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Animal Magnetism and Modern Mystery Fiction-Exploring Moore's *God of the Woods* as a Revelational Mystery

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Abstract:

Moore's *God of the Woods* is a modern-day magnum opus in the genre of mystery fiction. Told from more than six different points-of-view and spanning five different time periods, the novel is an arduous attempt by Moore to pose a mysterious and intellectual challenge to the reader, all the while keeping its logical and aesthetic integrity intact. This has been no easy feat, and to achieve the aforementioned balance of logic and aesthetic, Moore seems to have incorporated the trope of animal magnetism, originally employed by eighteenth-century writers of mystery fiction and eventually shunned once the theory of animal magnetism was debunked as a hoax by the nineteenth-century scientific community. With the refutation of the theory of animal magnetism more broadly known as mesmerism, the practice of employing it as a trope in mystery novels also died out, making most modern-day mysteries primarily logical and investigative in nature. Interestingly, Moore's recourse to this trope in *God of the Woods* leads to some fascinating conclusions.

The study depicts how Moore uses animal magnetism not only as an aesthetic trope but also as a motif to help sustain the novel as a revelational mystery, whereby, despite cracking the code, the resolution continues to remain demystified and a moment of intrigue for the reader.

Keywords: **animal magnetism, crime fiction, mesmerism, mystery, revelational mystery.**

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Introduction

Liz Moore's *God of the Woods* is another rung in the literary ladder that the author has carved for herself in the world of crime fiction in a relatively short of amount of time. Most of Moore's novels can be neatly grouped into what is popularly termed as mystery fiction. Although historically, English literature has had the privilege of some great female mystery writers, including Agatha Christie and Dorthy Sayers from the remoter past —or writers like Megan Abbott, Tansy Roberts, CLaare Mackintosh in the contemporary times— Liz Moore stands out for departing from certain conventions when it comes to writing what Steven Boyer calls "investigative mystery" or the "mystery of the logic" (Boyer, 2007, pg. 90).

Researchers such as Beth Kalikoff in "Killer Cupcakes: Food, Feminism, and Murder in Mystery Fiction by Women" credit how the past century has seen a shift in the position of women in the genre of murder mystery. Formerly at the periphery, women writers have now moved to the centre of the world of mystery fiction securing their spots as significant contributors (Kailkoff, 2006, pg. 67). Kalikoff does however stress how modern-day schoLaarship fails to capture certain nuanced themes, although in her case these have to do with culinary affairs, in mystery novels by female writers, implying the need to peruse works of women mystery novelists from newer and more nuanced angles.

The following study is an endeavour in this regard as it serves to establish how, unlike Beyer's absolute proposition and the long-term convention used in mystery novels, Moore's *God of the Woods* is not only investigative in style, but it is also at the same time what Boyer calls a "revelational mystery" which he believes cannot characterize mystery novels or dramas since those are resolved upon investigating the logic or the secret sustaining the mystery. Revelational mystery is the kind of mystery that, according to Boyer, characterizes religious scriptures and ancient mythical beliefs (Boyer, 2007, pg. 90). Liz Moore has somehow managed to strike a precarious balance between curating an investigative journalist convention of story-telling, however, as far as the theme, the resolution of the novel, and the decoding of the secret is concerned *God of the Woods* reads more like a revelational mystery, involving tropes of animal magnetism and the occult that are more in line with the writers of the eighteenth century whose works were tainted with the false hypothesis around mesmerism and the magnetic charge that were finally debunked in the middle of the nineteenth century.

This opens an exciting door, leading to new queries for literary researchers interested in the world of mystery fiction. These queries pertain to the necessity of relying on past tropes that were more the result of fallacies in the then-scientific culture instead of being rooted in actual scientific and logical merits. By seeking answers to the need for this new type of mystery convention as well as the

employment of outdated mystery tropes by Moore in her hit piece *God of the Woods*, the research hopes to uncover the potential of a new wave of artistic styles in the mystery genre.

Research Questions

The study aims to seek answers to the following queries:

1) Why does Moore employ the cultural tropes of animal magnetism in the investigative journey undertaken by the main detective although the former had already been rejected by the scientific community almost a century and a half ago?

2) How does the use of the trope of animal magnetism or an uncanny feeling or energy allow Moore to write what could be described as a type of revelational mystery?

3) To what extent could revelational mystery be actually deemed as a proper work of mystery fiction since it is never completely demystified?

Framework of the Research

The qualitative study samples Liz Moore's *God of the Woods*, published in 2024, as an example of the writer's ability to author mystery novels not only in the sense of investigative but also in a revelational style. The Literature Review disambiguates what the study means by revelational mystery, animal magnetism and mesmerism and finally, the Analysis reveals how the latter conventions are precisely what leads the story to be revelational in nature.

