

Short Stories of Good and Evil

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Abstract

This project explores the nature of good and evil through the creation of a series of short stories. These stories were written under the hypothesis that illustrating how context and point of view affect perceptions of right and wrong in the minds of readers would increase reader empathy. This project did not seek to convince readers whether particular actions were good or evil. Rather, this project sought to illustrate the subjective nature of right and wrong. Research was conducted utilizing writing guides from known writers and documents describing Utilitarian and Kantian ethical theories. Additionally, short stories written by other writers with themes similar to those presented in this project were reviewed. The results of this project are six short stories which explore the nature of good and evil. “Bad People” describes a conflict between two feuding families. “The Donor” explores capital punishment and the loss of individual rights in the name of the greater good. “Crazy” demonstrates that initial impressions are sometimes wrong and questions whether actions or results make one good or evil. “Scarcity” explores conflicting loyalties and how far one could morally go to survive. “The Red Door” sets the good of society against individual freedom. “The Argument” considers artificial life support and loyalty to family versus religious conviction. The short stories are not designed to provide readers with answers. Instead, the short stories are designed to inspire readers with questions.

Keywords: utilitarian, Kant, good, evil, right, wrong, morality, story, fiction, writing.

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Short Stories of Good and Evil

What is good? What is evil? Often, these questions are answered based on a form of intuition known as the human conscience. Everyone agrees that murder is wrong. Everyone agrees that it is wrong to steal. But, what if one murders a murderer to save an innocent life? What if one steals to keep one's child from starving to death? Different schools of ethics answer these questions differently. Kantian ethics holds that there is a higher moral law, and wrong is always wrong. Utilitarianism holds that the right thing to do is that which serves the greater good. What happens when the lines between good and evil become blurred and there is no easy answer? Through the use of creative writing, this project presents readers with scenarios that create questions about the nature of good and evil, and it builds empathy by causing readers to consider different views of right and wrong.

Chapter 1

Background

Stories have been used to preserve history, share knowledge, and teach lessons. Through various texts, some authors have shared the secrets to telling a memorable story. By using their tools, this project created a series of short stories that addressed the nature of good and evil.

Artistic Considerations. In a Madrid Café in 1954, an interviewer asked Ernest Hemingway how he named his characters. Hemingway replied, "The best I can" (Martin, 2006, p. 1591). The art and craft of writing is regarded by many as a mystery. What methods do the greatest writers use to create their literary works? In *On Writing*, King (2000) describes writing as "telepathy" and "a meeting of the minds" (p. 106). The goal of writing is to share thoughts and ideas. The best writers create new thoughts and ideas in the minds of their readers.

Questions of Good versus Evil. In an article describing good and evil, Bell (2004)

stated that though the American response to the attacks on September 11th is generally viewed as justified, that response “killed and injured civilians, demolished homes and places of worship, and created still more innocent victims,” and he went on to write that al Qaeda saw “themselves . . . as righteous, moral, and sincere as they try to destroy what they regard as evil in the world” (54). This citation is not made to justify the acts committed by al Qaeda. Rather, this citation presents an extreme example of how one’s point of view can affect one’s understanding of right and wrong. In an article discussing applied ethics, Dees and Crampton (1991) noted that theoretical ethics breaks down when faced with “the fact that we live in a morally imperfect . . . [and] unjust world” (136). The fact that the world is imperfect leads to the questions posed by this project.

Problem Statement

What is the nature of good and evil? Does a higher moral law define these ideas, or are they situational? If they are situational, then how does point of view affect ideas of right and wrong? What is the correct course of action when one faces conflicting loyalties? Can something normally defined as unethical be moral in some scenarios? With differing explanations of ethics, how can one define what is ethical or unethical? The problem with these questions is not that they are unanswerable. The problem with these questions is that they have so many answers. This project opens readers eyes to these questions.

Professional Significance

This project questions the nature of good and evil. This is not to subvert individual morals. Often, individuals are confident in their opinions about the world because they never consider the opinions of those that disagree with them. By presenting scenarios that are morally grey, and asking readers to question their reactions to similar scenarios, this project causes

readers to question the motivations and views of others. This project created stories designed to increase empathy by following specific methodology.

Overview of Methodology

Research for this project consisted of two parts. The first part of the research consisted of a review of scholarly works describing good and evil, and it explored various schools of ethical thought. Knowledge gained from this review supplemented the author's own intuition to create plots and characters that illustrate various ethical dilemmas designed to cause readers to question their understanding of good and evil. The second part of the research consisted of a review of texts and interviews by and with famous writers to identify some of the tools used in the creation of literary works. After completing this research, the author drafted short stories which explored the nature of good and evil.

Delimitations

It is not necessary to define what is good and what is evil. Most people can agree on extreme examples of good and evil. However, there are grey areas where morality is not so easily defined. This project's goal was to create short stories that highlighted these grey areas and caused readers to question their views of right and wrong. In completing this project, some terms and jargon were utilized that will not be familiar to all readers.

Definition of Terms

The following terms may not be familiar to all readers. The terms are broken up into two sections. The first section lists terms utilized in the introduction, research, and discussion portions of this project. The second section lists terms that the author invented for use in the short stories created for this project.

Section 1: General Terms.

Empathy. Ability to comprehend the feelings and views of others. One is not required to agree with those feelings or views.

Kantian. Promulgated by Immanuel Kant and others, this theory can be understood as a higher moral law theory. It is the intentions of the individual that determine whether actions are good or bad, regardless of any unintended consequences.

Morality. Determines whether actions are considered right or wrong. Morality is affected by individual belief, societal expectation, and ethical understanding.

Utilitarian. Promulgated by John Stuart Mill and others, this theory can be summarized as a greater good theory. Good produces the greatest happiness in the greatest number of people.

Section 2: Short Story Terms.

Moon. From “Scarcity.” One lunar cycle.

Melt. From “Scarcity.” Periods when all rivers are not completely frozen.

Rockway. From “Scarcity.” Old highways that have decayed over several centuries.

Snowden. From “Scarcity.” Shelter made of snow.

White. From “Scarcity.” Snow. A symbol for a vengeful mother nature and death. It takes life and warmth from the world and kills the human spirit, reducing humans to animals.

Summary

This project created short stories that considered the nature of good and evil with the overall goal of increasing empathy. A review of scholarly documents related to ethical decisions inspired the stories. A study of texts and interviews from great authors provided the tools necessary to create the stories. In summary, this uses fictional stories to evoke specific questions in the minds of its readers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many notable authors offer tips on successful writing. Reviewing the statements of these authors offers insight into the methods they use to create their stories. Stories often ask questions, and the question that this creative writing project explores will center on whether ideas of good and evil are interchangeable based on one's point of view. A study of the general tips offered by various authors, along with their views on narration, description, characters, and dialog, combined with a study of moral theory and morality in literature, offered insight that was used to create a series of short stories designed to cause readers to question their views on good and evil and thereby increase their capacity for empathy.

Writing Strategies

A story is something that reflects the human condition; good stories define characters through their actions, and those same actions drive the story forward (O'Connor, 1961, p. 1556). A short story should contain as much meaning as a novel; just because it is short does not mean it should be incomplete (O'Connor, 1961, p. 1558). When writing a story, don't worry about whether others will consider it a masterpiece; "all one can do is write truly and not care what the fate of it is" (Hemingway, 2013, p. 230). Authors should write stories with meaning, and they should not focus on gaining acceptance from others.

General tips. Grammar and vocabulary are foundations of writing. King (2000) wrote that an author should put vocabulary on the top shelf of their toolbox, and one of the worst things an author can do is to dress their writing up with long words because they are ashamed of their shorter words (p. 117). If one needs a dictionary to write, then one should not write (Hemingway, 2003, loc. 436). An author should speak plainly and directly, and they should use the first word they think of because that is usually the correct word (King, 2000, p. 118). King (2000) also states that one should avoid passive tense because it is a tool of timid writers who are

afraid to contend with troublesome action (p. 123). An active verb involves the subject doing something, while a passive verb involves something done to the subject; writing involves action (King p. 122). Carver (1968) stated that if punctuation is wrong or the story uses the wrong words, then the reader will be completely unaffected by what has been read (p. 1532). Poor grammar or incorrect vocabulary can ruin what might otherwise be good writing.

Symbols, theme, and effect are factors that authors must consider. Symbolism can enrich a story, but it isn't always necessary; if present, it will become apparent on its own, in which case the story can be adjusted in a second or third draft to bring it out further (King, 2000, p. 200). Symbols should operate on two levels; they must represent something greater, but they must also be a literal and necessary part of the story; symbols should not be added just for the sake of adding them (O'Connor, 1962, p. 1561). Certain details obtain meaning from the action of the story, and when this happens, those details become symbolic (O'Connor, 1962, p. 1561). The theme is what the story is about, and that is determined after the first draft is complete at the latest; after answering the question of why one wrote a story, future drafts should be adjusted to make this underlying purpose clearer (King, 2000, p. 201). The effect is also worth considering, and another writing strategy involves focusing on the overall effect of one's story rather than allowing various situations to dictate the direction it will take (Poe, 2003, p. 430). Stories are a combination of mystery and manners, and authors get the manners of a story from the "texture of existence" surrounding them (O'Connor, 1961, p. 1562). Symbols, theme, and effect are all factors involved in writing that reveal themselves to the author over time.

Narration. The narration is the action that authors use to move a story forward. Do not be afraid to break a complex thought into two simple thoughts; this makes things easier on the reader, and the reader should always be the main concern (King, 2000, p. 124). Hemingway

(2003) recommended that writers keep things simple; he stated that he could write like Tolstoy to make his book seem bigger and smarter, but then he remembers how much of Tolstoy's work he skipped over as he read (loc. 849). Narration should move the story forward, and it should not be unnecessarily complicated.

The method of narration determines the overall structure of the story and is the means by which the author creates. Writing is best done one sentence at a time; begin with the first sentence, and soon the story will reveal itself (Carver, 1968, p. 1533). It is the paragraph that is the basic unit of writing, and this flexible instrument can be multiple pages long or consist of a single word (King, 2000, p. 134). When one writes, it's best not to focus on where paragraphs should end and begin; instead, let nature take its course and fix things later if they do not look right (King, 2000, p. 132). Write about what one likes, and make it unique by blending in one's knowledge of life (King, 2000, p. 161). King (2000) stated that "plotting and the spontaneity of creation aren't compatible" (p. 163); he went on to state that he based his books on situations rather than plots (p. 164). On deciding what one should reveal to the reader and what one should hide, Hemingway (2003) stated that one could omit anything one wanted as long as the omission was intentional, strengthened the story, and made people feel more than they understood (loc. 810). If one omits correctly, then the reader will have a feeling of what the writer has omitted as strongly as they would have if the writer had plainly stated what was omitted (Hemingway, 2003, loc. 810). Narration creates overall structure and pushes the story forward, and sometimes omitting something can be as powerful as writing it down.

Description. The description is the means that authors use to create worlds for their readers. Individual senses communicate fictional worlds; they are based on "what can be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, and touched" (O'Connor, 1961, p. 1557). Adverbs are not a writer's friend;

rather than using a word like ‘firmly’ to describe how one closed a door, writers should place the context of the door closing in the prose building up to the event; this makes words like firmly unnecessary (King, 2000, p. 125). The description begins with visualizing what one wants the reader to see, and it ends with the writer transcribing that image onto a page through words (King, 2000, p. 174). It’s not necessary to be over detailed in one’s description, the reader’s subconscious will fill in details such as faces, builds, and clothing (King, 2000, p. 174). “Description begins in the writer’s imagination but should finish in the reader’s” (King, 2000, p. 174). Locale and texture are most important to making the reader feel that they are actually in the story (King, 2000, p. 175). Prose should be easy to read, seem short, and contain all the dimensions of the real world and the spiritual world (Hemingway, 2003, loc. 385). Stories should sound like they happened, and success is indicated by people assuming they occurred (Hemingway 2003 loc. 780). The application of description in a story determines whether the world created by the author is believable or not.

Characters. Characters can be used to drive a story forward, or the story can drive them forward. It isn’t necessary to know the story before one begins working; as long as one has an idea of who the characters are and what the situation is, the story will reveal itself as one writes (King, 2000, p. 167). Characters grow as the story progresses, and if they grow enough, they may begin to influence the story rather than the story influencing them (King, 2000, p. 190). Each of us is the protagonist of our own story in life, and if one can apply that same mentality to all of one’s characters, they may not always be brilliant, but they will be far from one dimensional” (King, 2000, p. 191). All characters are made up by combining parts of the writer with character traits observed in other people (King, 2000, p. 192). When writing a story, the author should make real people, not caricatures; real people can only say and do what they would

naturally say or do, and trying to make them do otherwise risks spoiling the story (Hemingway, 2003, loc. 755). Putting one's intellectual musings into the mouths of artificially constructed characters is not literature (Hemingway, 2003, loc. 768). It is ok to base characters on real people, but adjusting those characters too much risks transforming them into something that feels false to readers (Hemingway, 2013, p. 228). Fictional characters should be as real as people, and if written correctly, readers will view them as real people.

Dialog. The dialog is critical to creating a good story and bringing characters to life. Beginning writers often present dialog from characters that cannot be seen or felt; one can open a story with dialog, but the reader must be given an image of who is talking if they are to believe someone is there (O'Connor, 1961, p. 1557). "The best form of dialog attribution is [the word:] said," and one should avoid using adverbs or overly strong attribution verbs to make up for poor narration and description (King, 2000, p. 127). Character dialog tells readers more about the characters than anything except character action (King, 2000, p. 180). The dialog is a means to show the reader things rather than telling them things; one can use narration to tell about a character's education, or one can do it much more vividly through dialog (King, 2000, p. 180). The dialog is an important part of any story that involves believable characters.

