

REWRITING AS DE-CENTERING OF THE MASTER NARRATIVES IN J.M. HARRIS' *THE GOSPEL OF LOKI*

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ABSTRACT: Although rewriting master narratives like the Bible and mythology is a well-established literary sub-genre which goes back to Ovid and Virgil, it has obtained a new dimension as a challenging literary technique with Postmodernism. In the contemporary literary canon, there is a tendency to revisit canonical old texts and this literary practice is called "rewriting". Many authors rewrite these old stories from new perspectives and sometimes even in more modern contexts. This literary method is full of promise of freshness and novelty for the author, the reader, and the critic. Rewriting an older text is to rediscover, redefine, and re-interpret it from a perspective challenging enough to force the reader and the critic to question everything they previously knew about the text. It is in this sceptical mood that postmodernist fiction employs the technique of rewriting. By means of rewriting the old texts, authors open up, for mini-narratives, new space previously invaded by grand narratives. With the newly freed mini-narratives come alternative realities that deconstruct the universal reality of grand narratives. This article aims to analyze the concept of rewriting in the novel genre as a postmodern critic of and challenge to grand narratives. How grand narratives work and how they are deconstructed through rewriting are analyzed in the example of the comparative analysis of the trickster figure Loki from Norse mythology and the rewriting of these myths from Loki's perspective in Joanne M. Harris' *The Gospel of Loki*. Rewriting in the context of this study is defined as a conscious, critical, and politically motivated postmodern technique.

Keywords: Rewriting, postmodernism, deconstruction, grand narrative, masternarrative, Joanne M. Harris, *The Gospel of Loki*

J. M. HARRIS'N *THE GOSPEL OF LOKI* ROMANINDA ÜST ANLATILARIN MERKEZSİZLEŞMESİ OLARAK YENİDEN YAZMA

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ÖZ: *İncil* ve çeşitli mitlere konu olmuş öykülerin yeniden yazımı, Ovidius ve Vergilius'a dayanan köklü bir edebî alt tür olsa da, Postmodernizm ile alışılmışı meydan okuyan edebî bir teknik olarak yeni bir boyut kazanmıştır. Çağdaş edebiyat kapsamında kanonda kendine yer bulmuş eski metinlerin yeniden ele alınması yönünde bir temayül söz konusudur. Bu edebî pratiğe ise "yeniden yazım" adı verilir. Pek çok yazar, bu eski öyküleri yeni bir bakış açısından, hatta kimi zaman modernize edilmiş bir bağlamda yeniden yazmaktadır. Bu edebî pratik; yazar, okur ve eleştirmen için yenilik vadetmektedir. Eski bir metni yeniden yazmak; okuru ve eleştirmeni bu metne dair daha önceden bildikleri her şeyi sorgulayacak bir bakış açısından hareketle bu metni yeniden keşfetmek, yeniden tanımlamak ve yeniden yorumlamak anlamına gelir.

Postmodernizm, yeniden yazım tekniğini bu kuşkucu tutumla uygulamaktadır. Eski metinleri yeniden yazarak yazarlar; üst anlatıların işgalindeki alanlarda mini anlatılar için yer açmaktadırlar. Özgür kılınan mini anlatılar, üst anlatıların evrensel gerçekliğini yıkan alternatif gerçeklikleri beraberinde getirirler. Bu makale, roman türünde yeniden yazım tekniğini üst anlatılara karşı postmodern bir eleştiri ve başkaldırı olarak incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Üst anlatıların işleyişi ve yeniden yazım tekniğiyle nasıl yapı bozuma uğradıkları; İskandinav mitolojisindeki hilekâr karakter Loki'nin mitlerdeki orijinal karakterizasyonu ile mitlerin yeniden yazımı olan Joanne M. Harris'in *The Gospel of Loki* romanındaki karakterizasyonunun karşılaştırmalı tahlili üzerinden ele alınmaktadır. Bu makalenin bağlamında yeniden yazım, bilinçli, eleştirel ve politik bir postmodern teknik olarak tanımlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeniden yazım, postmodernizm, yapıbozum, üst anlatı, Joanne M. Harris, *The Gospel of Loki*