Significance of the Research

Researchers such as Beth Kalikoff and Robin Ann Reid have written extensively on the works of female writers in the world of crime and mystery fiction as well as stating the importance of their contribution in popularizing the genre, along with the differences in their style. Moore is one such name in the world of contemporary female authors of mystery novels whose work challenges the boundaries of mystery fiction and can be deemed as experimental in style. This experimentation, however, can easily go unnoticed by today's scholarship on account of the use of the more obvious tropes that the majority of mystery fiction is party to. This research hopes to ensure that the unique characteristics of Moore's writing in particular and women authors of mystery fiction, in general, are brought to light, enabling academic discourses on the extent to which modern mystery novels can be reshaped and experimented with. In doing so, it also hopes to credit the female authors for paving newer conventions and challenging the status quo on what comprises a proper mystery novel

Literature Review

In his insightful study titled *Narrative Energy, Physics and the Scientific Real in Victorian Literature*, Nathan Ashe expounds on how gothic, mystery and crime novelists repeatedly took

leverage with the pseudo-scientific theorising of the concept of animal magnetism and "energy". Ashe begins his study by quoting the iconic instance from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* where the titular character becomes party to "supernatural communication" (Ashe, 2022, pg. 12) from her lover Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester cries "Jane! Jane! Jane!" and his voice is somehow heard by Jane who is parted from him over a distance of thousands of miles. This scene has riled a number of critics, such as Richard Chase who dismissed it as a "gothic claptrap" and Ruth Bernard Yeazell who generously cites the novel as being "more true than real"(Ashe, 2022, pg. 12). Ashe, on the other hand, accounts for this breach of physical reality by contextualising it in the prevalent discourse on energy and ether.

According to Ashe, the nebulous understanding and the growing intrigue around the dispensation of energy and charge in the 19th-century understanding of physical phenomenon paved the way for writers to experiment with it in their fiction. It appears as though, Bronte herself employed the use of the word "energy" when describing the "frantic energy" (Ashe, 2022, pg. 17). which, in the words of Mr. Rochester himself, would have compelled any other listener in hearing range to pronounce him mad. Ashe believes that this scene, in an otherwise realistic novel that makes no mention of supernatural occurrences, was Bronte's way of leveraging the general beliefs on the discharge of energy and its ability to create "work" prevalent in her time. According to Ashe, Rochester's energy leaps across the vast, ether-filled distance to Jane, immediately propelling her previously at-rest body into motion as she jumps from her seat and flies to the garden—work, in the physical sense of the word (Ashe, 2022, pg. 17). In this way, novelists in the 18th century used energy to create unexpected connections, which frustrates natural causal narratives and allow references to God, nature and he occult in ambivalent ways.

Consequently, Ashe believes that Jane Eyre's "ambivalent naturalization" (Ashe, 2022, pg. 11) of apparently extraordinary events in a realistic setting became some kind of precedence for later novels that followed suit. Ashe, however, limits his research to the 19th-century novels or writings preceding the time when the fallible understanding of energy and charge was debunked. This research will explore how, the theory of energy along with animal magnetism more broadly known as mesmerism, narrativized by writers such as Wilkie Collins and Charlotte Bronte on account of a scientific fallacy prevalent in their times, formulated a narrative technique that continues to uphold to this day.

In his book titled, *The Spectral Arctic Book Subtitle: A History of Dreams and Ghosts in Polar Exploration* writer Shane McCorristine defines mesmerism in some detail. According to McCorristine, the concept of mesmerism is rooted in the works of Franz Anton Mesmer who engaged and

promulgated various types of therapeutic, surgical and entertainment practices predicated on the belief that all living bodies were capable of emanating a magnetic field that could be compromised for extracting information on an underlying physical or mental illness in the patient (McCorristine, 2018, 81). The practices of Franz Mesmer quickly became popular and replicated by other mesmerists. Typically, the practice would involve a male mesmerist making various passes with his hands over his seated (and usually female) patients. At times, the mesmerist could take the help of candles or magnets to induce a state of sleep in his patients. The intensity of the induced sleep could range anywhere from highly sensitive to completely comatose. Mesmerists claimed that the induced state was possible through the tempering of the electrically charged fluid that universally permeates within any live entity and that once they were able to activate it, this external charge or energy could be used for healing purposes. Mesmer himself claimed that since the charge was externally emanated and universally distributed, it could be compromised and worked upon without any need for an intermediate body. Mesmer's ideas managed to create a great stir in the field of electrical experimentation, especially in France but were completely redirected after his death. (McCorristine, 2018, 81).

Harold B. Siegel, in his study "Animal Magnetism in Polish Romantic Literature" speaks of how, despite being condemned by the investigative team comprising of the American Ambassador in France Mr Benjam Franklin, commissioned by Louis XVT, the Romantic period saw a great surge in popularity of the concepts surrounding animal magnetism as developed by Mesmer and later modified by Deleuze and Puysegur. Harold himself was a twentieth-century scholar and wrote extensively on how the popularity of the concept carried well into the twentieth century (Siegel, 1974, 16) and, as this study will demonstrate, continues to serve an important function in literature to this day.

A more recent study came in the form of Laurie Johnson's study titled "The Romantic and Modern Practice of Animal Magnetism: Friedrich Schlegel's Protocols of the Magnetic Treatment of Countess Lesniowska". According to Johnson, as a therapeutic practice, magnetism or mesmerism was both romantic and modern and "foreshadowed" (Johnson, 2007, 11) the ways Freud conceptualised the phenomenon of uncanny repetitions. This is because, as a therapeutic practice, animal magnetism formed a bridge between archaic and modern medicine as well as literature and social relations. In his discussions with Joseph Breuer, Freud emphasized the communicative aspect of magnetism and believed that the practices of hypnotism suggest that there is more to the physical world that extends into the realm of spiritual knowledge (Johnson, 2007, 14). Both Mesmer and Schlegel were more fascinated by the recurrent ways in which knowledge was communicated between the patient and his/her mesmerist doctor.