Central Questions

Good and evil. One theme applicable to stories centers on the nature of good and evil. King (2000) described his inspiration for the novel *The Dead Zone* as a question over whether a political assassin could ever be right, and if so could placing that assassin as the novel's protagonist make him the good guy (p. 192). While context is a factor in defining good and evil, the point of view also plays a role (Bell, 2004, p. 54). The belief that one is always good and moral and one's enemies are evil does not serve truth or justice (Bell, 2004, p. 54). The idea that

one must serve good and oppose evil exists in every human society; the problem is that not all people agree on what is good and what is evil (Bell, 2004, p. 55). If evil means causing harm, then often evil is a result of the “understandable acts of well-meaning, decent people” (Bell, 2004, p. 55). Transgressors often minimize the harm that they do, while victims often exaggerate the harm done to them; the result is that when individuals seek revenge, they often inflict greater harm than was originally done to them (Bell, 2004, p. 55). To reduce evil and increase good, people must act with concern for other people’s well-being, and that means operating within an ethical system that considers everyone’s point of view (Bell, 2004, p. 56). To know the truth, people must question their convictions and be skeptical of their own beliefs (Bell, 2004, p. 56). People can learn that pure evil is a myth, and they can learn self-restraint, empathy, and fairness (Bell, 2004, p. 59). Empathy, or considering the views of others without accepting or condemning them, offers a clearer view of good and evil for those who practice it.

A higher moral law. Immanuel Kant believed that good and evil were not subjective. Moral laws carry with them absolute obligations; individual morals may fail due to poor judgment, but moral laws are incorruptible (Kant, 2002, p. 6). Kant (2002) stated that one’s will was the ultimate expression of good, and because a good will is the only good that has no limitations, it is one’s intention that ultimately determines what is good (p. 9). The morality of any action is determined by how its universal application would affect the world; telling a lie might seem advantageous, but if the idea that lying is ok is applied universally, then promises mean nothing, and society begins to fail (Kant, 2002, p. 19). Immanuel Kant’s philosophy implies that actions and results matter less than the intentions behind actions.

Utility. John Stewart Mill believed that results defined morality, and utility defined what was good. Utility teaches that actions are good in direct proportion to the total happiness

produced, and actions are bad if they produce effects that are the opposite of happiness (Mill, 2001, p. 9). It is not the happiness of any individual that matters; it is the total happiness that matters (Mill, 2001, p. 14). Utilitarian morals allow a human being to sacrifice themselves for the greater good, but the sacrifice is only considered good if it increases the sum of happiness and is wasted if it does not (Mill, 2001, p. 19). John Steward Mill's moral philosophy holds that results matter more than intentions, and the needs of the many carry more weight than the needs of the few.

Morality. Morality defines what is considered good and evil. Ideal morality is used to determine the virtues, rules, and values that come from an abstract moral view, while practical morality recognizes that we live in an imperfect and unjust world (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 136). Moral obligations rest on a foundation of trust, and when trust is absent, these moral obligations are often unfelt (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 136). Expecting others to follow the path of ideal morality when they know that strangers are unlikely to do the same is not realistic, and increasing the incentive to act morally relies on enhancing mutual trust between parties (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 137). People decide what is morally right based on a combination of expected outcomes and individual relationships (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 138). In many negotiations, deception is considered acceptable unless it is used against an individual that one shares a bond of trust with or against a party that is significantly disadvantaged (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 139). Without trust, people operate in a Hobbesian state of nature where they are only concerned with their interests and consider themselves in conflict with everyone else (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 145). Even in close-knit groups, people can remain insecure due to a lack of mutual trust (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 145). Pragmatists are willing to work for a moral and civil society, but they are not willing to place themselves at a disadvantage where

they might fall victim to those who do not act morally (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 146).

Empathy can provide people with a reason to believe that trust is present, which in turn increases the likelihood of moral action, but empathy is often reliant on familiarity (Dees and Crampton, 1991, p. 159). Morality relies on trust, and trust is rooted in the empathy that occurs with familiarity.

Good, Evil, and Morality in Literature

Shirly Jackson. “The Lottery” is a story depicting institutionalized evil. The story begins as people gather in an orderly manner to participate in a ritual that began in a time faded from memory (Jackson, 1948, p. 595). Everyone in the town draws pieces of paper to determine the family selected for the lottery, and then that family steps forward, and each member draws a piece of paper (Jackson, 1948, p. 598). The winner is selected, and it is revealed that Tessie Hutchinson, a wife and mother, will be stoned to death (Jackson, 1948, p. 600). Any member of her family, including the youngest child, had the potential to be selected, and Tessie’s own family, including her youngest child, participate in stoning her to death (Jackson, 1948, p. 600). The town members view the act as good, and the story illustrates the warped lens through which people may define good and evil.

Frank Kafka. “The Metamorphosis” tests the limits of human compassion. The protagonist, Gregor, awakens one day to find he has changed into an insect (Kafka, 1971, p. 89). Gregor works as a provider for his family and is in the process of paying off his parent’s debts (Kafka, 1971, p. 89). Gregor’s family, while initially frightened by his condition, eventually begins to make attempts to accommodate his happiness and care for him (Kafka, 1971, p. 108). The family struggles due to the loss of income after Gregor’s transformation, and they go from treating Gregor with compassion to attacking him to merely tolerating his existence (Kafka,

1971, p. 122). Ultimately Gregor dies, and the family members express relief and move on to better lives (Kafka, 1971, p. 139). “The Metamorphosis” explores the human capacity to ignore suffering, and its ending implies questions of whether Gregor’s suffering served the greater good and whether his family, who could have done much more for Gregor, actually got what they deserved.

In “The Problem of Our Laws,” Kafka questions whether one is morally obligated to follow unjust laws. Kafka (1971) narrated that the nobility created laws that only applied to commoners, and the commoners did not even know what the laws were; people felt an obligation to follow these laws because they were ancient (p. 437). The people realize that they could be free were they to deny these unknown laws or deny the nobility, but they are unwilling to do that because of the security provided by the unknown laws and the ruling nobility (Kafka, 1971, p. 438). Kafka’s story begs the question of whether one is morally obligated to resist injustice when one lives in security and comfort because of that injustice.

Ursula K. Le Guin. “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” considers the cost of utility. Le Guin (2004) narrated a tale of a great city filled with people who live completely free of pain and endure a state of constant bliss (loc. 4565). Contrasting the happiness of the city is the spectacle of a miserable child who must endure a painful and loveless existence; the pain of that individual is the cost of the happiness (Le Guin, 2004, loc. 4621). The people know the cost of their happiness, and the majority of them accept it; however, some leave the city and go to a place that only they appear to know (Le Guin, 2004, loc. 4650). Le Guin’s story questions the rights of the individual versus those of the masses, and it questions whether those walking away rather than helping the child are just.

Another of Le Guin’s stories is titled “The Day Before the Revolution.” Le Guin (2004)

wrote, “This story is about one of the ones who walked away from Omelas” (loc. 4675). Le Guin (2004) described two conflicting forms of government, one that appeared to be overly authoritarian and one that is referred to as Odonian and appears to be anarchistic (loc. 4719). The protagonist, Laia, narrated memories of time spent in prison and hinted at fighting that left her lover among fourteen hundred killed and buried in a mass grave (loc. 4705). Laia invented the Odonian way of life, and in effect walked away from the authoritarian government that had oppressed her (Le Guin, 2004, loc. 4719). The story details Laia’s approaching death as what will presumably be a major revolution begins (Le Guin, 2004, loc. 4924). “The Day Before the Revolution” includes several themes, but a major theme implied by the events of the story is that it is morally right to stand against an ideology one does not believe in, even if the price of standing against that ideology is pain and death.

Summary

This study of the general tips offered by various authors, along with their views on narration, description, characters, and dialog, combined with a study of moral theory and morality in literature, offered insight that was used to create a series of short stories designed to cause readers to question their views of good and evil and thereby increase empathy. Defining good and evil and exploring how those definitions impact morality offered a theme for the stories. In conclusion, the knowledge imparted by the authors of fiction listed in this chapter, and the inspiration granted by the references defining good, evil, and morality, provided the tools necessary to create a compilation of short stories designed increase empathy.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter summarizes the process of developing this project's collection of short stories. These stories present readers with scenarios designed cause readers to question right and wrong. On a grander scale, the stories explore the nature of good and evil. This project used strategies outlined by various writers to develop a collection of short stories that explore the nature of good and evil with the ultimate goal of increasing empathy in the minds of its readers.

Research Context

Because this was a creative project, the majority of the research was applied within the mind of the author. The research listed in Chapter 2: Literary Review was utilized to develop a methodology to create short stories designed to accomplish the goals of this project. While the major question of this project serves as a unifying theme for the short stories, the ultimate goal of this project was to explore the creative processes involved in writing a collection of short stories.

Research Participants

The primary research participant in this project is the project's author. However, the various writers consulted via a review of their guides on writing and their literary works make those writers indirect research participants. The writers cited in Chapter 2: Literary Review were instrumental in developing the research methodology for this project and in providing ideas on the best methods of expression for this project's major question.

Research Instruments

The research instruments used for this project consisted of the works reviewed in Chapter 2: Literary Review, and they consisted of the author's structured use of imagination to create original literary works that express the project's major question and sub-questions. The Plan of Action outlines the application of the research instruments for this creative project.

Plan of Action

The plan of action for this project consisted of several phases. Each phase was critical in the development of this project, and the phases did overlap. The phases of this project were developed based on information presented in Chapter 2: Literary Review.

Phase 1: Identifying questions. This phase determined the questions that would unify the short stories this project created. All of the short stories fall under the theme identified by the major question, and each story addresses one or more of the sub-questions posed under the main question.

Major question. What is the nature of good and evil? This question acted as the unifying theme of this project.

Sub-question 1. Does a higher moral law define what is good and what is evil? This sub-question explores the main ideas behind Utilitarian and Kantian ethics.

Sub-question 2. How does point of view affect ideas of right and wrong? This sub-question seeks to increase empathy by shifting reader viewpoints between opposing factions.

Sub-question 3. What is the correct action when one faces conflicting loyalties? This sub-question explores how concepts of right and wrong may differ due to conflicting loyalties.

Sub-question 4. Can something normally defined as unethical be moral? This sub-question showcases the utilitarian idea that the greater good might make something normally unethical moral and therefore ethical.

Sub-question 5. With differing explanations of ethics, how can one define what is ethical or unethical? This sub-question leads into the answer implied by this project's results.

Phase 2: Brain Storming. This phase consisted of brainstorming and writing down new ideas. An example of this phase's execution occurred when the author was driving to

Jacksonville, Florida in late November 2017. While driving on the interstate, the author saw the forests of North Carolina and pondered what it might be like to go off the grid and live with nature. The author then thought of a previous news story that described a driver killed when an unknown person threw a rock onto a highway. Next, the author's mind imagined a disturbed individual who had moved into the woods throwing something onto the interstate highway on which the author drove. Then, the author's mind shifted to the questions of good and evil posed by this project, and the author pondered what kind of justice might await an individual who performed such an action if it caused deaths. Finally, after remembering a news article that described China harvesting organs from condemned prisoners, the author questioned what might happen if the United States harvested prisoner's organs. The author's final thoughts centered on revealing that the individual condemned might innocent of the crime. The result was the short story titled "The Donor."

Brain Storming consists of allowing the mind to create scenarios based on questions; this occurs with little mental effort, but much of the data is discarded and never committed to long-term memory. Brain Storming, in the context of this project, often occurred in the moments just before losing consciousness to sleep or directly upon waking. Because this data is a product of the subconscious that quickly fades from conscious thought, the most important step in the brain storming phase is to write down any ideas that occur.

Phase 3: Writing. Writing was the most difficult phase of the project. The first step of writing was to gather ideas compiled during the brain storming phase. After reviewing those ideas, the outline of a story was created. This outline contained rough ideas of characters and their backstories. The outline also contained major plot points and twists. Sometimes, the outline contained an ending for the story, but sometimes the ending revealed itself as the story

was written. Writing is an exercise of the sub-conscious, and it flexes the same mental muscles that children use to create imaginary friends or to play make-believe. One may guide their writing, but one cannot force it. There were benefits to the structure of an outline, but the author also had to ensure that the outline did not become an oppressive fence that stifled creativity.

Phase 4: Revising. After completion of the writing phase, the revising phase streamlined the story's text and corrected grammar and spelling errors. The revisions occurred several days after the writing process was complete based on recommendations of writers indirectly surveyed while creating Chapter 2: Literary Review. Additionally, the short stories were presented to a reader for feedback before their finalization.

Organization and Analysis of Data

The result of this project is not data collected via quantitative or qualitative methods. Instead, the result of this project is a collection of short stories. The main questions and sub-questions provided the themes explored by the collection of short stories. The connecting feature of the stories is their exploration of this project's main question and sub-questions.

Summary

This project used strategies outlined by various writers to develop a collection of short stories that explore the nature of good and evil with the ultimate goal of increasing empathy in the minds of its readers. The writers studied in Chapter 2: Literary Review were indirect research participants in the project. This project's plan of action consisted of four distinct phases, and those phases produced a series of short stories that explore the project's major question and sub-questions. In summary, this project explored the creative process of developing short stories under a specific theme.