Introduction

Rewriting, in the broadest sense, is the act of writing an old text again. The term's definition in OED is as follows: "Write (something) again so as to alter or improve it".¹ There may be several reasons to rewrite an old text. A text may be rewritten in order to address a certain audience; for example, a classic work can be rewritten with a simplified language in order to make it more understandable for younger readers. Another purpose of reproducing any given text may be to make it more palatable for readers belonging to another culture than that of the text's original audience's culture; the text is rewritten so that it is stripped of any utterances or references that might offend the members of the target culture. However, in the context of Postmodernist literature, the term rewriting assumes a rather different purpose, which is to defy the original text, to give voice to the silenced by rewriting, or writing back to, the canon, and to present it in a new light to encourage the readers to question what is offered them as the universal truth. In other words, the rewritten version of a text works on the same characters, usually in the same setting, but with a different perspective; this practice may be considered to

¹ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/rewrite>, Mayıs 2017

have an element of parody or pastiche, both important elements of postmodernist fiction. If the rewritten text has a tone of parody in it, which it usually does, the aim is to ridicule or highlight the claims and statements of the original text. That is to say, what is offered in the original text as truth is shown to be groundless and representations therein are deconstructed and reshaped.

As Abrams explains “the system of linguistic and literary conventions that constitute a literary text are said by structuralist and poststructuralist critics to be “naturalized” in the activity of reading, in that the artifices of a nonreferential “textuality” are made to seem *vraisemblable* (credible)—that is, made to give the illusion of referring to reality—by being brought into accord with modes of discourse and cultural stereotypes that are so familiar and habitual as to seem natural”.² Postmodern rewriting undermines the idea of originality as the text is “woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages (what language is not?) antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony”; thus, “the intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation”.³ After Bakhtin, Kristeva proposes that a text is “a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another”⁴, thus, it is “a production that cannot be reduced to representation”.⁵ Therefore, as Kristeva claims, authors do not produce original texts but rather they pile up them from pre-existent texts, and the texts are nothing more than compilation. Rewriting as a technique proposes that any utterance is already written and in a rewritten text “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”⁶ Intertextuality as a comparative investigation undercuts any authorial intention. “By highlighting unvoiced modes of intertextual work in other guises—paraphrase, formulaic expression, variant, recontextualization, translation—various tacit critical agendas behind intertextuality’s representations become visible. Among intertextuality’s most

² Meyer Howard Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Stamford: Cengage Learning, 2015, p. 398.

³ Roland Barthes, “From Word to Text”, *Image—Music—Text*, Stephen Heath (trans.), New York: The Noonday Press, 1977, p. 160.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Ed. Leon S. Roudiez, Transl. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 36.

⁵ Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 86.

⁶ R. Barthes, *ibid.* p. 142.

practical functions is (re-) evaluation by means of comparison, counterposition and contrast”.⁷ Thus, in the context of postmodernism “[r]ewriting the canon offers several possibilities”.⁸ The most significant possibility offered by rewriting is “the opportunity to reverse, or perhaps just problematize, the subject and object positions of the original text”.⁹ In this context, through a deconstructive approach, a rewritten text deals with representations, since ideas and opinions are conveyed through ideologically shaped representations. It is the ideologically shaped representations that postmodernist rewriting renounces and aims to subvert by showing how the claims to truth and reality are just illusory constructions of the dominant worldview conveyed by means of metanarratives. Gayatri Spivak, known for her critical work in the fields of feminism and postcolonial theory, reminds that “[t]he role of literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored”.¹⁰ In other words, narratives, especially master narratives around which all other narratives are formed, legitimate cultural representations by disguising them as undeniable truths. This can be considered as the main reason why postmodernist fiction resort to rewriting; that is to say, postmodernist fiction rewrite the old texts with a view to shed light on the misrepresented and allow for the multiplicity of subjective realities, all of which are textually constructed.