Johnson iterates how magnetism is uncanny due to the ways it ties in with the "animistic conception of the universe" (Johnson, 2007, 15). The "animal" in animal magnetism is etymologically rooted in "anima" or the soul. Mesmerists were tasked with inducing occurrences of literal convulsions and hallucinations in their patients. These confessions of hallucinations were treated as clairvoyant visions which alluded to convictions rooted in Gaelic past and traditional biomedicine (Johnson, 2007, 16). It is interesting how contemporary twenty-first-century literature, as exemplified in the writings of Liz Moore, continues to make allusions to such historical beliefs in uncanny, ritualistic and repetitive communications.

Johnson defines animal magnetism as a "repetitive, corporeal" (Johnson, 2007, 16) practice that links together the patient and the doctor in a state of communication that involves symptoms of convulsions, babbling or fainting. The patient is usually "detached from past perception" but the mesmerist is able to access these "lost" (Johnson, 2007, 16) perceptions by manipulating the patient's nervous system. Once released, the symptoms from the patients take the shape of free-flowing anxiety symbolizing the prevalence of themes or problems that are much more consequential and open to interpretation. According to Johnson, animal magnetism thus became a way of aestheticizing the illness in the patient through its transformation into a metaphor. Mesmerists used it as one of the earliest treatments in psychiatry that sought to cure psychosomatic illnesses with uncanny qualities by exaggerating these very qualities. The patient's perpetual elicitation of his disease in the form of convulsions, babblings, etc., allows the latter to escape the "contingent, historically located suffering" and instead become part of the "modern Romantic subject, who turns history into memory and narrative into fragment" (Johnson, 2007, 16).

The rage around mesmerism and animal magnetism declined during the middle of the nineteenth century when a number of scientists came together to disprove the existence of the "ether" or an externally present electromagnetic field that allowed this uninhibited flow of charge. With this refutation, there was also the demise of animal magnetism in literature, except, as this study tends to suggest, the mystery novel. To understand why and how animal magnetism, a historical hoax, already debunked in the 19th century, found its way into the modern mystery novel, we would first have to look at what makes a mystery novel truly mysterious.

In his essay titled "The Appeal of the Mystery" Alan H. Goldman picks up the accusation often levied against mystery novels of being part of the "mindless" (Goldman, 2011, pg. 261) or escapist popular culture. Goldman, however, refuses to believe such is the case, declaring how, historically, academicians have not only taken great interest but also tremendous pride in their erudition in the

genre of mystery. According to Goldman, the idea that mystery novels are less worthy than their other literary counterparts come from the perception that mystery novels often portray stereotypical, one-dimensional characters, conventional plot-lines, little to no atmosphere, inept investigative abilities in the characters, emotional disengagement, etc. Goldman believes that while some of these may apply to the worst specimens of the mystery novel, they might not hold true for the best members of the genre, which, in the words of Goldman "apply to other works considered serious" (Goldman, 2011, pg. 261).

There are certainly criticisms that have their roots in valid observations. Mystery novels can be formulaic in that most are often ideologically conservative and plot-wise seem to crescendo towards unearthing the status quo as the ultimate enemy. The police are often bumbling and inept but Goldman cites a great number of examples of mystery novels that go against the grain. More importantly, Goldman suggests that the appeal of the mystery novel primarily comes from our ability to engage with it in a way that is not possible with other forms of fiction. It allows the reader to participate in a type of intellectual activity that is absolutely cathartic as the pieces of the puzzle come together and the evildoers are rightfully punished for their crimes (Goldman, 2011, pg. 266-267).

For Goldman, the real appeal of the mystery novel lies in its ability to engage all of the reader's "inferential ability, memory and imagination" (Goldman, 2011, pg. 267) but he takes care to make a distinction between the interpretive efforts of the detective and the interpretive efforts of the reader. According to Goldman, while the detective in mystery novels works linearly, paying the most attention to clues that are obvious and then, usually upon reaching some kind of cul-de-sac, turning to the more insignificant ones, the reader engages in what he describes as "aesthetic interpretation". According to Goldman, unlike the detective, the experienced reader will not be lured in with the most obvious clues and will look for the minor, seemingly inconsequential details and think of ways to fit these into the most plausible solution to the mystery. This will lead to a number of aesthetically adept and varied interpretations and outcomes. And while other novels and genres also offer opportunities of disambiguation (novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* with the disambiguation of Mr. Dary's or Mr. Wickham's original motives, or *Great Expectations* where Dickens unveils the mystery of Miss Havisham), it is the mystery novels that compel the reader to engage in the aesthetic interpretation the most insistently since the novel's entire resolution is predicated on it. And this aesthetic interpretation of the mystery novel is what not only brings all of the major and minor elements of the plot into a neat harmony but also brings significance to each of them.

The other great charm of the mystery novel for Goldman is its ability to allow readers to identify and develop compassion for characters that are the least like us and with whom we have little

to relate. According to Goldman, the real value of a novel comes from a reader's ability to relate to the characters' struggles as they offer something to learn. However, because in literature, we only tend to relate with characters most like us, the lack of differential in life experiences or outcomes means that there will be little value in such type of identification.