Chapter 4: Results

This project's main question centered on the nature of good and evil. The sub-questions of this project explored how context affects one's definitions of right and wrong. These questions did not have a single answer. However, based on the assumption that people form their opinions of what is moral based on their individual experiences and points of view, this project tried to instill in readers a question of how they might react or what they might approve of in various situations. Short stories are used to present readers with various fictional scenarios. The stories expose readers to realities designed to shape their opinions of specific situations, and then the stories reveal new information that causes readers to reconsider their views on what is right and wrong. The stories also present information designed to leave readers questioning how they might react if placed in the situations described therein. This creative project did not seek to answer questions; instead, this project attempted to cause readers to ask questions they might not otherwise think to ask themselves.

Bad People

1

Otto Sawson woke in a cold sweat. He looked out of his window and saw the sky was barely beginning to light. Dawn was still a good hour away, and Otto kicked the footboard of his bed in frustration. There was no going back to sleep. Not when you woke up to damp sheets and cramped muscles caused by dreams that were already fading from memory. Otto got out of bed. He felt the stress begin to melt out of his muscles as his bare feet touched the cold dirt floor of the hut. There was always something reassuring about the dirt. Otto would have slept on the floor if he didn't know it would seep the warmth from his bones. Summer was different. In summer he could sleep on earth and it kept him cool. In winter, it stole what little warmth there

was to be had. The dirt could be good or bad, depending on the time of year.

Otto put on his furs and pulled on his boots. He opened the door that led from his hut to the outside world, and was immediately knocked to the ground by a mountain of fur and drool. Otto couldn't stand dog breath, and now he would smell like it until he could boil water and wash himself.

"Get off me, mutt!" he exclaimed.

"Woof," was the answer he received. Arf eyed Otto with contempt as more drool slid from his powerful jaws. Otto still regretted that name. His daughter Melinda named the dog that because she thought it was funny to see Otto shouting for him. Otto tried to get the dog to answer to something else, but he would only acknowledge the name Arf. So, whenever Otto needed the dog, he was forced to shout, "ARF, ARF, AAARF!" The other Sawsons always got a laugh when that scene played out. Otto didn't see the humor.

The dog stank, but it was a good guard dog. Arf warned Otto whenever someone approached the hut, and sometimes Arf even brought home game from a successful hunt. Otto had to keep the chickens behind a fence to keep the dog from killing them, and once old Charlie Sawson said he caught Arf stalking his son like he was a chicken, but the dog was family too and Otto didn't care. Besides, Charlie's son was a delinquent and it would serve him right if Arf took a bite out of his hide. Otto knew he could count on Arf, so he tolerated the smelly breath and the drool.

"I miss her," he said to the dog. Otto was sure the dog missed Melinda too. She had just seen her ninth winter when she disappeared. She had gone into the forest to look for roots. Otto and the other Sawsons had searched for her for days. There was no proof, but they all knew the Waltons were to blame. Otto's face flushed when he thought of the Waltons.

“Heya Otto!” shouted Larcos from across the road. Larcos Sawson worked the land like Otto did, and he had the arms and hands to show it. Larcos was the one person in town that Otto didn’t know he could beat in a fight.

Good thing we’re friends, he thought. “Heya Larcos, what’s good?”

“Did you hear about Billy?” asked Larcos.

“Na, what about him?” replied Otto.

“Crops turned bad. Lost everything. Waltons poisoned his well,” said Larcos.

“When are we gonna do something about them?” asked Otto.

“I don’t know. But it needs to be soon. If you go too long without reminding them they can bleed, they start to get bold,” said Larcos.

“They should keep to their own and let us keep to ours. All we wanna do is raise our crops and get along,” said Otto.

“Not their way,” said Larcos.

“Well, it’s high time we remind them that we aren’t push overs,” said Otto.

Larcos headed back to work his field, and Otto walked to the coop to see to his chickens. Arf followed obediently and kept a watchful eye on Otto when he entered the fenced in area of the coop. The hens were ok. Otto was tying the gate shut again when he heard something loud.

Dong-dong-dong-dong, the bell rang over and over, echoing from the tower. The watchman ringing it could mean only one thing. *The Waltons are attacking us*, Otto thought as his heart threatened to pound its way out of his chest. Otto ran into his hut and grabbed his club. *Good for pounding posts and pounding skulls*, he thought as he rushed to join the rest of the Sawsons. *I’m going to get them back for everything they’ve taken from me*.

Otto and the other Sawsons watched the tree line. Each of them clutched a weapon. The

army of Waltons hellbent on killing them didn't appear. What did break the tree line was Phil Sawson. He carried a bloodied mass in his arms, and tears streamed down his cheeks. Otto heard Marta scream as she ran forward and gathered her daughter up in her arms.

"What the hell happened?" demanded Larcos.

Phil's body trembled, and tears continued to flow from his eyes. "She went out a few hours before dawn to fish at the water hole. She was supposed to have fish in the pan for breakfast. When she didn't show up, I went to look for her. There was blood. I followed it until I found her like this."

"You let her go down to the hole by herself?" shouted Larcos.

"It's my land. She shouldn't have had to worry about anything."

Larcos looked at Otto. Otto returned a stare that gave away no emotion. Phil's land sat at the edge of Walton territory, and there had been fights over that water hole before. Otto's father had killed a Walton who raped Phil's mother by that same hole. It was one of the many stories that Otto's father told him when he was growing up. Otto knew that his father told him those things so that they wouldn't happen to him. You didn't go near Walton territory without weapons, and even then, you needed friends with you. The Waltons were monsters.

"How many more of our children are we gonna let them take from us?" Otto shouted. He looked at Phil's daughter, and he saw only Melinda. "All we want to do is live in peace, but those monsters will never let us live in peace!"

Several of the Sawsons, faces grim, nodded as Otto shouted. A few others shared their rage over the young girl's death.

"We need to burn them out once and for all!" shouted Larcos.

"Kill them all, before they kill any more of our daughters," shouted another Sawson.

“We’ve put up with this for too long. Let’s teach these animals what happens when you pick a fight with a Sawson!”

“The killed my daughter and I never even found a body to burry. Now they’ve done it again. This ends now!” shouted Otto.

Some of the town’s women appeared worried and looked like they might try to calm the men down before they charged off to attack the Waltons, but others shook with as much rage as the men and egged them on. Marta Sawson was no longer screaming or crying. She was holding her daughter in her arms and rocking back and forth. She looked up at her husband. “Go kill them all.” She said it calmly and quietly. Her voice was strangely empty of emotion. Somehow, that drove the men’s rage even further, and Phil made an animalistic snarl as he turned back toward his land, and toward the Walton land that was beyond it. The townsmen followed him. Each carried a weapon, and each had murder in his eyes.

2

Otto Walton woke when the sunlight pouring through his window hit his face. He’d overslept again, and he knew Angele would be put off by it. *She’ll be fine, I’ll just grab her some flowers*, he thought as he got out of bed. Otto had been trying to get Angele to agree to marry him for two winters. No one else was pursuing her, but Otto suspected that she kept resisting his advances because she hoped someone better would come along. That was ok. Women were funny like that sometimes. Otto still wanted her, and she was at least interested in him enough to meet him for breakfast sometimes.

Otto walked outside, and Tarley waved at him from across the road. Tarley was always up first, and his crops showed the work he put in. Otto walked across the road to talk to his friend.

“Morning Tarley!” he said.

“Howdy Otto. Angele was around looking in on you. Seemed a bit angry,” said Tarley.

“I don’t understand why she didn’t just knock on my damned door if she was over here anyway. I just don’t get it,” said Otto.

“Maybe she’s afraid of seeing you before you’ve combed your hair in the morning?”

Tarley speculated.

“How are the crops doing?” Otto asked. He hadn’t bothered to comb his hair this morning and wanted to change the subject.

“Better. There was something in the water that was making them sick. I worked out an agreement with Nathan to use his well in exchange for a portion of my harvest, and they’ve recovered. It’s not fun having to load up the wagon every week though. I’d give anything for rain,” said Tarley.

“Don’t you share a border with the Sawsons? I wouldn’t put it past that crazy lot to poison a well,” said Otto.

“They’d be hurting themselves. When wells are in the same valley they take water from the same place,” he replied.

“Have you had any more trouble on the border?” asked Otto.

“Nothing recent. None of the border farms have heard much from them since Billy stopped contesting ownership of that fishing hole,” said Tarley.

“I still can’t believe Billy let that pass. Those bastards killed his uncle,” said Otto.

“He brought it on himself. Sneaking off to meet that man’s wife after dark. It was only a matter of time before the husband caught on and did something about it. Billy knew it was happening, and he knew it was wrong, and he didn’t do anything to stop it. I think Billy feels it

was partially his fault, and that's probably why he backed off on his claims to the fishing hole. It's sad really. If Billy's uncle had picked an unwed Sawson woman to pursue, we might live in a different world," said Tarley.

"You're too generous. The Sawsons have been at us for as long as I can remember. The only thing people like that understand is fists and clubs, and they would have reacted the same regardless of whether the girl was married or not" said Otto.

"They've kept to themselves since..." Tarley stopped speaking when he realized Otto was no longer paying attention.

"Who is that?" asked Otto. A shadow moved in the trees. Otto felt his heart beating faster. The shadow broke through the forest line. Otto breathed a sigh of relief as Angele exited the forest carrying a bundle of roots and mushrooms. Otto smiled at her, and then he stopped smiling when she glared at him. Then suddenly she laughed at him and Otto knew they would be ok. He smiled at her again, and this time she returned the smile. Then the Sawsons broke through the trees behind Angele.

3

Otto and Larcos Sawson washed their clothes in the river. The other Sawsons had finished washing their clothes. Otto had worn white trousers that morning. He hadn't considered their color when he and the other Sawsons charged into the forest. His trousers weren't white anymore. None of the Sawsons spoke during the walk back to town. Until they finished washing. After their clothes were clean, and after they turned from the river and began walking to town, the people began to talk. Some even laughed. It was as though the river had purified them. Otto looked down at his trousers.

"We showed them," said Larcos.

“I heard Phil talking as he headed back to town. He and Marta are going to take over the Walton lands next to his. I guess he won’t have to worry about who wants his fishing hole now,” said Otto.

“That girl...” said Larcos.

“Let’s head back. This isn’t going to wash off,” said Otto. *The stains will never come off*, he thought.

Otto walked back to his hut, and he saw Arf running along the property line. “ARF, AAARRF!” he shouted. The dog looked at him, wagged its tail, and then walked away from him into the trees. *Stupid dog*, he thought.

Arf headed into the woods and found the spot where he buried it. He dug it up and began to chew. There wasn’t any meat left on it, but it was still a nice bone. Arf was a good guard dog, and he was a good hunter. Sometimes, Arf would bring whatever he caught home for Otto to share. Sometimes, Arf would keep the kill for himself and bury the bones. On the end of this particular bone was a foot. Attached to this foot was a shoe. It was a special shoe. Melinda’s dad had given her this shoe for her birthday.

End.

The Donor

1

The rain was beating against the windshield. It was one of those storms where the drops seemed to be the size of golf balls, and Jon had his wipers turned all the way up. As he listened to the woosh-woosh of his wipers, he sped down the highway. The clouds above him were black, but he could see light peeking through in the distance. That was Jon’s world right now. Golf balls of rain, dark clouds overhead, and light in the distance.

Woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh. *If I can just get through this mess I can stop and stretch my legs some place dry*, Jon thought as he sped forward. The radio station was fading, but Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody was fighting to break through the static. Jon shifted the tuner forward hoping he would land on a decent station, but the radio only found more static, and Jon was forced to listen to the drumbeat of rain on his roof and the unrelenting rhythm of his wipers.

Woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh.

Jon weaved through slower drivers as he shifted lanes. *Why do people drive so stupid when it rains?* He grinned at his thought as he observed the arrow of his odometer pointing at ninety. The cars he passed must have been going about sixty. The speed limit was fifty-five.

The rain drops had gotten smaller. They were no longer golf balls threatening to dent the roof of his car. Now they were thousands of little peas, like a super-fast drum solo of tiny drops that were hard to see through even with his wipers at max speed. Jon didn't slow down, but he did look down at his radio which was still scanning as it endlessly searched for a signal. He turned off the auto-scan and started moving through the stations a digit at a time hoping to find something that might pass for driving music.

Woosh-woosh-woosh-woosh. That was the last thing Jon heard. The split-second sound of his front end collapsing as he rear-ended the backside of a big red van happened too fast for him to hear it. The image of the radio faded from his sight in a flash of light that echoed a microsecond of intense pain as his bones were snapped by his car collapsing around him.

2

"Morn'n Tom," said the deputy as he walked into the station.

"Morn'n," said the Sheriff. The Sheriff sat at an oversized desk that seemed designed to intimidate people. In front of the desk were two chairs that looked uncomfortable. The sheriff's

station was an old demo log cabin for a company that had gone out of business years ago. It was an upgrade to the old station, so the Sheriff got the funding approved and moved in. The bedroom was converted into three holding cells, and the living area held the desks of the Sheriff and his deputies.

“I hear they caught our guy roaming around Black Lake. They say he’s really screwed up in the head,” said the deputy.

Tom looked up from the cartoon section of the newspaper he was reading and looked at Bill, his lead deputy. “Well Bill, you gotta be screwed up in the head to do something like that fella did. Good thing they caught him.”