It would be fair to say that representation is one of the main issues which rewriting grapples with. There are many examples of revisionist rewriting in literature. To list some, we can mention the following pairs: Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe* (1986), Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and Patrick White’s *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), Beowulf (manuscript dated back to c.975-1010 AD) and John Gardner’s *Grendel* (1971). Salman Rushdie underlines this issue through the words of one of his characters in his novel *The Satanic Verses*: “They describe us. ... They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct”.¹¹ It should be noted that the quotation mentions a binary opposition “we / they” and highlights how representation works; thus, the first necessary element of a master narrative is achieved. Another insight this quotation

⁷ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, p. 7.

⁸ Jennifer Anne McClinton, “Rewriting empire: Rewriting canonical British texts from a postcolonial perspective.” (Diss.). Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 2001, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Three women’s texts and a critique of imperialism”, *Critical inquiry*, Vol:12, 1985, pp. 1-28.

¹¹ Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, New York: The Consortium, 1988, p. 168.

provides is that the side which has the power transforms the other so as to fit in the master narrative that sets all values by describing the other side and claiming that this is the truthful representation. In any logocentric pairing the powerful one defines the other. Rewriting the existing texts offers the opportunity to revise/recreate/reshape these (mis)representations; therefore, the practice of rewriting has become an important element in postmodernist fiction. Jennifer Anne McClinton explains the reason why rewriting is a favorite method of postmodernist, postcolonial, and feminist authors:

“For authors who choose to grapple with these descriptions, the possibilities for meaningful, complex, accurate descriptions open up in historically telling ways that are impossible with wholly ‘new’ texts that might appear to reject the [constructed] past outright. For these reasons, writers ... all over the world are drawn to the practice of rewriting, retelling, revising, and resituating old stories so that the new versions are more applicable to their experiences and lives.”¹²

As implied by the quotation above, rewriting the old texts is a much more effective way of dealing with the historical misrepresentations. Rewriting as a literary practice concerns itself with representations and master narratives hoping firstly to revise, deny and deconstruct and secondly to reconstruct, reshape, and finally to offer a representation which is desired by the previously misrepresented. Due to these possibilities, rewriting as a literary practice is a crucial element of postmodernist, postcolonial, and feminist critical theory. At this point, it is necessary to understand how a master narrative sets logo centric binaries. Master narrative, or as sometimes called metanarrative or grand narrative, is one of the key terms in contemporary literary criticism. The term was introduced by Jean François Lyotard in his “The Postmodern Condition”, which refers to any narrative which claims to be able to explain the world in entirety in the light of one absolute truth/reality.¹³ Joseph Stephens and Robyn McCallum define metanarrative as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience”.¹⁴ Another definition provided by Hans Bertens explains that metanarratives are “supposedly transcendent and universal truths that underpin western civilization”.¹⁵ Most attempts at defining master narratives emphasize that they are totalizing while laying claim to universality, and are overarching. In

¹² J.A. McClinton, *ibid.* p. 2-3.

¹³ Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester UP. 1984, p. 6.

¹⁴ Joseph Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children’s Literature*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 6.

¹⁵ Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. London: Routledge, 1995, p. 119.

a master narrative, no trespassing is allowed; in other words, there are fixed definitions or categories which cannot be challenged. Every entity is entitled to an unchangeable definition and fall into a category whose borders are precisely drawn.

Since Harris' novel deals with Loki the infamous trickster figure of the Norse mythology, it is necessary to point out the master narrative of the world in the Norse mythology and how it functions; therefore, a brief background of the Norse myths should be included in the present study. As in other mythologies around the world, the canon of Norse mythology too includes specific myths that explain the creation of the universe, the races that live in it, including stories of deities which reveal their specific characteristics, and, of course, how the end times take place and the world is reborn. In Norse mythology, even gods and goddesses are not immortal. There is also the belief in the unchanging fate, which is called Wyrð. Even Odin the king of the gods is incapable of changing the fate. Another important aspect of Norse mythology is that the Nordic universe told in the myths is a gloomy one because the gods know of Ragnarok, the end of times, and how they will die in battle during Ragnarok. This prophecy looms over the gods all the time. Much of the information we have today comes from Snorri Sturluson who was a 12th century historian, poet, and politician. He collected the sagas and myths and wrote them down in his Prose Edda, which is believed to be written around 1200 A.D.

