With my left I smothered her face with the pillow. (McEwan 1979: 76)

Seething with fury, he rips off the mannequin's clothes and rapes it/her violently without the slightest ounce of remorse, while his hand is closed about her throat, an indication of nonconsensual nature of the sexual intercourse. Having subjected the mannequin to ruthless nonconsensual intercourse, he ends up smothering it/her to death with a pillow out of uncontrollable rage. His impulsive and illogical plan for gaining power by the virtue of destroying the dummy, however, blows up in his face massively and cataclysmically. Shocked by the enormity and gravity of his atrocious crime, the Cartesian rational being loses his sanity, regarded as the one of the significant attributes of the *Anthropos*, as mentioned earlier.

With the loss of his sanity and his transformation from a rational being into an irrational one, the subject loses his logicity once and for all and tragically collapses to the bottom of objectivity and irrationality. Consequently, the anthropocentrism gets dismantled completely, hence the total decentralization of the *Anthropos*:

I fainted. I awoke what seemed many hours later, I saw the corpse and before I had time to turn my head I vomited over it. Like a sleepwalker I drifted into the kitchen, I made straight for the Utrillo and tore it to shreds. I dropped the Rodin forgery into the garbage disposal. Now I was running like a naked madman from room to room destroying whatever I could lay my hands on. I stopped only to finish the scotch. Vermeer, Blake, Richard Dadd, Paul Nash, Rothko, I tore, trampled, mangled, kicked, spat and urinated on ... my precious possessions ... oh my precious ... I danced, I sang, I laughed ... I wept long into the night. (McEwan 1979: 77)

As one can observe in the above-cited text, having murdered the mannequin, the character completely loses touch with reality and collapses deeply into madness, tearing his books and paintings to pieces and wreaking havoc on his “precious possessions” and his house. Falling into a manic-depressive state, he either dances, sings, and laughs or weeps interminably, regarded as the defining characters of bipolarity. It is crystal clear that the trauma and psychological pain of taking his loved one’s life strips him of his rationality and brings about the onset of psychosis. As a result, the Cartesian “thinking being” turns into an *unthinking* being, thus the collapse of anthropocentrism.

6. CONCLUSION

In the foregoing study, attempts were made to shed light on the tragic downfall of the *Anthropos* from the center of meaning-making system and world in Ian McEwan’s “Dead as They Come”. The article delved into the recalcitrant nature and subterranean reality of the mannequin; therefore, the underlying theoretical framework deployed in this study is Object-Oriented Ontology, specifically the theories addressing the objective reality of nonhuman entities put forth by Harman and Brown. Banking on these thinkers’ theories, it was averred that the mannequin functions as a Harmanian “broken object” or a Brownian “thing” in the short story, thus defying the subject or *Anthropos* and gaining subjectivity and agency in the process. Given that the nonhuman, that is the mannequin, lies at the core of the narrative, Object-Oriented Ontology proves to be of paramount significance in furnishing a novel reading of McEwan’s short story, as while the previous articles have focused on the role of the subject or the man in the story, the current study has examined that of the object or nonhuman.

As argued earlier in the article, the subject human gets gradually decentered and overthrown by the mannequin throughout the narrative, hence the dismantlement of anthropocentrism. To start with, at the outset of the story, the decline of the *Anthropos*’ subjectivity, agency, and power is initiated by the seduction of the nonhuman, and waning of his agentiality subsists as his naming-giving faculty and his most crucial tool, namely language, fail to assist him in the subjugating, possessing, and controlling the object. Therefore, by degrees, he experiences a tragic fall down the ontological pyramid to the status of an object while the mannequin climbs up the ladder to the position of a subject. The coup de grace is ultimately delivered to the *Anthropos* and, by the extension, to the humanism, as he collapses to the abyss of the madness and irrationality, upon (symbolically) taking the life of the mannequin. Given the overreaching significance of the human cognitive and thinking apparatus in the centralization of the human subject, the loss of reasoning faculty takes a fatal toll on the human and exacerbates his downfall from subjectivity. Consequently, he transforms from a “thinking being” into an *unthinking* one at the end of the short story.

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SUMMARY

THE MANNEQUIN AS AN ACTIVE AGENT: DECENTERED SUBJECTIVITY IN IAN MCEWAN'S "DEAD AS THEY COME"

Ian McEwan's "Dead as They Come" portrays an immaculate picture of an active and defiant object, decentering the subject from the center, thus paving the way for the dismantlement of anthropocentrism. While the short story has been examined through a subject-oriented lens, the object-oriented aspects thereof have not received much critical attention. Therefore, resorting to Object-Oriented Ontology terminology, the current study will attempt to analyze the subversive and recalcitrant nature of the mannequin, defying the anthropocentric rule and reality. Graham Harman and Bill Brown's OOO theories will form the underpinning theoretical framework of this article. It will be contended that anthropocentric dominance gets gradually chipped as the most pivotal tools at the disposal of Anthropos, namely language and name-giving, fail to assist him in controlling and possessing the nonhuman. The ultimate fatal blow is delivered to him when he loses his rationality and reasoning faculty, thus falling from subjectivity into the abyss of madness and insanity, which marks the complete annihilation of anthropocentrism.

KEYWORDS: Object-Seducer, Failure of Language, Defiant Broken Object, Mannequin, *Unthinking Being*.

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