“Whatta ya think will happen when the courts get ahold of him?” asked Bill.

“Justice. Turn on the tube and see what’s on about it,” said Tom.

Bill turned on the TV and put the channel on the local news station. The interviewer had two people debating the events leading up to the tragedy. One of the people was a woman in nice business attire, while the other was a college student wearing a wrinkled button up shirt that didn’t seem to fit right. Tom put down his paper, and Bill sat down to watch the broadcast.

College student in wrinkled shirt: “Look, I’m not saying what happened isn’t horrible, but if that guy hadn’t been speeding...”

Woman in fancy business attire: “No one is saying that the reckless driver doesn’t bear some of the blame, but the fact remains that if that log hadn’t been dragged into the highway, causing those people to stop, the accident wouldn’t have happened.”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “Are you going to keep interrupting me, or am I going to actually get a chance to speak?”

Interviewer: “Let’s all calm down. Everyone will get a chance to share their thoughts.”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “I’m perfectly calm. I just don’t see how you can consider taking a man’s life when he wasn’t the one directly responsible. And to be honest, there aren’t any witnesses who can say...”

Woman in fancy business attire: “The gentleman was a vagabond living in the woods. He was the only person in the area. Police reported that they have a confession from the man saying that he dragged the log onto the highway. Even if the gentleman’s proximity to the incident is considered circumstantial, the confession makes witnesses irrelevant.”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “How many innocent people have been killed because police beat a confession out of them? People have rights, and all the news ever shows anymore is how the death penalty saves lives...”

Interviewer: “Let me remind our commentators that we are here to discuss the facts surrounding this case. This isn’t a death penalty debate.”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “What do you mean it’s not a death penalty debate? These new laws incentivize the state to murder people!”

Woman in fancy business attire: “I don’t think its murder at all when we are getting rid of criminals. The new laws allow their lives to serve the greater good. I’m sure both of you can remember the little girl Molly whose heart was failing. Her life was saved when that murderer and rapist was put to death. There is nothing you can say that will convince me that he had as much right to life as that innocent little girl...”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “No one is talking about Molly or that crazy guy, we are talking about some poor hermit who may or may not have even done what people are saying he did, and we’re ignoring the fact that it was the idiot speeder who actually killed that family.”

Woman in fancy business attire: “I’d appreciate it if I could finish my sentence without

being interrupted. And you may not care about Molly, but...”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “I never said I didn’t care about Molly! And you’ve been interrupting me over and over again during this entire interview! Where do you get off attacking...”

Woman in fancy business attire: “As I was trying to say, you may not care about Molly, but I’m sure her family is glad that the new laws are in place.”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “What the hell are you talking about? No one here is talking about Molly! What the -BEEP- is wrong with you?!”

Interviewer: “Obviously this is a very emotional subject for some people. I’d like to thank both of our commentators for participating in this discussion.”

Woman in fancy business attire: “Always a pleasure.”

College student in wrinkled shirt: “What the -BEEP- is wrong with you -BEEEEEP- people? We’re talking about people’s lives...”

Bill turned off the TV and looked over at a smirking Tom.

“Wow, people really do get emotional over this stuff, don’t they?” said Tom.

“Yes, they do,” said Bill.

3

“How’s our subject, Emily?” asked the doctor. The doctor was an overweight man wearing a white lab coat, and Emily was an attractive blonde woman that one wouldn’t normally expect to see conversing with such a man.

“Still unconscious. Do you think he’ll wake up?” asked the nurse. The unconscious man had tan skin and a wrinkled face. He looked to be about forty years old, and the scars on his face spoke of a rough life. The man’s chest rose and fell, but those were his only signs of life.

“He had a negative reaction to the serum. It’s rare, but it does happen. Sometimes they wake up, but sometimes the damage is too great and they stay like this,” said the doctor.

“It’s so sad. What if he was innocent?” asked Emily.

“It’s a tradeoff. The police only use the serum when they know someone’s guilty. Forcing them to confess saves a lot of time and money.”

“But I read that the serum can make people say what the police want to hear.”

“Now Emily,” said the doctor, “It’s best not to think about those kinds of things. Like I said, the police only use the serum when they know someone is guilty. If the process of getting guilty people to confess damages them, well, they’re going to die anyway and some might say losing consciousness is a mercy. Let’s not forget, the new laws aren’t about punishment, they are about justice and saving lives.”

“I guess you’re right.”

“Of course I’m right. Now did you get the data I asked for?”

“Yes doctor. There’s three candidates for the heart, four for the liver, and twelve waiting for kidneys. There’s also an eight-year-old with severe vision loss who will probably benefit from the retinas.”

“Outstanding. So, this fella can do some good for the world. I wish I had some say in who got what, but they pay others to figure out those details,” said the doctor.

“What about his trial?” asked Emily.

“Paperwork just came through this morning. The magistrate ruled that based on a serum based confession, and the loss of life resulting from his criminal mischief, along with the innocent lives saved by immediate harvest, that the right to trial was suspended.”

“So, I should prep him then?”

“Yes.” said the doctor.

“I’m glad he’s unconscious. The last one was hard. You missed that one. They waived his trial too. He struggled against his restraints until he went under. He kept screaming that he was innocent, but he said differently under the serum,” said Emily.

“I followed that story. His heart saved a little girl’s life. The serum confession was for the murders. They had DNA proof of the rapes. The world is better without him in it,” said the doctor.

“It was still hard to put him under.”

“Emily, I understand how you feel. Just remember, we are saving innocent lives, and we are allowing some very bad characters to do something good with their lives. We are just balancing the scales,” said the doctor. “Now, prep this subject for immediate harvest.”

“Yes, doctor.” said Emily.

End.

Crazy

Taylor is getting out today. That was Jessie’s first thought upon waking. Jessie climbed out of bed and threw on a T-shirt and jeans. Taylor was getting out of jail. Jessie wrote letters to the judge, Jessie wrote letters to Congress, Jessie even wrote letters to Santa, and none of it did any good. Nothing would keep Taylor from getting out of jail. Time was served, justice was done, and Taylor was going free. Jessie knew there was nothing to be done about Taylor. All Jessie could do was take Angel and flee. The courts said Taylor could have her, but Jessie would never let that happen. Taylor was crazy, and Jessie was not going to allow that craziness to infect Angel. Jessie’s eyes had bags underneath them that were almost as dark as Angel’s hair. Jessie didn’t sleep much these days.

Angel slept. It was the peaceful kind of sleep that only valium could provide. It was important for Angel to sleep. If Angel was awake, she might feel Jessie's tension and nervousness. She might feel Jessie's fear. It was a parent's responsibility to protect a child from danger. Jessie knew that some people would criticize drugging a child, but Jessie didn't care. Angel belonged to Jessie, and Jessie would do anything to protect her. So, Jessie carefully lifted Angel and carried her out to the van and placed her gently in the back seat. Jessie laid a soft blanket over Angel, and then Jessie gathered the last of the things they would need. Jessie was taking Angel and getting out of town. Taylor wouldn't be able to find them. *No court has the right to tell me what I can do with my baby*, Jessie thought as the two backed out of the driveway. Taylor would come for Jessie and Angel, and all Taylor would find would be an empty house.

But if the house is empty, Taylor will know we ran. Taylor will look for us, Jessie thought. Jessie feared what might happen if Taylor found them. *I need something to divert Taylor's attention. I know, a fire!* Jessie thought. A fire would hide the evidence and mask their escape. Jessie saw people do this all the time on TV, so it must work. The TV told Jessie lots of things, and sometimes they were pointless, but other times they were very helpful. The TV helped Jessie to get free of Taylor. Jessie would have never called the police if it hadn't been for the CSI show. Jessie watched the show and saw the woman murdered by her husband, and Jessie knew that Taylor would do the same thing. Jessie decided then that Taylor would not be given time to hurt anyone. Jessie would protect Angel, and Jessie would lock Taylor away. Jessie called the police, and told them about Taylor's abuse. Taylor begged the police not to believe Jessie, but Jessie's story was too well told. The bruise on Angel's arms backed it up. Taylor never left marks on Jessie or Angel, but that didn't stop Jessie. Jessie felt bad about

hurting Angel, but it was quick and it gave Angel the marks that Jessie needed to lock Taylor away. Marks on a grown-up were something the police might ignore, but marks on a child forced them to act. Jessie was smart. Jessie made sure Angel said she didn't know how she got the marks. That was what children always told the police on TV. Jessie used valium to make sure Angel would say she didn't know how she got the marks. Valium was the best thing the doctors ever gave Jessie. Jessie hated hurting Angel, but it was better for Jessie and Angel, and it put Taylor away. But now, Taylor was getting out. There was nothing Jessie could do but run.

The fire spread fast after it was lit. It spread much faster than Jessie had seen on TV, and Jessie almost didn't make it out of the house. But now the flames raged and the house burned. Jessie imagined Taylor coming home and finding the burned house. Taylor would think Jessie and Angel were inside, and it would take time for the fire department to figure out that they weren't there. That was the way things always happened on CSI, so Jessie knew it would happen that way now.

Jessie jumped in the van and began to drive. Jessie's neighbors lived over a mile away, and there was a thick line of trees surrounding all of Jessie's property, so no one would see the fire. There was a lot of smoke, but Jessie would be gone before anyone called the fire department. The country was isolated. Taylor was the one who wanted to live in the country. Taylor promised it would be peaceful and the family could live a life of meaning, but Taylor really wanted to move to the country so there would be no witnesses. Taylor was the devil, but Jessie would protect Angel from that devil. Angel was the most important thing in Jessie's life.

Jessie looked back at Angel. She was still sleeping peacefully. Jessie was glad that there was valium to put Angel to sleep. The fire might have been too much for Angel to bear. Jessie turned on the radio, careful to keep the volume low so Angel would not be disturbed by it.

The radio came to life in the middle of the annoying beeps that precede tests of the emergency broadcast system. *BEEEP, BEEEP, BEEP, following is a test...*, was what Jessie expected to hear. But what came after the beeps wasn't a test. *Taylor has gotten to the police. What am I going to do?* Jessie thought with rising panic. The message coming over the radio was frightening, and Jessie listened intently. *The child is believed to be in extreme danger. The father has been declared a danger to himself and the child. Police have asked that if anyone sees a blue van with a dark-haired man driving to call immediately. Mr. Jessie Sagan is suspected of making a false report to police, kidnapping, and arson. Mr. Sagan is in need of his medication, and his actions may be very unpredictable. Again, listeners are directed to contact the police immediately if they see the father and child. Do not approach them....*

Jessie turned off the radio. *Taylor got to them*, he thought again. She wanted to give Jessie the pills. The pills were how she controlled Jessie. The pills were worms that crawled into Jessie's brain and chewed up little pieces and left holes where they crawled. Jessie knew this, because Jessie could feel the holes. Jessie threw away the pills, but the holes were still there and they might never heal. But Jessie wouldn't let her hurt Angel. Jessie would protect Angel from the police and Taylor and the devil and Santa and whoever else wanted to come for her. Jessie didn't have CSI to tell him what to do, but he turned the radio back on and looked for a different station. The first station was Taylor's station, but Jessie hoped that he could find his own station. Sometimes, the radio told Jessie what to do, and he needed to find his station so that the radio would talk to him and tell him how to keep Angel safe. Jessie sped down the highway searching for his station. Angel slept in the backseat, and Jessie knew he was right to protect her. Jessie wouldn't let Taylor find them. He wouldn't let anyone find them or hurt them. Everyone wanted to hurt them, and they wanted to feed Jessie the pills that were worms so they would eat

his brain, but the CSI and the radio would tell Jessie how to be safe and how to protect Angel. Jessie was grateful for the valium. Angel slept so peacefully. Her chest didn't even rise or fall anymore.

End.

Scarcity

The White falls. The White has always fallen. The burning rains come and go, but the White remains. Through the White move shadows. They do not know why they move, they only know that they must move. The shadows know no god but hunger. They know no peace but death. Still, the shadows want life. They seek warmth, but the White offers only cold. This is a story of shadows.

1

Amaq was asleep when they came. There was no alarm, only a few screams that escaped lips before throats were slit. Amaq donned his pack and grabbed his daughter and ran out of the hut. Alas was heavy and hard to carry, but she was the only thing he had left of Katsit, his wife. She was taken by raiders long ago, but Amaq had gotten away with a much younger Alas. He still remembered the sound of Katsit's screams as he ran. She had begged him to save her, but there were too many, and he had Alas to think about. Amaq followed the laws of the white, and those laws centered on survival. That didn't stop Amaq from hearing Katsit's screams every night when he slept.

Now Amaq ran again. There weren't many screams this time. These raiders were good at what they did. Elkridge was being taken. Sooner or later everything was taken by raiders or claimed by the white. Alas began to cry.

"Quiet!" Amaq whispered as he crouched in the white. The child was silent, and he was

grateful. Amaq didn't know if he could leave the child, even if it meant the difference between escape and being taken himself. He hoped he would never have to find out.

More screams echoed in the night. The people of Elkridge were awake now, and they knew what was happening. Screams were silenced, but more rose in their place. The people of Elkridge were sheep, and wolves moved among them. *But I am a rabbit*, thought Amaq. He rewrapped Alas in her blanket and jogged into the white. He would move to the edge of the trees and dig a snowden. The snowden would keep him and Alas warm, and it would conceal them from raiders. It would also give Amaq time to think. He was not a stupid rabbit who would flee blindly into the white. Amaq was a smart rabbit. Amaq was a survivor.