Readers of detective novels must, first and foremost, allow themselves to identify with the detective, who in most cases will be quite different from them. The detective is usually something of an outsider, unmarried, divorced or widowed. The detective will also be supremely infallible and witty a combination of what Goldman likes to out as "the Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic heroism" (Goldman, 2011, pg. 267). But by involuntarily assuming his role as a detective, we the readers must also identify with his moods, reasonings and other traits. And because the detective must identify with the culprit in order to understand his motives and hopefully outpace his schemes to catch the culprits red-handed, so must the reader. This allows the reader to intensely empathize with both the detective and the culprit; to feel the frustrations and hopes of both the good guy and the bad guy in a way that is not possible with other genres.

Most importantly, and perhaps intrinsically related to this study, is Goldman's observations around the emotional engagement that is inevitable with mystery novels. While critics of mystery novels regale the former on account of its tendency to conserve the social status quo, however, as Goldman suggests, more often than not, the detectives themselves either bend or break the law, even to the extent of setting the murderer free or sometimes uncover the crimes with ulterior motives. As far as the novel under study is concerned, it falls in the former category. The main detective uncovering the mystery of the lost Barbara makes, what in legal lingo and common law can be considered as not only morally incorrect but also socially detrimental. And yet, as readers, we are left with a vague sense that the slight bending of the law by the detective in this case should be permissible. Interestingly, our justification for this bending of the law is predicated more on feelings than actual facts. This is where animal magnetism comes in since, in the absence of actual physical evidence, the final decision of the detective rests on what she feels and the "bug in her abdomen" (Moore, 2024, pg. 381). The lack of ground evidence, and the reliance on spiritual communion and gut feelings make Moore's novel what Boyer terms as revelational in nature.

In his article "The Logic of Mystery" Steven D. Boyer made some key distinctions between two dominant types of mysteries. The first was termed the investigative mystery, the subject matter of which was often found in novels and TV shows. This type of mystery basically centred around solving

some crime or an inexplicable case. The readers end up joining the detective in this quest and the mystery resolves itself once we find out "whodunit" (Boyer, 2007, pg. 90).

The other kind of mystery, Boyeur suggests, is rooted in the ancient Mediterranean tradition and dabbles in eternal or heavenly secrets. It is the kind of mystery that has defined Greek religions along with ancient concepts in science and philosophy. Boyer posits that unravelling this kind of mystery involves communication with the occult by means of "esoteric devotion", "intellectual contemplation" (Boyer, 2007, pg. 90) or a similarly spiritual means. Boyer terms it a revelational mystery because it is often characterized by some kind of a revelation of the occult. But what is odd about this mystery is that unlike investigative mystery, which is no longer a mystery once the secret is out, the revelational mystery continues to remain a mystery even when the so-called secret is made apparent. This is the fundamental difference between an investigative mystery, which is really just a mystery of logic, and a revelational mystery, which remains a mystery even upon the outing of the secret.

What is especially interesting is that while Boyer claims that the mystery found in TV dramas and crime novels is usually an investigative mystery, which to a significant extent also applies to Moore's *God of the Woods*, certain elements, including the reliance on tropes of feeling, or animal magnetism, make it a sort of revelational mystery instead. The following section will present a detailed analysis of how these elements contribute towards both the logical and aesthetic structuring of the story as well as allow the ending of the novel to remain "revelational" and not necessarily "investigative" in style.

Analysis

In many ways, Liz Moore's mystery novel *God of the Woods* neatly places itself within the most popular conventions of the genre. Like most specimens of detective fiction, the novel features a rookie detective whose underdog status in the investigative field is further accentuated on account of her female gender. Following the convention, it is not the domineering team of veteran cops that makes the major breakthrough but the female investigator Judyta Luptack who successfully puts together the pieces of the puzzle.

The mystery novel follows the disappearance of Barbara Van Laar, the progeny of the prestigious and elite Van Laar family and the search for her tracks uncovers the unresolved mystery surrounding the disappearance of Barbara's brother twelve years ago in a similar manner. The novel oscillates between the perspectives of various characters in the story as well as five different timelines. This novel posits an arduous intellectual challenge on the part of the reader to keep track of the various timelines as well as the point of view.

From among the characters whose voices narrate the story of both Barbara's disappearance as well as that of her brother Bear twelve years ago, there are those that are indicted for the crime, however, at no point in the breadth of the entire novel do readers ever assume the culpability of any of the formerly accused characters who are narrating the story. But where the novel divests from the common convention is that the characters actually guilty of the crime do in fact turn out to be the one that appear the most suspicious throughout the story. The real puzzle of the mystery in Liz Moore's novel lies not in "who" did it since that is substantially hinted at through the employment of what this study has now demystified as "animal magnetism", but "how" it was done.

The mechanics of Moore's skills as an author of mystery novels lie in the deft use of the concept of animal magnetism to grease the plotline in a way that forsook physical evidence despite being self-contradictory. It was stated in the previous section that animal magnetism could be broken down into its two main constituents: corporeality and repetition. It is the premise of this study to establish that Moore heavily relied on the former in order to build a sense of trust and faith between the indicted narrators of the novel and its readers.

As stated earlier, while certain characters narrating the story were also the ones incriminated in the disappearance of the Van Laar siblings, it will not occur to the seasoned reader of the mystery novel to indict them to boot, and there are two main reasons for this.