In Norse mythology, there are two main forces: Order and Chaos. The gods and goddesses who live in the high seat of the deities, Asgard, are responsible for keeping the balance between these two primordial forces. This is a binary opposition similar to the one in Christian and Islamic traditions which talk of a struggle between good and evil till the Day of Judgment. Such dualism is a crucial element of a master narrative. The favored side of this binary opposition is represented by Odin. In Norse mythology, Odin is the father of the gods and therefore the protector of Order. Odin goes by many names such as All-Father, One-Eyed, High-One, and so on. He is the god of wisdom, poetry, and victory. Together with his brothers Vili and Ve, he fashions the worlds from the corpse of the giant Ymir. He is often depicted with two ravens, Hugin and Munin, which keep watch over the worlds and report the events to him. In several myths, it is told that Odin has an insatiable thirst for knowledge and does not refrain from sacrifice for the sake of obtaining wisdom. He is famously known for sacrificing one of his eyes in return for a sip from the well of Mimir, the well of wisdom. According to another story, Odin hangs himself from Yggdrasil, the world tree which connects the nine worlds in Norse cosmology and pierces his body with a spear. He remains in

this position, hanging by the tree and looking into the void, for nine days and nine nights until finally he reaches a state in which the inspiration of the Runes, the magical letters of the runic alphabet, come to him. Since he is wise and benevolent in the original myths, Odin teaches the secret of runes to other Asgardians. With all the qualities mentioned above, Odin represents the ideals of the master narrative of the Norse mythology which can be defined as good vs evil or light versus dark.

Loki, on the other hand, is not of the same race as the Asgardians. He is the son of a giant named Farbauti and his mother is the giantess Laufey. He is often referred to as the son of Wildfire, a child of Chaos. For some unknown reason, Odin is said to have sworn an oath of brotherhood with Loki. The lore on Loki presents him as the trickster, the mischief-maker, and the enemy of the gods. Some interpret him as the counterpart of the devil, or Lucifer, because the myths tell that he will lead the army of Chaos against the army of the gods on the day of Ragnarok. He is referred to as “the prince of lies, ‘the originator of deceit, and the back-biter’.”¹⁶ As an evil trickster, Loki causes the gods to get into trouble, but he often helps them to get out of the trouble as well. Some misdeeds of Loki towards the gods can be listed as the theft of the golden apples of Idun – these apples were the source of the gods’ eternal youth; if it had not been for these apples, the gods would not have been able to fend off old age’s effects – and the death of Baldr, the god of love, peace, and forgiveness. Loki’s offspring is also evil and monstrous. His offspring includes Fenrir the wolf, Jormungand the world serpent, and Hel. It is prophesied that when the day of Ragnarok arrives Fenrir will fight and devour Odin, and Jormungand will fight Thor and Thor will kill it with his hammer, Mjollnir, yet the venom of the serpent will kill him.

In the world described by Norse myths, there are two competing forces, Order and Chaos. The gods in the leadership of Odin, all of whom reside in the famous hall of Valhalla in Asgard, are responsible for maintaining the order in the nine worlds until the day of the final battle arrives. Loki, although he is allowed to reside with the gods in Asgard, is the representative of the evil forces of Chaos which seek to destroy the order so dear to the gods. Therefore, it can be claimed that in the world of Norse myths, the master narrative of good versus evil, or, order versus chaos, is at play, and that Odin and his fellow Asgardians stand for the order and the good, whereas Loki, followed by his offspring, is seen as the symbol of evil and chaos.

¹⁶ J.H. Belton, (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of Norse Mythology*. Project Gutenberg, 2012, p. 207.