2

He woke with Alas shivering in his arms. The walls of the snowden insulated their heat, but the ground stole much of it away. The runoff from melting white helped the ground to steal their heat and dampened their clothes. Amaq helped Alas change into dry clothes from his pack, and he changed into a fresh outer layer as well. He left the damp clothes behind. There was no place to dry them now.

Alas looked at Amaq with trusting eyes, and he did his best to smile at her. He knew he needed distance between himself and Elkridge. The raiders would send out scouts when they had eaten everything to be eaten there. Amaq was glad that he and Alas weren't part of the spoils. *Let them eat the sheep. Rabbits are too fast*, he thought.

Amaq lived at Elkridge for nearly twenty moons, but he knew better than to think of it as home. The white didn't let people have homes, and anyone who forgot that shared the fate of the sheep. Amaq looked at Alas. He wanted to protect her. He wanted to teach her to be a survivor. He wanted to make sure that she grew up to be a rabbit, and not a sheep. *I wouldn't leave her*

behind, he thought as he trekked through the white.

What if you had no choice? the voice taunted.

I'll protect her no matter what, he answered.

Then you'll both die, said the voice.

I'll protect her no matter what, he thought again. The voice laughed.

3

Amaq gave Alas the last piece of fish. There was no fire, and they ate the fish raw.

Amaq and Alas had moved through the white for half a moon, and Amaq prayed to the white that they would come across a town. He moved along the tree line of the forest, and he kept the crumbling lanes of the rockway in sight to his left. Raiders followed the rockways, and Amaq wanted to be able to dart into the trees if he saw movement on the horizon.

As Amaq moved, he never went too long without gazing in a particular direction. Danger came from the darkness, and nothing was darker than a blind spot. Amaq kept his eyes moving. He had no blind spots. Alas rode on his back. She grew heavier each day, and Amaq wondered how long he would be able to carry her.

I'll protect her no matter what, he thought. The voice laughed at him.

Through the trees, Amaq saw the outline of a cabin. It was far enough from the rockway that it would go unnoticed unless one moved along the tree line, as Amaq did. There was no smoke rising from the chimney. Smoke drew raiders.

Smoke was probably what killed Elkridge, he thought.

What makes smoke? asked the voice.

Fire, he thought.

The white will not abide the flame, said the voice.

What's in the cabin? he thought.

What's outside? replied the voice.

Amaq shook his head and moved toward the cabin. Alas snuggled against his chest. He tried to ignore the voice's laughter.

4

Amaq stopped at the edge of the clearing and set his pack on the ground. Alas whimpered as he sat her on top of the pack. "Stay quiet, I'll be right back," he said. Alas looked at him with watery eyes, but she knew better than to question her father. Amaq left her and moved to investigate the cabin.

"Who's there?" shouted an elderly voice from the cabin's window.

I guess I wasn't careful enough, Amaq thought with alarm.

Maybe you're a sheep after all, mused the voice.

"I was forced out of Elkridge by raiders. I'm trying to find a place for me and my daughter to stay warm," Amaq said.

The white will not abide warmth, warned the voice.

The door to the cabin opened, and Amaq tried not to flinch at the sight of the crossbow pointed at him. The man had grey hair and eyes that looked like they owned the world. The man stared at the tree line for a long moment.

"Maybe yer one o' the ones who took Elkridge," the man said.

"Do I look like a raider?" asked Amaq.

The man thought on it. "Hmmm. Not sure. What does a raider look like?"

Amaq realized that he and the old man probably both looked like raiders. "Well, I'm not. I'm just trying to find a place to keep my daughter warm," he said.

The white will not abide warmth, said the voice.

Shut up, thought Amaq.

“If you can show me this daughter o’ yers, I’ll let you shelter here for a bit, but if you can’t, then yer a raider and you won’t be leav’n this place,” said the man.

“Fair enough,” said Amaq. He kept his hands away from his sides and back slowly toward the tree line. The stranger had his crossbow aimed at Amaq, but Amaq had distance on his side, and he knew that this might be his only chance to grab Alas and dart into the trees to escape. Amaq hesitated, and then he picked up Alas and moved back toward the entrance of the cabin. When the old man saw the child, he lowered his crossbow and leaned against the door frame for support. He looked very tired.

I’ll protect her, Amaq thought.

No matter what? asked the voice.

5

“This is Alas. I’m Amaq.”

“Name’s Panu,” said the old man. “How long you two been out in the white?”

“A bit over half a moon. I was able to fish some, but we’re out of food and we’ve been fighting to keep our clothes dry,” said Amaq.

“I can make fire, but it’ll have to be after dark so raiders can’t see the smoke. Until then, I got some blankets, and there’s jerky in the smoker” said Panu. “How old is that little one? Is she mute?”

Amaq struggled to contain his hunger. Jerky was a rarity. Anything other than fish was a rarity, and sometimes that was a rarity too. “She was born three melts ago.” Amaq thought for a moment. “I guess that makes her a bit over five years old.” Amaq was surprised at how fast time

marched forward. "She hasn't spoken since her mother was taken."

Panu frowned. "Sorry for yer loss."

Amaq nodded and looked to the smoker.

The white will not abide warmth, repeated the voice.

Later that night, Amaq helped Panu carry wood in from behind the cabin. Amaq placed the logs in the fireplace and Panu prepared kindling and started the fire. Panu placed a pot over the flames and promised Amaq and Alas a tea that would warm their bones and heal their souls.

"How long have you been out here?" asked Amaq.

"Oh, few melts now."

"No trouble with raiders out here by yourself?"

"I don't bother no one, so no one bothers me. Raiders are easy t'void so long as you only burn at night and only do yer hunt'n early in the morn'n. Between fish'n n' hunt'n I manage t'void starvation."

"I see," said Amaq.

"Tea's done," said Panu as he stood up to get them cups. He served Amaq first, then he poured one for Alas. Panu didn't take any for himself. Alas smelled the tea and put it down on the floor. She went back to staring at the flame. Panu looked at her with concern for a moment and then recovered. "So, where you two head'n?"

"We don't have anywhere to go," said Amaq. A thought occurred to him. "I don't know you very well, but you seem like you know what you're doing out here. I can fish, and I can cut wood. I'm sure I could learn to work that crossbow of yours. Maybe we could help each other."

"Maybe," said Panu. He had a thoughtful look on his face, and Amaq thought his eyes contained sadness.

6

“Hold that thought, I’ll be back,” said Panu.

The hair stood on the back of Amaq’s neck. “What’s going on?”

“Old age! I’m just goin to the outhouse, I’ll be back in a minute,” said Panu.

Amaq smiled and waved at the old man. He looked down at Alas. She had fallen asleep, and her cup sat next to her.

The white will not abide warmth, said the voice.

Amaq stared at his tea. His instincts told him that everything was wrong. He poured his cup back into the pot. The old man’s crossbow was propped against the front door. There was a bolt loaded, and Amaq knew that all he needed to do was point and pull. He grabbed the crossbow, sat back down, and pointed it at the door.

The white will not abide warmth, said the voice.

No, it doesn’t seem like it will, he answered. The voice’s approval washed over him, and it was icy cold.

The door opened and Panu entered the cabin. “What the ...”

He didn’t finish the sentence. Panu just stared at the bolt sticking from the center of his chest as he collapsed. Amaq’s rage was ice. Then a new feeling replaced his rage. His heart banged in his chest and echoed through his ears as he turned back toward Alas. She was awake now. She looked up at him. Her tea cup was empty.

Amaq’s first instinct was to make the child vomit. He thought to stick his finger down her throat, but she refused to cooperate. He shook her and screamed at her. Alas stared at him and her eyes filled with water. Amaq stopped shaking her and waited.

After a short time, Alas pointed at the tea pot. She wanted more tea. Amaq looked at the

body of the old man he had just killed. There was nothing wrong with the tea. *My instincts are wrong*, he thought.

They were right, said the voice. Amaq didn't have the will to argue.

Amaq looked through the Panu's cabin, but the only food was the few pieces of jerky still sitting in the smoker. It wasn't even enough for one meal. He had the pot of tea, and there were herbs in pouches in the old man's cabinets, but Amaq didn't know what the herbs were, and he didn't watch when Panu made the tea. *I don't dare use these without knowing what they are, and how much nourishment can they give us anyway?* he thought.

Amaq hadn't smoked meat in a while, but he remembered how. He had mostly smoked fish. Once, he caught a young elk away from its herd and took it. The smoked meat of the young elk had lasted him nearly two moons. He treated Panu like the elk. He knew that meat might be the difference between Alas seeing the next melt and dying in the white. He knew that Alas liked jerky.

The white will not abide warmth, said the voice.

Shut up! Amaq screamed it.

Wolves feed on sheep, said the voice.

Amaq ignored it and continued preparing the meat. The voice laughed at him.

End.

The Red Door

1

The intercom came to life. "Attention ladies and gentlemen, we are now approaching the arrival terminal for Station 134, also called Utopia. We request that all passengers return their seats to docking configuration and give their arrival cards to the crew as they come by to collect

them. Thank you for traveling with us, and remember, the stars are yours.”

The stars were mine. I liked the sound of that. It was just an ultraclever trademarked catch phrase cooked up by some advertising executive, but it sounded nice. Star Transports, or more specifically the advertising weeny who worked for them, didn’t invent the phrase, but they were smart enough to trademark it. *The stars are mine...*

“Do you have your arrival card, sir?”

“Sure do, here ya go,” I said to the slightly overweight and likely underpaid stewardess. The arrival card was insurance to make sure no one could say I didn’t come here voluntarily. The station was outside Earthspace, and while that might put them beyond the direct control of the United Earth Council, the UEC still cared about its citizens. The outer stations had their own sovereign governments, but that didn’t mean they were the wild west. Actions taken against citizens of United Earth were likely to be met with reprisal from the UEC, unless the UE citizens renounced their citizenship. So, enter the arrival cards. Sign the dotted line. Renounce your UE citizenship. Agree that you will comply with station law.

The intercom began speaking again as people stood up to gather their things. “Citizens, we have now docked at Station 134. Please take all belongings with you as you depart. We encourage all of you to remember that criminal activity is not tolerated at this station, and any acts of criminality will be met with severe reprisal. Station 134 is outside of Earthspace, and your arrival cards have granted station officials the right to exercise total jurisdiction in the event of any conflicts or criminality. The stars are yours.”

The arrival terminal looked like it was meant to handle more people than our transport carried. I couldn’t complain, less people meant shorter lines. One thing that did surprise me was the lack of customs agents. Passengers stepped off the transport and moved to claim their

luggage. There were a few people in uniforms standing under signs that said ‘INFORMATION,’ but I didn’t see any security. There were plenty of cameras, so if someone did something stupid it would no doubt be captured, but capturing a criminal on video and actually capturing one were two different things. I was shocked by the lack of security. My fellow passengers all seemed oblivious to it. I took my bag off the conveyer and followed everyone else down a corridor that led to whatever came next.

2

“Please move to the seats on the front row,” said a man wearing a blue uniform and a white beard. ‘INDOCTRINATION’ was written in big black letters on the screen in front of us.

“Nice beard,” said a young man that couldn’t have been older than twenty. The two young men that were with him tried unsuccessfully to hold back their chuckles.

“Why thank you,” said the gentleman with the beard. “I’m going to assume that was a heartfelt complement, because disrespecting a government official is a punishable offence onboard Utopia Station.”

All three young men grew a few shades paler, and the one who had spoken replied, “Ummm, yes sir.”

The man with the beard smiled and looked pleased with himself. He then said, “Ladies and gentlemen, please move to the seats on the front row so that we can begin your indoctrination. We are willing to display some patience with you because you don’t know our laws yet, but you became subject to them the moment you stepped off the transport, so I encourage all of you to remain silent and observe our presentation.”

So, I was finally going to get some information about what made this place tick. The only thing anyone on the outside knew about the station was that they had very strict laws, and

there was almost no crime. Beyond that, the station was a mystery. A lot of people believed that the crime reports were adjusted to make the station more appealing to would be immigrants. How could a place with no crime exist? The fact that nobody who came here ever left should be frightening, but who would want to leave a paradise with no crime?

“Friends, welcome to Utopia. Before we go any further, I must inform you that you have until the conclusion of this indoctrination to change your minds about living with us. If you decide Utopia isn’t for you, then your memories will be wiped of the previous six hours. If you don’t want to undergo that procedure, then you must inform us now and return immediately to the transport. Your arrival cards will be destroyed and you will return to Earthspace. Does anyone wish to return to the transport?”

After the old man finished speaking, several people looked nervous but no one raised their hand. Everyone was here because there was nothing for them in Earthspace. The outer stations offered a new beginning. They were all founded by outcasts who didn’t agree with the status quo, and because these outcasts had the money and resources, they made their own status quo. The rumor I heard said that Utopia was founded by an old octillionaire whose son was murdered. I was sure that wasn’t the only rumor about the stations founding, but it was simple enough to be believable. I looked around and saw everyone else looking at the old guy and waiting for him to continue.

The old guy with the beard smiled and said, “Alright, good choice. Utopia is a paradise, and I always feel sorry for those who turn away from it.” The audience nodded, and a few people even clapped. The old guy smiled again with approval.

“Now, the first thing to understand about Utopia is that there is virtually no crime. And, there are zero second time offenders. We live in a happy and orderly society, and we believe in

peace and justice.” We all listened intently and waited for the old guy to tell us more.