The first reason is corporeality. The characters from whose perspective we see the story unfold are Louise, Barbara's camp counsellor; Tracy, Barabar's bunkmate and friend; Alice, Barbara's mother; Jacob, the serial killer on loose who is also supposedly Bear's murderer; Carl, the gardener who worked for the Van Laars twelve years ago; and investigator Judyta Luptack (who goes by the name Judy) who is one of the investigating officers working in the case along with her colleague Denny.

At one point in the story, Louise, Jacob and Carl are accused by the Van Laars and the police of the disappearance and possible death of Bear and twelve years later his sister from the same woods. However, the suspicion levied against these characters by the Van Laars fails to cultivate the confidence of the readers. Even Jacob, despite being a proven serial killer, fails to arouse the same kind of suspicion amongst the readers as the more outwardly respectable characters in the story such as Peter Van Laar the Second (Barbara's grandfather), Tessie Jo who is Barbara's close confidante, or Vic Hewitt who is Tessie Jo's father.

As stated earlier, it is the premise of the study to explain how Moore used the concept of animal magnetism, specifically its features of corporeality and repetition, to prove the guilt of the actual criminals or the innocence of the ones indicted beyond the scope of ground evidence. When the crime

doers are actually revealed towards the end, the reader's suspicions are only confirmed, not completely overturned.

Corporeality, as defined by Merriam-Webster, refers to the concept of existence. What is corporeal will have or relate to a physical body. Doris V. Faulk states that mesmerists believed that animal magnetism worked by using the corporeal medium to invoke hidden traumas or illnesses (Faulk, 1969, pg. 536). The traumas lingered in the subconscious of the patients and the mesmerists or practitioners of animal magnetism would manipulate the magnetic field around the corporeal form in order to access the vestiges of these traumas. Now while the practice of mesmerism, or more specifically, animal magnetism, has been debunked as a hoax since a long time ago, we see Moore relying on a similar convention to uncover the traumatic suffering of the characters.

As readers, we are at the receiving end of the events as they unfold from the perspective of the characters. In so far, as the characters reveal to us their innermost fears and desires, our relationship with the characters simulates one of the mesmerists and the patient. We as readers assume the role of the mesmerist while the indicted characters are the patients suffering from the malady and resulting trauma of false accusations and the injustice of it all. It must also be noted how, just as the patient, under the spell of the mesmerist has no control over the elicitations and the convulsions or babbling become more or less an involuntary response that eradicates any doubt of manufacturing or manipulating information, similarly, the characters appear to be confessing their timelines without a sense of positive consciousness. This is because although the stories are told from the perspective of these various characters, they are narrated in the third person. It is almost like a camera following the character at all times leaving no room for mischief or secrecy from the reader. The absence of a first-person point of view strips the characters of the ability to manipulate information while at the same time, the presence (or existence) of their perspective brings them a sense of corporeality in a way that is absent for the actual criminal characters in the story.

It is the absence of perspective that takes away the corporeality from the other characters in a way that is yet maintained by the narrativising characters. What the readers learn about the Van Laars, for example, may or may not be factually accurate accounts since the Van Laars and their elite friends are seen through the eyes of the narrative characters. The lack of a closer and more nuanced perspective makes them, in a way, less corporeal than others. Just as how the live experiences of one's friends cultivate in us a more nuanced and visually grafted understanding when compared with an event narrated by the very friends of which we are not directly a part. The projection of Van Laars's

attitude, mannerisms, and behaviours could be factual or the result of the story-teller's highly sensitive state of emotion. It can be both corporeal and non-corporeal, as in actually existing or exaggerated.

The other aspect of animal magnetism that draws the readers closer and more trusting of the narrativising characters is "repetition". This repetition in the practice of animal magnetism referred to the mesmerist's ability to elicit the same response (convulsions, babblings, hallucinations, etc.)

In *God of the Woods*, the narrative viewpoint of the story continues to shift back and forth between the characters. The chapters titled the name of the character from whose viewpoint the story follows come up repetitively. These perspectives are then picked up from where they were last left off bringing a sense of closure to their stories. In the process of animal magnetism, the doctor tries to resurface the trauma over and over until the mystery behind the patient's malady is disclosed. In the same way, the repetitive nature of going back to the characters allows them to bring their story full circle and resolve the mystery. Until the final section of the novel, these individual pieces feel very much like the fragmented versions of the hallucinosis that patients exhibit. The fragmentation of the narrative by the modern romantic subject as Laurie Johnson put it, is supposed to be the clues that lead the doctor to formulate some plausible causal interpretation. The more frequently the elicitations from the patient surface or the more repetitive the occurrence, the more room it gives to the doctor to make his thesis.

The narratives of the various characters also originally surface as fragmented and disjointed episodes of the actual causal events leading up to both Bear and Barbara's disappearance. In the beginning, as the chapters successively start following the recollections and everyday affairs of various characters both in the present and the past, the fragmented storylines appear unrelated and do more to sustain a simulacrum of confusion which is in fact self-created. It is only until we as the readers repetitively go back to these different characters allowing them to, at times, recall and other times, act in different ways that these fragmented view points begin to contribute towards the disambiguation of the events.