“Justice is the foundation of our society, and the way we achieve justice could be considered harsh to outsiders. That’s the reason for the memory wipes, and it’s also the reason our citizens have no contact with anyone outside of Utopia.”

“So, you’re saying we can’t contact our families to let them know we’re safe?” a young woman asked.

“Please, hold all questions until the end of the indoctrination brief, and I promise I’ll tell you everything you need to know. We don’t want outsiders trying to tell us what we should be doing inside the walls of our station. If their ways worked, people wouldn’t be breaking down the doors to live here,” said the old guy. I looked around the room and couldn’t help but notice all of the empty chairs, but the rest of the audience seemed oblivious to their surroundings and nodded as the old man spoke.

“Our society is one where everyone is free to pursue whatever brings them happiness. Our only law is that you may not infringe on the happiness of others. Break our law, and you will face our justice,” said the old man.

Now people in the audience began to look nervous. What had I gotten myself into? I was considering how often I made people around me unhappy, though I usually had no idea what I had done to cause their unhappiness. A young man stood up and said, “So what happens if I accidentally make someone unhappy? Like what if I say something someone doesn’t like?”

The old man looked at him seriously and said, “I’m afraid being interrupted during my indoctrination after asking that you all hold your questions till the end has made me very unhappy.” The young man looked visibly frightened and opened his mouth to say something, but the old man’s laughter cut him off. “Oh please, we’re not intolerant here!” The audience

laughed nervously. “Listen, when we talk about happiness, we aren’t talking about that fleeting feeling you get when you bite into a warm piece of cake. We are talking about the greater good. Sometimes, things that on the surface seem bad actually lead to happiness. Besides, even if we were trying to enforce fleeting human emotions, intolerance tends to cause unhappiness in those who it’s directed at, wouldn’t you agree?” Again, the audience laughed, this time a bit less nervously. I continued listening to see where the old man was going with this.

“We know we can’t make everyone happy all the time. It’s the happiness of society that matters. Individual cells may get sick and die, but the organism lives on. That’s how we view our society, as a living organism. Of course, there are going to be minor disagreements, and that’s what courts are for. Our courts resolve disputes in whatever way best serves justice. Justice isn’t about punishment, justice is about upholding the greater good. And the greater good is that which brings about happiness. Happiness is measured by the well-being of society. Does that make sense to everyone?”

I nodded my head. It did make sense. Everyone around me seemed to agree. I was finally going to leave behind a world where people only thought about themselves and where justice was determined by money. Immigrants to Utopia were given permission to bring clothing and necessities only. Everything else was left behind. People bound for Utopia called it the great equalizer. It didn’t matter how rich you were in Earthspace, when you got to Utopia, everyone was on equal footing. The pamphlets passed out at spaceports described inequality as the root of all evil, and they promised a place where everyone was equal. To someone like me, who didn’t have much to begin with, it sounded like paradise. My thoughts snapped back to my present surroundings as the old man continued to speak.

“Now, we’ve established that we aren’t monsters here, and we’ve covered a tiny bit of

what living in our society entails. The rest you'll have to learn on the other side of the doors at the end of the next corridor. Before you go, there is one more thing that needs to be said. When you join our society, you join something greater than yourself. You are free to pursue happiness with the understanding that the wellbeing of society is of greater concern than the wellbeing of any one person. If society is miserable, then everyone in it is miserable. If one person is miserable, then society can help them to find happiness. I said before that crime was very rare, and no one ever committed a crime twice. That's because if someone is found guilty of violating our law, they are sentenced to death."

The old guy said it so matter-of-factly. I was as shocked as everyone else in the audience. The death penalty was outlawed in Earthspace centuries ago. The UEC decided that the state didn't have the right to claim the life of any individual, no matter the crime. Their theory was that people committed crimes due to sickness or desperation, and in either case it was society that had failed to take care of the individual. Here was a place that put the needs of the individual below those of society, and it had no problem taking the lives of anyone who got out of line. I was disoriented by this information, but I also knew that it didn't matter. I had to go through with this, because I really didn't have any place to go. There was nothing for me in Earthspace. At least here, I had a chance at happiness. I knew I could keep my head down and stay out of trouble. That seemed to be all these people were asking of us.

"Let me off this station!" One of the young women in the audience had stood up and was trying to leave the room. Two men in red uniforms blocked her exit.

"Miss, we are happy to let you leave the station. Before that can happen, you will have to go through the procedure to have your memory wiped. It doesn't serve the greater good to let you leave with the information that you've just been exposed to," one of the men said.

I guess there is security here, I thought as I watched the scene unfolding in front of me. The three young men who had complimented the old man on his beard earlier all stood up to help the woman. I switched between watching the growing chaos in front of me and watching the old man, who looked on with a calm expression as he put some sort of mask over his mouth and nose. The security guards were doing the same. Suddenly I felt very sleepy, and my head spun as the world faded to darkness. The last thing I heard was my face hitting the floor. *I must have fallen*, I thought as blackness overtook me.

3

I woke laying on a cot. My clothes had been replaced with a dark grey shirt and pants. I looked around and saw that everyone else was wearing the same thing that I was. The distraught woman and the three men who were arguing with the security guard were missing. The side of my face ached. The door to the room we were in opened and another official in a blue uniform walked in.

“Good morning ladies and gentleman. I apologize that we are meeting like this. It seems there was a disturbance in the indoctrination hall, and everyone was gassed for their own protection. Usually I would be greeting you at the entrance to the last door before entering the station, but sometimes things don’t work out that way,” he said.

“What happened to the people who are missing?” I asked. I knew I should keep my mouth shut until I knew what was going on, but my face hurt and I wanted answers.

“They’re fine. After the room was rendered unconscious, those citizens were taken back to the transport after having their memories wiped. We felt it was best to keep that situation from escalating. By the way, I’m afraid you took a nasty bruise falling out of your seat. I assure you we have a medical technician standing by to see to it, you’ll be good as new before you

know it,” he promised.

“What happens now?” a man asked.

“Now I tell you all that the transport is still waiting, and if anyone wishes to depart the station and elect to have their memory wiped they may do so. The rest will be granted access to the station and they will be assigned employment and living quarters,” the official said.

“You couldn’t have just said that in the last room without knocking us all out?” said the same man.

“Because of the individuals making a disturbance, the atmosphere in the room wasn’t conducive to you making a rational choice. Now that the situation is back under control, you can all decide what you want to do. I understand that some of you may feel concern over our methods, but I can assure you that Utopia is the best place to live in the entire universe. My wife and I are extremely happy here, and we would never consider leaving. Those of you who wish to depart should remain in this room. An escort will arrive after we leave to wipe your memories and return you to the transport, which is still waiting for anyone having second thoughts. If the rest of you would follow me please,” said the official.

It surprised me how confident he was. He didn’t even look back to see if anyone followed him. He took it for granted that everyone he spoke to would follow him down the corridor. He was right. None of us had anywhere else to go. Besides, their motives seemed to be centered on doing what was best for everyone. No one stayed behind. I started to wonder about the woman and the three men from the indoctrination room, but then the door at the end of the corridor opened and they were forgotten as my eyes took in Utopia.

The thing that shocked me the most was the blue sky. That, and there was vegetation everywhere. The last station I visited didn’t have any vegetation, and the only light that existed

came from synthetic bulbs that made my eyes hurt.

“The upper shell of the station is lined with hologlyphs, so we are able to simulate what Earth’s sky looked like before it became too polluted to see it. The sun up there even warms the station and emits light in different blue and red spectrums to promote plant growth depending on the simulated time of year. Pretty impressive, isn’t it?” said the official.

“Pretty impressive,” I managed to stutter. Impressive was an understatement. I had never seen such a sight. “Some of these plants are unfamiliar,” I said.

“Some of our plants are standard earthstock varieties with genetic modifications, but we’ve genetically engineered others from scratch. The plants provide all of our food and they clean our air. We’ve modified our fruit trees so that they all produce complete amino chains and contain adequate amounts of every nutrient, so there is no need for people to eat a dozen plants to replace the protein they used to get from meat or worry about what fruit has which vitamins. Choose any fruit you like, and you can live off of it. We only have such a large variety of plants because we don’t want people to become bored eating only one thing,” he said.

“Where are you leading us,” a woman asked.

“We’re almost there. The next steps are to assign you living quarters and employment. Everyone gets the same luxuries, and everyone is assigned employment based on their aptitudes. Everyone contributes to our society,” the man said.

“What if I don’t like my assigned employment?” I asked.

“Everyone has to serve the greater good of society. But don’t worry, there are programs for job exchange and there is also a seniority based system for placing candidates who have numerous aptitudes into jobs that they like. And there aren’t any bad jobs. We have machines to do the cleaning and cooking here. Of course, if someone has the aptitude for it and wants to

clean or cook, we can always accommodate them!” the official said. Several audience members laughed and he smiled at them.

I was beginning to think that this place might be ok. They might treat people a bit rough sometimes, but inside the station proper it was beautiful, and everyone seemed genuinely happy. As we entered the building where we would learn what kind of job we would do and where we would live, I found myself eagerly looking forward to learning what my place here would be.

4

“Do you have any fear of heights?” asked a woman in a blue uniform. This one had blue eyes to match her uniform.

“No, why do you ask?” I replied.

“We’re going to put you in an upper level living quarters. It’s a nice view, but the tradeoff is that you have to wait longer for the lift. If you find that you don’t like it, there is a program in place to swap rooms, and you can use your room terminal to put yourself on the lists along with what level you would prefer,” said blue eyes.

“Sounds fair. So, when do I get a job?” I asked.

“Eager to contribute, I like that,” said blue eyes. “I’m Jenny by the way. Welcome to Utopia,” she said.

“Nice to meet you. I’m Rich,” I said with a smile. “So Jenny, any men or kids in your life I should know about before I use my amazing charm to convince you to meet me for dinner?”

Her eye’s sparkled mischievously as she considered my question. “What makes you think there isn’t a woman you should know about?” she responded. I felt my face heat up a bit as I struggled to find the right come back for her question. She watched me struggle for a few

moments before finally saying, “I don’t have a significant other. And no one has children here.”

That surprised me, but then I recalled that I hadn’t seen any children as our guide led us from the entry corridor to this building. “What do you mean no one has children? Are they illegal or something?” I said. I didn’t mean the question to be funny, but Jenny laughed as though it were a joke.

“You’ll be sterilized and your genetic material will be collected later. Our children are educated on the lower levels until they reach adulthood. Then, they come through this room just like the immigrants do to be assigned living quarters and employment. Our children are all engineered from recombining our genetic material, and they are produced in artificial wombs. We have all the benefits of genetic diversity without any of nature’s mistakes or any of the messiness that comes with natural childbirth,” Jenny said.

“If you genetically engineer your children, why do you allow immigrants to come here? Don’t they bring the kinds of things you are trying to get rid of by making your children in test tubes?” I asked.

“You make it sound so crude,” replied Jenny. “Any genetic imperfections brought into the gene pool by immigrants can be filtered out during the genetic recombination, and allowing immigrants ensures we continue to benefit from an influx of new genetic material.”

“I guess that makes sense. And sterilization means you get all of the fun with none of the consequences,” I said.

“Please,” Jenny replied with a roll of her eyes. “Are you ready to find out your occupation?”

“I suppose. Are you going to show me around the station this evening?” I asked.

“Let’s see what you do for a living before I agree to that,” said Jenny. I couldn’t tell

whether she was joking. She looked at the screen and input the number listed on the file in front of her. Presumably some complex computer algorithm was about to spit out the job I was always meant to do. The screen flashed and Jenny face became notably paler. She looked up at me and there was no trace of flirtation or laughter in her eyes.

“What does it say?” I asked. It couldn’t be that bad. I remembered the guide saying machines did all the lower tiered jobs. *This place is supposed to be the land of happiness, why does this girl look so frightened*, I thought.

“Sir, you’ve been assigned to Rehabilitations. An enforcement officer will be here to escort you to your home and then to the Rehab center.

“What do you mean Rehab? I haven’t done anything wrong,” I said.

“No sir, you don’t understand. You’re not going to be receiving rehabilitation, your aptitude results state that you have the right temperament to administer rehabilitation to people,” she said.

“Didn’t the guide say that all crimes here are punishable by death? What do you mean rehabilitation?” I asked.

“I’m sorry sir, I’m not able to tell you anything else. They’ll explain everything when you get there I’m sure,” she said.

A knock at the door indicated our time together was up. The door opened and a man in a red uniform stood waiting. Somehow, the red made the man look very intimidating. I stood to follow him. I turned to Jenny one last time before exiting and said, “So, does this mean dinner is a no?” I asked.

Instead of answering she turned a shade paler and began to thumb through another file. I immediately regretted the question and followed the man in red outside.

5

After dropping my bag off at the living quarters, the guy in red escorted me to Rehab. He wasn't much for conversation, but he did tell me that his name was Chuck and that those in law enforcement and rehabilitation tended to keep to themselves.

"Why is that? Are we supposed to be better than everyone else?" I asked.

"It's not us that chooses for it to be that way, it's other people. The general population doesn't like any reminder that their world isn't butterflies and rainbows all of the time. We're a reminder that even this so-called utopia isn't always perfect, so people don't like seeing us," said Chuck.

I looked down at the red uniform I was wearing. It came from the bag that Chuck had handed me at my quarters. "Why do they make us wear this if it makes people unhappy? Doesn't that go against what this place is all about?" I asked.

"Our uniforms remind people that actions have consequences, and the greater good is served by that reminder. Any momentary discomfort felt by individuals is trumped by the greater good," said Chuck. I nodded. I didn't like the idea of being a social leper forced to befriend people like Chuck, but it made sense. This place was giving me a chance at a new life. And here I was, less than twenty-four hours ago a nobody, and today an important government official charged with rehabilitating those who betrayed the greater good. We entered Rehab and I was led to a white room with two white chairs. In one of them sat another man in a red uniform. Somehow, the red was even more intimidating when contrasted against the white interior of the interview room.

"Hello Richard, my name is Steven, and I'll be your coach. My job is to ensure you understand your responsibilities and are able to perform your assigned duties," he said. "Please

have a seat.”

“Nice to meet you. I prefer Rich if that’s ok,” I said.

“Actually, I’m afraid it isn’t. We find that full names carry more authority, and it is a requirement that each of us use our full names. In fact, if your full name was Rich we would have to change it to Richard in order to be in compliance with regulation,” said Steven.

“I see,” I said. I sat down and tried to ignore the unpleasant feeling that was pressing in on my chest.

“Now, you’ve been selected for this job because your aptitude analysis shows that you have the right temperament for it. Rehabilitation is one of the most important jobs on this station, and once you become a Specialist, the decision is irreversible. You have the right to refuse this job. Refusal will result in immediate rehabilitation.

The unpleasant feeling sitting on my chest now threatened to crush it. “What exactly to you mean when you say rehabilitation? Do you guys kill people in this place? Are you saying that if I don’t agree to do it you’re going to kill me? Is that why you wear red? You’re all monsters, aren’t you?!” I said. I was shocked when Steven actually laughed at me.

“Wow. These initial interviews are always the most interesting. You’re close to the truth of things Richard, but I’m afraid all your conclusions are more than a little bit off. And I’m not a monster. I’m going to play miniature golf with my wife after we finish here. She works up in the admin department. She’s not a monster either. Wonderful woman actually. Married for as long as I can remember.

“If you don’t kill people, then what is this place? At indoctrination we were told that crimes were punishable by death here. I would have gotten back on the transport if I had anything waiting for me back in Earthspace,” I said.

“What they didn’t make clear to you during indoctrination was that the death of one’s identity and the death of one’s body are two completely different things. We don’t physically kill people. Do you have any idea how messy that would be? No wonder you imagine us to be monsters,” said Steven.

“I don’t understand,” I said.

“Of course you don’t,” said Steven. “I haven’t explained anything yet. When someone is unable to conform to the societal requirements of Utopia, their minds are wiped, and they are reeducated so that they can once again contribute to Utopian society.”

My mouth dropped open. “But what gives you the right to do that to people?” I asked.

“That little card you signed gives us every right. And we exercise that right in the name of the greater good. The greater good is served by ensuring the happiness of our citizens, and the best way to maintain happiness is to reprogram the unhappy. It really works wonderfully,” said Steven. I could tell he was proud of his society.

“And if I refuse to help you do this, what happens? Do you erase my memory and make me do it anyway?” I asked.

“If you decline the position, you will be rehabilitated and assigned a different job,” said Steven. I considered what I was being offered and what I might be taking away from people. It seemed monstrous to take away people’s minds, but then I remembered what I saw when I entered the station. Everyone was happy, and the world was beautiful. Back in Earthspace, people lived in states of constant hunger, constant fear, constant misery. Here, people were happy, and the only fear they felt was fleeting, and it passed as soon as whatever red uniform they had observed passed from their sight. Surely this was better. Surely it was worth it for this kind of world. I looked Steven in the eyes, and felt the weight on my chest replaced with a

conviction to serve the greater good.

“I accept the job,” I said.

“Of course you do my friend, our aptitude analysis are never wrong. Ah good, here’s old Chuck,” said Steven as Chuck opened the door and stepped inside. “Now, if you’ll follow Chuck and his associate, they will escort you to rehabilitation.”

“But, but I accepted the job,” I said.

“Yes, you did, and it was the best decision you could have made. Our job is among the most important on the station,” said Steven.

“Then why am I going to be rehabilitated,” I asked. I couldn’t keep my voice from trembling, but I saw no pleasure in Steven’s face at the sight of my fear.

“Richard, everything is going to be fine. You are not being punished. Everyone on this station gets rehabilitated after accepting their employee assignments. Think of it as on the job training. When it’s done, you’ll live a life full of happiness with no memories of the horrors you endured before you came here. And if you ever make a mistake, we’ll just rehabilitate you again. It’s a perfect world,” said Steven. The pride in his voice as he described this world was unmistakable. I imagined myself speaking the same way after they reprogrammed me.

“Wait,” I tried to say, but it was already too late. I felt a pinch on the back of my shoulder, and then the room began to spin. I was carried down the hall toward a red door. Before I lost consciousness, I caught a glimpse of the girl and the three young men who had made a ruckus at indoctrination. All four of them had blank expressions on their faces. It occurred to me that they must be waiting for reprogramming. *All of us belong to Utopia now.* The red door is ahead of me, and all of me will be gone when I pass through it.

End.

The Argument

“David, I don’t want to do this anymore,” said Sharron as she looked at her brother. Sharron and David held hands as they stared at James, and Sharron could feel David’s tension by the tightened grip she felt. *It’s the same thing every time*, Sharron thought. The couple stood together in a hospital room. The lights on the ceiling were too bright, as if they were designed to prevent one from sleeping. Everything in the room was white or silver, even the chairs that they sat in. It seemed like the walls and furniture intensified the bright artificial light coming from the ceiling, as if exposure to that bright light might force Sharron’s brother to regain consciousness. It was a terrible trick to play on a soul searching for peace. *Machines forcing air into his lungs, blinding lights that will confuse a soul trying to follow the light to the other side. It’s unnatural. It’s evil. I have to end this, no matter how much it upsets him*, she thought.

David thought turning off the life support keeping her brother alive was murder. Sharron thought keeping James hooked up to a machine with tubes stuffed down his throat was evil. *If only he could tell us what he wanted. Oh James, why didn’t you leave a Will or something behind*, she thought. Of course, Sharron knew why. No one ever wanted to think about dying. Sharron and David hadn’t created a Will until James’ accident. David told her it was their responsibility to those they left behind, and Sharron agreed. What they didn’t agree on was what the Wills would say. David’s said to keep him alive no matter what. Sharron’s said no artificial life support. They fought over that a lot. Sharron had a feeling that David only let the subject drop because of the stress she was under from her brother’s condition. *That argument might never end*, she thought.

“Your brother needs us to be here. I read that people in comas can hear everything going on around them, and I even read that sometimes people wake up when their relatives are in the

room,” said David.

“I don’t mean THIS..., I mean I can’t look at him anymore this way. It’s my decision. I’m his only immediate family and I don’t need your permission to do it,” said Sharron.

“If you kill your brother, I don’t know how I can go on looking at you every day. It would mean that you’re not the person I thought you were when we married,” David replied.

“It’s God’s will David. Keeping him tied to all these machines is wrong. And he’s not in a coma. People in comas don’t need machines to make them breath,” said Sharron.

“That’s not true. There have been cases where people attached to ventilators, in comas, have woken up. If we don’t do everything we can, if we don’t let doctor’s do everything they can, then we might as well be putting a gun to his head and pulling the trigger. It’s the same thing to me,” said David.

Sharron let go of David’s hand. She could see in his eyes that letting go of his hand hurt him more than anything she might say to him. *No, this argument will never end*, Sharron thought again. She knew he wouldn’t leave her over this. For one thing, he barely even knew James. They had only met at family get-togethers and seen each other when Sharron made David feel guilty enough to come to church with her. Her parents hadn’t approved of David. Sharron loved him, and she knew she could save his soul. David was a good man. They didn’t agree on a lot of things, but Sharron knew David loved her, and she knew he was a good person. Sharron knew David would make it to heaven with her as long as she kept on him. He needed to go to church more, and he needed to BELIEVE, but Sharron knew he would come around.

He thinks he’s doing good by fighting with me over letting my brother rest, but it’s not God’s will. It’s James’ time, and we have to respect that. I have to do what I know is right, Sharron thought. Sharron and James were both devout in their beliefs, and she knew that James

would agree with her. Death was a natural part of God's plan, and people had no right to interfere with God's will. To do so was by definition evil. *But David thinks he's doing good by fighting me on it*, she thought. Did that make it good? Were David's intentions a factor in how God would judge him when he stood there trying to explain why he stood in the way of God's great plan. Sharron didn't know, but she hoped so. She knew people could only do what they thought was right, and David didn't have the church when he was younger to teach him what was good and what was evil. People could be wrong, but the church taught God's will and could never be wrong. If only she could make David see. *I won't give up on him Lord. And, I'll stop what's happening to my brother today. I'll tell the doctors to turn off these machines. I promise Lord. Amen*, she prayed.

"David, I know you don't understand this now. One day you will. I have faith that you will. But I can't do this anymore. I have to do what's right by God," said Sharron.

"What about what's right by your husband? What about your vows to me Sharron?" he said.

"Those vows go both ways David. I love you, but I won't be like Adam following Eve down the path of sin. I know what God wants me to do. James and I are of the same faith, so I know what James wants. We're keeping him trapped here, and it's selfish. I owe my brother rest. And I owe God my faith. I hope he can forgive me for defying his will for this long. I hope he sees that I was waiting for you to see his plan was right. But I can't wait anymore David. I have to do this," Sharron said.

David looked at her. He didn't say anything. He just looked into her eyes and walked out of the hospital room. It was a slap in the face similar to the one she gave him when she pulled her hand away from his. She looked down at her brother and took his hand in hers. She

gave it a quick squeeze before she turned to call for the doctor. It was time for James to rest.

Sharron squeezed her brother's hand. Neither James felt his hand squeezed. One James screamed for her to stop and begged her not to kill him. He knew he could will his body to respond if only he had time. He laid in darkness and felt the ache of the tubes going down his throat, but it was a good ache. The ache was a rope tossed out to him, a rope that he clung to as he threatened to drown in the violent rapids of a cold black river. That James screamed and begged God to let his sister hear him so that she would not take away the rope. The other James did not scream. Instead, he wept with relief as he imagined the warmth that awaited him when the false light was removed and he could finally find the real light. This James had wept for as long as he lay tied to the machines that forced him to breath. But now it was ending, and instead of weeping with despair, this James now wept with joy and relief. One James screams and the other weeps. And the argument never ends.

End.

Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion

What is good? What is evil? Often, these questions are answered based on a form of intuition known as the human conscience. Everyone can agree that murder is wrong. Everyone can agree that it is wrong to steal. What if one murders a murderer to save an innocent life? What if one steals to keep one's child from starving to death? Different schools of ethics answer these questions differently. Kantian ethics holds that there is a higher moral law, and wrong is always wrong. Utilitarianism holds that the right thing to do is that which serves the greater good. Through the use of creative writing, this project presented readers with scenarios designed to cause them to question the nature of good and evil.

Statement of Problem

What is the nature of good and evil? Does a higher moral law define these ideas, or are they situational? If they are situational, then how does one's point of view affect ideas of right and wrong? What is the correct course of action when one faces conflicting loyalties? Can something usually defined as unethical be moral in some scenarios? With differing explanations of ethics, how can one define what is ethical or unethical? The problem with these questions is not that they are unanswerable; the problem is that they have many answers.

Explanation of Project

This project sought to cause readers to question their understanding of right and wrong. Often, individuals are confident in their opinions about the world because they never truly consider the opinions of those that disagree with them. This project sought to cause readers to form opinions based on incomplete information so they would change their views when exposed to new information. By presenting different scenarios, this project sought to cause readers to question the motivations and viewpoints of others. Ultimately, this creative project sought to

contrast Kantian and Utilitarian ethical thoughts and flex the individual conscience of readers in a series of short stories in the hopes of increasing empathy in the minds of readers.

Review of Methodology

The research phase of this project consisted of reviewing writing guides created by Raymond Carver, Ernest Hemingway, Stephen King, Flannery O'Connor, and Edgar Allan Poe. These writers provided lessons in the art and craft of writing that were applied to create a series of short stories addressing the questions posed by this project. Additionally, a review of the philosophies of ethics from Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, along with a study of views expressed by other philosophical writers, provided insight on how people define right and wrong. Finally, a reading of literary works with themes similar to those addressed by this project was conducted to identify how writers approached creative writing that addressed good and evil. The author utilized knowledge gained from the above sources to create a series of short stories.

Summary of Results

In this project, short stories presented readers with various fictional scenarios. The stories exposed readers to realities designed to shape their opinions of specific situations, and then the stories revealed new information that caused readers to shift their view on what was right or wrong. The stories also presented information designed to leave readers questioning how they might react if placed in the situations described therein.

Bad People. The inspiration for this story came from two feuding families encountered by Huckleberry Finn in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In Twain's story, the two families have been feuding for so long that they do not remember the cause of their quarrel. Initially, the story introduces readers to Otto Sawson. The Sawsons are in a feud with a neighboring family named the Waltons. After the reader views the Waltons through the eyes of

Otto Sawson, the point of view shifts to a character named Otto Walton, and readers learn that the Waltons are not evil. Both point-of-view characters are named Otto; this was done to imply that often people who perceive each other as enemies are not as different as they imagine. The final shift in viewpoint occurs after a conflict between the Waltons and the Sawsons, and readers experience the aftermath of terrible events and learn that assumptions can lead to great evils.