An example of this disambiguation through repetitive corporeality is Alice's visions. On the brink of dysfunctionality since the disappearance of her son Bear and then later Barbara, Alice's perspectives shift between what she currently perceives in real-time and what she recollects. At one point, we the readers are lent into her past visions that are a blurry maze of seemingly disjointed visual and auditory imageries that seem to confuse our judgment of the actual crime, more than it resolves. But in the final resolution and disambiguation of who commits the real crimes, those disjointed and

confusing imageries of Alice play a vital part in highlighting the full breadth of what actually happened and who the real culprit is.

She didn't know where she was. She opened her eyes. Her mouth was so dry that she couldn't swallow. Above her, the room rotated slowly, …. She had the sensation of being unable to form words. Even her thoughts were wordless. Water, she thought—but it was an image, not a noun. …. Her neck was stiff, as if she had not moved her head for days. There were windows in this room, but they were darkened by closed shutters with tight slats and exterior latches. She couldn't tell if it was day or night outside. (Moore, 2024, pg. 405)

The scene describes Alice's inebriated state of semi-consciousness while she was paddling in the waters which resulted in the drowning of her son in a shocking turn of events. Although, the shocking revelation that Bear was actually killed accidentally by the ineptitude of his own mother appears towards the end, as readers we still feel sympathy for her due to these recollections. Her distorted and semi-conscious understanding of the events around her helps to vindicate her from the guilt because to readers it is obvious that both the event of Bear's drowning and inability to come clean about it were not the result of intentional concealment of crime but the result of her inebriation and dampened senses from the overuse of drugs prescribed by the doctor that her husband, Peter the Third, and father-in-law, Peter-the-Second, plotted for her to keep the scandal of a drunk mother responsible for losing the child a secret.

However, in the court of law, Alice is pardoned on grounds of mental ineptitude — a decision which in today's time from a thoroughly legal standpoint, might be deemed as controversial. Nevertheless, even in the court of public opinion, we still find her less culpable for the crime on account of these very fragmented visions that help uncover the mystery of her crime. This mirrors the dilemma of Walter Hartright in Wilkie Collins's classically renowned mystery *The Woman in White.* According to researcher Nathan Ashe, Walter Hartright did not need to conduct his own novel in the style of an investigative journal when the court of law had already ruled Laura Fairly as rightfully vindicated from the charges of assuming a false identity. What need, Ashe asks, promulgates Mr. Hartright to then conduct his own investigation of sorts with receipts of time and place where each event unfolds as well as narrativising events from key witnesses such as Ms. Halcombe. Ashe gives two probable reasons. The first he says has to do with court rulings being a fickle business since the admission of new information can, at any time, overturn it. In addition, Hartright admits the possibility of incredulity around Laura's identity despite the court's rulings since human nature loves to delve into conspiracy theories (Ashe, 2022, pg. 25-45).

The second reason for penning his story in an investigative journalistic style, despite being vindicated by the court could be what Ashe describes as Walter's need to earn the favour of the court of public opinion through the disclosure of certain pieces of evidence that border on the uncanny and by its virtue not admissible in court. This study stipulates a similar premise for *God of the Woods* by Liz Moore. Although vindicated in the court of law, there are additional facts about Alice that we learn through these recollections that may not be admissible in court but profoundly impact the grounds of the case in the court of public opinion. The blacked-out scenes described by Alice in the immediate aftermath of the drowning of her son Bear suggest the extent to which she was incapacitated. One might still, and rightfully, place the blame on her since it was her choice to drink herself to inebriation but her recollections reveal that the reason she was in that state had to do with the need to dispel the shock she experienced from her husband cheating on her with Delphine, who was both her sister as well as the woman that her husband, Peter the Third actively vilified. Surely, this revelation, while not justifying her being under the influence of alcohol, especially in the vicinity of a child, does much to dispel a totalitarian sense of indirect incrimination and cultivate a sense of sympathy for her in the readers. Equally important is the knowledge that her son Bear was less in the vicinity out of her accord and more from the need to escape the company of his grandfather, Peter the Second. However, Bear's contempt for his grandfather is rooted in what can be described as a trope of revelational mystery.

One of the earliest instances of the tropes, typically found in revelational mysteries, applied by Moore is when Carl, the gardener of the Van Laar mansion, becomes the coincidental confidante to Bear's disclosure that he "doesn't like him". Instead of taking Bear's words as the whim of a young child, Carl immediately tenses and reads significantly more into it than the reader. It is obvious that Carl's fears are not rooted in any substantial set of evidence. His unease is purely uncanny but completely solidifies against Bear's grandfather in the event of Bear's disappearance, and continues to do so with each directive dispensed by the grandfather the suspicion turns into conviction. Although Bear's grandfather, who was in charge of the search expedition following Bear's disappearance, convinced the search team members of the logical contingency of his directives, Carl continued to feel otherwise.