The Donor. This story explores capital punishment, medical ethics, and utilitarian laws that conflict with individual conscience. The story consisted of three chapters with different characters impacted by the story's events. Chapter One described a man speeding down the highway and ended with his death when he crashed into a stopped car. Chapter Two shifted to two deputies discussing the aftermath of the accident and observing a news broadcast capturing opposing views on blame and punishment. Chapter 3 moved to a conversation between a doctor and a nurse tasked with harvesting organs from individuals convicted of capital crimes. This chapter also revealed the existence of laws that strip individuals of their rights when it serves the greater good. This story is meant to leave readers questioning the justness of capital punishment and whether individual happiness is outweighed by the happiness of the many.

Crazy. This inspiration for this story came from a writing task presented by Stephen King in *On Writing* in which he tasked would be writers to create a story about an abusive spouse escaping from prison and shift the genders of the story's characters. The story describes Jessie, a character initially presented as an abused spouse. Jessie's significant other, Taylor, and daughter, Angel, exist as plot items designed to drive Jessie forward. Jessie and Taylor have gender-neutral names so that readers will assume Jessie to be a female and Taylor to be a male based on existing stereotypes about spousal abuse. The reader follows Jessie on a journey as he attempts to escape what he perceives is a threat to his daughter. Later, the story reveals that

Jessie has a mental illness, possibly schizophrenia, and his actions are misguided. Finally, the story reveals that Jessie inadvertently killed the daughter he was trying to protect. The story initially leads readers to sympathize and identify with Jessie. The story then progresses in a manner that attempts to shift the sympathy of readers to the framed wife named Taylor. At the end of the story, the reader should feel a mixture of pity, horror, and revulsion toward Jessie. The story was designed to cause readers to recognize that initial opinions are often misguided and it is difficult to judge situations based on perceived reality. Additionally, readers should be left conflicted over whether Jessie is evil or simply a victim of terrible circumstances. The question surrounding Jessie is whether intentions or results define actions as evil.

Scarcity. This story was created based on a non-published short story titled “The White.” In “The White,” unnamed characters struggle to survive and face destruction in an unforgiving future world. “Scarcity” is set some years before the events in “The White,” and it captures the journey of a father and his daughter. The father’s journey, his actions, and the conflicts he experiences within himself were designed to prompt readers to question what is justifiable and what is not justifiable in the name of survival. The father’s murder of a man who sheltered him and his daughter offers a warning against taking actions based on assumptions that may not be true.

The Red Door. This story occurs in a distant future aboard a space station, and Ursula Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” serves as its inspiration. Le Guin presented a story designed to contrast the potential happiness created by a utilitarian society with the individual horror that might exist in that society. “The Red Door” sought to immerse readers in a utilitarian society via narration from a first-person point of view. The story explores capital punishment, loss of identity, and happiness versus freedom. This story is meant to make readers

ponder whether the greater good should trump individual freedom, and at what point the sacrifice of the individual becomes too great to justify societal happiness.

The Argument. This story explores the ethics of keeping an individual alive via artificial means. Religious conviction contrasts with individual morals about right and wrong. The story consists of an argument between a couple about a brother kept alive by artificial life support. The story centers on the point of view of a woman, and character dialog presents her husband's views. The story ends with an internal argument that occurs in the mind of the comatose brother who perceives the woman's intention to remove him from life support. The brother exists as two separate entities, one relieved to pass on and the other struggling to stay alive. Beneath the simple argument of artificial life support lies the revelation that the woman's brother maintains consciousness, and is therefore still alive. This leads to questions of whether the woman's decision, based on ignorance of her brother's apparent consciousness, is good or evil. Additionally, the side of the woman's brother who sees death as a release from suffering hints at an implication that assisted suicide might be just in some instances. The story is meant to illustrate the idea that good can be a point of view, and whatever view readers hold on artificial life support, this story should create some empathy for those with the opposing view.

Relationship of Research to the Field

This was a creative project and therefore is not directly related to other research.

Discussion of Results

This project did not seek to answer a main question and sub-questions. The questions asked do not have a single answer, and it is up to individual readers to consider these questions in pursuit of the answers. The short stories fall under a theme based on this project's main question: What is the nature of good and evil? The individual short stories address this theme by

considering the projects sub-questions.

Does a higher moral law define right and wrong, or are they situational? Each story presented actions that could be called right or wrong in different situations. The Sawson's actions in "Bad People" might be justified in a world without higher authority where hostile entities accost the family, or they might be completely unjustified as in the scenario presented. "The Donor" describes a world where doctors harvest organs from criminals, and the dialog implies that some of those criminals may be innocent. If an evil person dies so an innocent person might live, is that moral? What if the price of the system is that sometimes innocent people also die? These questions are presented indirectly to readers.

"Crazy" offers a glimpse into insanity and leaves it for readers to decide whether the story's protagonist is evil or a victim. "Scarcity" presents a world of theft, murder, and even cannibalism, and it ponders how far one might morally go to survive. "The Red Door" presents a world that decimates individual freedom in the name of happiness, and it asks readers to consider at what point individual subjugation by the will of the many becomes immoral. "The Argument" explores the conflict that occurs when different faiths or moral values fight against one another. In each story, the reader's conscience and individual sense of right and wrong offer an additional layer for consideration.

If good and evil are situational, how does point of view affect ideas of right and wrong? The stories illustrate that point of view may affect ideas of right and wrong through shifting views and information revealed at calculated moments. "Bad People" offers the most dramatic example of shifting points of view. Other stories of this project rely on revealing hidden information to readers to shift the reader's view. In this context, the stories seek to illustrate to readers that point of view does affect perceptions of good and evil.

What is the correct course of action when one faces conflicting loyalties? Conflicting loyalties create tension at various points in several of the stories created for this project. The nurse in “The Donor” struggles with her conscience and the laws of her society. The father in “Scarcity” describes fleeing with his daughter as raiders take his wife, and later he wrestles with the possibility that he may have to leave his daughter behind in favor of his survival. Additionally, the father must choose between trusting a man who showed him kindness and his obligation to survive. In “The Argument,” a woman must choose between loyalty to her husband and loyalty to her religious convictions and brother. In all of the described cases, the protagonist is forced to follow their moral compass to determine right from wrong. The readers’ moral compasses will determine whether they agree with the actions taken by the characters.

Can something normally defined as unethical be moral in some scenarios?

Cannibalism is generally considered wrong, but it may be moral if one must choose between cannibalism and death from starvation. The fact that the father in “Scarcity” misjudged the intentions of his host does not remove his obligation to survive or help his daughter survive. The nurse in “The Donor” is killing people, and some of those people have not had a trial. However, her actions are in accordance with the laws of her world, and they are saving the lives of others. The father in “Crazy” might be wrong, but what if he were truly fleeing an abusive spouse, and what if he had taken different actions that didn’t result in the child’s death at the end of the story? Would his lie to police about his spouse be justifiable if it had saved his daughter? These questions are not posed directly, but they are implied, and readers will hopefully consider them as they consider the scenarios presented in the stories. As with the other questions of this project, it is up to readers to decide the answer.

With differing explanations of ethics, how can one define what is ethical or unethical? This sub-question leads into the conclusion implied by the stories created for this project. Each story presents different ethical dilemmas, and they demonstrate that Utilitarian or Kantian ethical ideas may break down when taken to extremes. Whether characters attempt to serve the greater good or follow their moral compass, acts that may be called evil are possible. The problem arises in defining those acts as evil. The stories in this project imply that good and evil are a matter of context and point of view, and one may call an act evil in one scenario or good in another scenario. Necessary or justifiable acts of evil may be called good.

Conclusions

This project did not seek to answer the main question and sub-questions posed. Rather, it seeks to instill in readers a realization that the questions exist and the answers are debatable. Despite not seeking to answer the main question of this project, when the project is taken in its entirety, an answer to the question regarding the nature of good and evil becomes apparent. The stories of this project demonstrate that individual conscience can be wrong, the greater good may not always be good, and context differentiates right from wrong. When one acknowledges these conclusions, the realization that good and evil are subjective becomes inescapable. Therefore, the nature of good and evil is that they are interchangeable ideas that shift depending on one's point of view and the context in which one defines them.

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Wendell Bell, senior research scientist and a professor of sociology at Yale University, offers an exploration of the different types of evil and how they motivate human actions. The overall context of the article is in understanding evil acts with the goal of reducing their frequency.

Carver, R. (1968). On writing. In *The art of the short story*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. Print.

Author Raymond Carver provides an overview of his methods of writing and creating short stories. He references the works of other authors, but he also states that each writer should find their way and not focus on mimicking the style of others.

Dees, J. G., & Cramton, P. C. (1991). Shrewd bargaining on the moral frontier: Toward a theory of morality in practice. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 1(2), 135. EBSCOhost. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=5953150&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

J. Gregory Dees, a Duke University professor, and Peter Crampton, a professor at the University of Maryland, offer a discussion on whether there is a difference between theoretical and applied ethics. They consider whether it is possible to define morality in an immoral world that is often unfair. Though the context of their discussion directly relates to business negotiations, the questions posed apply to any ethical scenario.

Hemingway, E. (1934). Ernest Hemingway to F. Scott Fitzgerald. In *Letters of note*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books LLC. Print.

Author Ernest Hemingway provides feedback to F. Scott Fitzgerald regarding Fitzgerald's latest literary work. Hemingway's critique of Fitzgerald offers advice and insight to other would be authors.

Hemingway, E. (2002). *Ernest Hemingway on writing*. New York, NY: Scribner. Kindle.

Author Ernest Hemingway speaks to would be writers in a collection of letters and notes spanning numerous works in a compilation created by Larry Phillips and Mary Welsh Hemingway. The book is made up of a collection of quotes taken from Hemingway during various interviews, letters, and through some of his stories. These quotes are in turn grouped by topic and organized into chapters, granting readers a glimpse inside the mind of Ernest Hemingway.

Jackson, S. (1948). The lottery. In *The art of the short story*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. Print.

Author Shirley Jackson depicts evil practiced in an orderly system built on a tradition that no one can remember. The society depicted in Jackson's story selects a person to be stoned to death by their neighbors and family, and this ceremony depicts the events as normal and good. Jackson captures how institutionalized evil can warp individuals understanding of what is morally right and wrong.

Kafka, F. (1971). The metamorphosis. In *The complete stories*. New York, NY: Schocken Ebooks. Kindle.

Frank Kafka explores the utilitarian concept that the suffering of an individual can lead to an outcome that is good. The protagonist, initially the provider for his family, is

transformed into an insect. The family, now forced to provide for themselves, initially suffers but then prospers even as they let the protagonist wither away. Troubling is the thought that the family could have chosen to make all of their lives better once they began working, but they chose to take no action that would benefit the stories protagonist even though he gave everything to support his family. This story leaves the reader questioning whether the needs of the many outweigh those of the few even when the many are unjust.

Kafka, F. (1971). The problem of our laws. In *The complete stories*. New York, NY: Schocken Ebooks. Kindle.

Frank Kafka presented a society of common people governed by laws that they do not know and ruled over by a nobility that is not beholden to those laws. The moral question that this work centers on is on one's obligation to resist unjust rule even when one is comfortable under the apparent security of that rule.

Kant, I., Wood, A. W., & Schneewind, J. B. (2002). *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals*. New Haven: Yale University Press. Retrieved from <https://search-ebscohost-com.vlib.excelsior.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=187773&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Immanuel Kant offers a moral philosophy where a higher moral law governs ethical decisions. The debate between higher law and the greater good factors into many considerations of right versus wrong.

King, S. (2000). *On writing*. New York, NY: Scribner. Print.

Author Stephen King details his theory of writing and goes over the tools that every writer should include in his or her toolbox. He begins with explanations of how

vocabulary, grammar, and style play into the craft of writing. Next, he explores the various methods used to bring stories to life, and he provides an overview of his creative process. King teaches how narration, description, and characters come together to create a story.

Le Guin, U. K. (2004). The day before the revolution. In *The wind's twelve quarters*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc. Kindle.

Author Ursula K. Le Guin details what are presumably the final hours of a revolutionary's life as she considers what her belief have cost her and the nature of freedom. While the story includes several themes, the theme that is most applicable for consideration in this project centers on the morality of fighting for one's beliefs, even if that fighting causes pain and death.

Le Guin, U. K. (2004). The ones who walk away from omelas. In *The wind's twelve quarters*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc. Kindle.

Author Ursula K. Le Guin illustrates the utilitarian view that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few through the misery of a small child that suffers so that an entire city can live in relative happiness. Whether the child is meant to represent the individual beholden to the masses or the poverty-stricken portions of the world that support capitalistic societies, Le Guin's story leaves reader's questioning whether the cost of happiness for some is worth the misery of others.

Mill, J. S. (2001). *Utilitarianism*. Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books Limited. Ebook.

John Steward Mill presents a greater good theory that conflicts with the Immanuel Kant's higher moral law, and this offers a source of conflict should fictional characters with views centered on utilitarianism encounter those who believe in Kantian ethical ideas.

O'Connor, F. (1961). Writing short stories. In *The art of the short story*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning. Print.

Author Flannery O'Connor offers her ideas on creative writing and short stories. She describes how short stories should carry no less meaning than a novel, and she implies that this meaning is what separates a true story from an anecdote or viewpoint.

Poe, E. A. (2003). The philosophy of composition. In *The fall of the house of Usher and other writings*. New York, NY: Penguin. Kindle.

Author Edgar Allan Poe details his theories on what constitutes good writing. He offers lessons in creating poetry that apply to any form of creative writing.