Carl had resisted allowing entry to a feeling that had been hovering on the outskirts of his consciousness. But from the back of the pickup truck, he watched as the lights of Self-Reliance turned off one by one, and he, at last, allowed himself to think it: if that were his boy, lost in the cold woods overnight—down with an injury, perhaps—well, he would still be out there searching. (Moore, 2024, pg. 144)

Once again, Carl's unease is not rooted in any actual piece of evidence but a "feeling" lingering around the periphery of his consciousness. As readers, we identify with Carl and sense something ominous in the ways of the Van Laars. In a very painful turn of events, when the Van Laars indict Carl, their own gardener for Bear's disappearance, and although the writer does not immediately dispel the accusations, Barbara's disappearance twelve years later sets up a chain reaction that ultimately allows truth about Carl's false indictment to surface. However, this truth forms one of the more prosaic moments in the novel. The revelation is made to the rookie investigator by Carl's own daughter who takes up work at the Van Laars out of financial need. The unremarkable manner in which Carl's daughter confirms the false accusations made against her suggests that Moore never expected her readers to believe them to begin with. This is despite Moore never formally trying to vindicate Carl in the eyes of the reader. One hypothesis that explains this conviction in Moore could be that she penned most of her novel in the revelational mystery style instead of a simple investigative style. Unlike most mystery novels of the present day, and more in the fashion of the mystery novels of the nineteenth century, Moore's novels relies as much on the reader's intuition and their gut-feeling, as she does on actual clues to dispel the mystery. Not all links created in the novel can be explained away by concrete, durable facts and there are moments in the novel when the reader, along with other characters in the novel, find themselves latching on to a gut-feeling, an energy of sorts, a silent intuition, in order to arrive at legitimate conclusions.

A more extreme example of revelational mystery is in the instance of Judyta Luptack's investigations. As an investigative officer, Luptack is well-versed in the procedural formalities of conducting an investigation and the durability of evidence in court. It then comes as a surprise that of all the characters relying on the powers of the "uncanny", it is Luptack that relies on it the most. The very first instance of Luptack experiencing the force of the uncanny is when she finds herself sitting opposite Bear's grandfather who flares up at her questions. Instead of attributing the source of his emotional volatility to the disappearance of his granddaughter, she finds something in the emotion displayed of Mr. Peter the Second unsettling. It is purely this vague and uncanny sense of unease, emanating from the demeanor of Barbara's grandfather that although does not directly incriminate him for any wrongdoing, does at least make him the suspect in the aesthetic investigative scheme of things. As an investigative mystery, it answers our suspicion by confirming that Bear's grandfather was in fact culpable in concealing the truth about Bear's demise in hopes of curtailing a family scandal that might be detrimental to their extremely lucrative family business. But like a revelational mystery, there are a number of questions that are never answered despite the secret being made apparent.

The first of these seeks to know why Luptack would occasionally feel a "sensation…beginning in her lower belly that she's never felt before: some feeling that one piece of a Laarger puzzle is about to fall into place" Moore, 2024, pg. 340) every time the investigation would veer towards the name of the Van Laars. As mentioned earlier, Luptack experiences these recurrently, but mostly in relation to either Van Laars or the Hewitts. Once again, Moore offers no particular reasoning or explanation for where this "sensation' keeps appearing and what it is rooted in. But as readers, we identify with her emotional ebb and flow and begin feeling similar sensations against these characters along with her.

In fact, Moore uses this convention of feeling or sensation quite liberally with other characters to boot. At one point, rising from her sleep, Alice just knows something bad has happened although there are no apparent signs of it.

She knows something bad has happened. The feeling of it hovers; the fact of it hasn't arrived yet. She sits up. Reaches for the tumbler of gin on her nightstand. Drinks painfully. (Moore, 2024, pg. 340)

At times Moore refers to this feeling as a "bug", that Judyta would feel in her abdomen, that she was told by her senior investigative partner she would feel every time she felt she was nearly there in cracking the case of the mystery. It is imperative to note, however, that when Denny refers to the feeling of the "bug" in the pit of the stomach that investigators feel, he mentions it in a non-serious way and laughs it off. However, her "bugs" or feelings for or against a hypothesis were almost invariably well-placed.

For a twenty-first-century writer, to apply a convention of "intuition" in a mystery novel that liberally, even when it came to investigative journalism is a little unusual. Modern-day writers typically rely on sturdier pieces of evidence to shape their mystery novels in as convincing a style as possible. Moore's reliance on intuition is more in tune with the writing styles of Collins and Haggard, than contemporary writers of mystery and crime novels.

The only plausible justification for such a liberal application of the trope of "intuition" in her mystery novel could be attributed to the fact that Moore primarily planned her writing to be more revelational than logical. This means that although the Van Laars's secret and corrupt practices have been outed, the mystery somehow remains. The biggest indicator supporting this theory is the ending of the novel where, once again, relying on her "intuition", Luptack decides that Barbara, the Van Laars's granddaughter who was also now lost 12 years later, and who many members of the investigating team had likely pronounced as dead, was, in fact, alive and hiding in a hideout arranged by Tessie Jo. This magnanimous finding, which proves to be true is purely predicated on Luptack's intuition. She "has no evidence that she'll find anything on the other side" (Moore, 2024, pg. 507) but

"pulled by a hunch that she hasn't been able to shake, ever since she spoke to Louise Donnadieu—she strips down to her bathing suit" (507). The novel reaches a crescendo when, upon finding her theory correct and locating an alert Barbara in Tessie Jo's hideout across the other side of the river belt, Luptack makes the shocking decision of keeping her incredible finding, one that can skyrocket her career as an investigator, under wraps.

There she is: Barbara Van Laar, standing straight and strong. At home in her body, at home in the woods. Something about her looks immortal, thinks Judy: a spirit, an apparition, more god than child.

Judy keeps swimming until, at last, she reaches the opposite shore.

When she looks back to the island she sees only the pines, drawn closed like a curtain around the girl. (Moore, 2024, pg. 509)

The final scene of Liz Moore's mystery novel makes it a classic case of revelational mystery where, despite the secret being out, the mystery remains. Why did Luptack not take Barbara back with her to the Van Lars? Will Barabara be able to survive on her own? Will Luptack ever out Barabara's secret to the world? A number of key questions are never answered and as in the philosophy of Boyer, having the knowledge only makes one more puzzled. Had the novel ended with the confirmation of Barabar's demise, the story would have neatly fit into the category of logical mystery where the wrongly accused are avenged in one way or another and the criminals have paid their dues. Instead, as readers, we are now regaled by the fact that Barabra, a 12-year-old girl who should not be left to fend for herself against an unrelenting nature, is in fact left alone and by none other than the very person whose job was to secure her well and alive.

However, Moore's build-up of relying on the topes of animal magnetism, including reliance on one's "intuition", a "hunch", or a "feeling", helps draw some closure to the ending. If one is to give credit to Inspector Luptack for cracking open the ultimate mystery by locating Barbara by solely relying on her intuition, then as readers, we must also trust her intuition when it comes to the decision of allowing Barbara to keep her secret and fend for herself under Tessie Jo's supervision. Just as how with revelational mysteries or the secrets of the heavens, we suspend the need or even our ability to ever be party to all of the celestial secrets, we must also forfeit our doubts about the controversial decision made by Professor Luptack in so far as it has always been her intuition in the novel that has led her closest to the truth. We therefore see how by employing the rituals of animal magnetism in her novel, Moore is able to bring some closure to her novel which is more in tune with a revelational mystery which can never be demystified than a mundane investigative or logical one.

Conclusion

Rotating between more than five different points-of-view and multiple time periods, Moore's *God of the Woods* is truly a rigorous puzzle piece to design from either the aesthetic or the logical standpoint and yet Moore manages to imbue her narrative with great aesthetic quality all the while trying her best to preserve its logical integrity. It was the premise of this study to showcase how the use of mystique or uncanny elements, which, a century ago, must have been accounted for by reference to the popularized cultural beliefs around animal magnetism, were Moore's way of justifying the revelational nature of her mystery.

As the analysis suggests, since the uncanny feelings of the occult had always been part of Luptack's investigative journey and the primary contributor towards her cracking the case, her reliance on it towards the end as she makes the controversial decision of keeping the discovery of Barabara a secret, not only appears plausible but also justifiable. This explains why Moore has relied so liberally on the use of this trope instead of strictly adhering to cues of logic. It also shows why *God of the Woods* works so well as a revelational mystery where some questions never get answered despite the secret being brought to light.

Finally, while some deem this type of revelational mystery as flawed on account of the number of questions that go unexplained or unanswered, there is a certain artistic merit in a work of mystery fiction that continues to sustain the mystery even after de-mystifying it. Indeed, such a paradox is difficult to explain, however, since Moore has successfully achieved that in her novel, it stands to reason that the "mystery" in mystery novels can mean a number of things and a revelational mystery authorship of such kind reinforces the limitations of human cognition and access to knowledge that it is always hampered with.

المستخلص

المغناطيسية الحيوانية وأدب الغموض الحديث – استكشاف رواية *إله الغابة* لمور كغموض استكشافي

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تُعدُّ رواية إله الغابة لمور عملاً فنيًا معاصرًا بامتياز في أدب الغموض. إذ تُسرد من خلال أكثر من ست وجهات نظر مختلفة، وتمتد عبر خمس فترات زمنية، ما يجعلها محاولة شاقة من قبل مور لطرح تحدٍّ غامض وفكري أمام القارئ، مع الحفاظ في الوقت ذاته على تكاملها المنطقي والجمالي. ولم يكن تحقيق هذا التوازن بين المنطق والجمال أمرًا يسيرًا، إذ يبدو أن مور استعان في روايته بمفهوم "المغناطيسية الحيوانية"، وهو أسلوب سرده استخدمه كُتّاب أدب الغموض في القرن الثامن عشر قبل أن يُنبذ لاحقًا بعد دحضه علميًا من قبل المجتمع العلمي في القرن التاسع عشر. ومع تفنيد نظرية المغناطيسية الحيوانية، المعروفة أيضًا بالتنويم المغناطيسي، تلاشى توظيفها كعنصر سردي في روايات الغموض، مما جعل الغالبية العظمى من الروايات البوليسية الحديثة تعتمد على المنطق والتحقيق وحدهما. ومن المثير للاهتمام أن عودة مور إلى هذا الأسلوب السردي في إله الغابة تفضي إلى استنتاجات مذهلة.

تبيّن هذه الدراسة كيف يوظّف مور المغناطيسية الحيوانية ليس فقط كعنصر جمالي، بل أيضًا كرمزٍ يساهم في ترسيخ الرواية ضمن فئة الغموض الاستكشافي، حيث يظل الحل، رغم فك شفرته، محتفظًا بهالة من الغموض والإثارة التي تُبقي القارئ متحفزًا حتى النهاية.

الكلمات المفتاحية :المغناطيسية الحيوانية، الأدب البوليسي، التنويم المغناطيسي، الغموض، الغموض الاستكشافي.

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