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Through The Other's Eyes: *The Gospel of Loki*

In *The Gospel of Loki*, the narrator is Loki himself and the events that the reader is already familiar from the myths and sagas are narrated through his perspective. In rewriting, the authorial voice is a “problematic metaphor, a simulacrum aiming at preserving the belief that there is an identifiable cause for the existence of the text, a cause that functions as a guarantee of authority”. In short, “the authorial voice stands for the origin of the text, but its power is severely challenged by the fact that no writer, except again in a metaphorical sense, creates his own linguistic instrument”.¹⁷ The novel opens with the foreword where Loki addresses the reader to inform that now it is his time to tell his side to the stories. He, in a jocular manner, refers to and ridicules the “Authorized Version” which, until now, has always been presented and acknowledged as truthful. He voices his suspicion in this “Authorized Version”. In the foreword, he refers to Odin as the Old Man and says that Odin is a master storyteller. Even from the opening of the novel, Loki emphasizes the importance of story-telling and words. After hinting that Odin’s version of the stories is biased, he starts telling the stories from his own perspective.

He starts to recount the story of how he and Odin meet for the first time and how he ends up crossing into the land of Order. Loki tells the reader that he was a formless being, a wildfire, in the realm of Chaos, when Odin called to him. When his curiosity gets the best of him, Loki leaves the realm of Chaos and meets this mysterious man. Odin reveals his secret plan to obtain the runes and eventually gain more power for himself and confesses that as a symbol of Order he cannot bend the rules himself and for this reason he needs Loki’s help. While Loki is still confused about what to do, Odin marks him with his glam – a kind of magical mark – and thus tricks Loki into coming with him to serve him. He also promises Loki that he will make him a god among the other gods.

The story goes on to tell the war between the two tribes of the Aesir and the Vanir. Loki tells the reader that, back in that day, Odin was not the powerful god he is yet to become. The Vanir are the firemen, descendants of Chaos and they hold the power of runes, which Odin desperately desires for himself. Agreeing on the exchange of hostages, Odin deceives the Vanir into teaching him the secret of runes. Loki then talks about how he is received by other gods in Asgard. He feels disappointed because the reception is not what Odin had promise him to be. Among other gods’ gaze, Loki feels himself as a despised and unwelcome guest.

¹⁷ Claude Maisonnat et al. (eds.), *Rewriting/Reprising in Literature: The Paradoxes of Intertextuality*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, p. xx.

Afterwards, the novel goes on to retell from the perspective of Loki the misdeeds done by him in the original myths. By re-telling these stories, Loki explains that he made all these mistakes, but his motives were not evil. Several myths that are retold in several chapters of the novel are: the fortification of Asgard, how Sif lost her golden hair, the kidnapping of Idun, and the death of Baldr. He seeks to justify his motives as innocent. For instance, his daughter Hel is in love with Baldr; this is the reason why he causes Baldr's death: in order to make his daughter happy by sending Baldr to Hel's realm, the world of the dead.

Through all these adventures, Loki's relation with the gods gradually breaks apart. Especially after Baldr's death, the gods do not refrain from openly expressing their dislike of Loki. Finally, the gods have had enough of Loki's troubles and decide to bind him to a rock in a cave where a snake will drip its venom on Loki's face. Loki, meditating on Mimir's prophecy that the fallen will return home and the child will liberate the father, bides his time in the darkness where he is imprisoned until the Ragnarok arrives. Having provided firstly some background information on Norse mythology and the characters and then going through the main points in the synopsis of Harris' novel above, the study in the following section analyzes the comparison of how Loki's representation differ in the novel from the one in the original stories.

In the original myths Loki is not portrayed as one of the favoured figures of Norse mythology. Loki in the myths can be considered to assume the role of "the Other", the outcast, and the misfit, in contrast to which the dominant culture defines itself as the good, the pure, and the ideal. To give an idea of how Loki is perceived in the original myths, attention must be paid to what Snorri Sturluson has to say to describe him:

*"Also numbered among the Aesir is he whom some call the mischief-monger of the Aesir, and the first father of falsehoods, and blemish of all gods and men: he is named Loki or Loptr, son of Farbauti the giant; his mother was Laufey or Nal; his brothers are Byleistr and Helblindi. Loki is beautiful and comely to look upon, evil in spirit, very fickle in habit. (Transl. Brodeur)"*¹⁸

As can be seen in the above quotation, Loki's description involves many negative words and there are accusations to him as being the father of lies, evil-spirited, and the bringer of mischief. This brings in mind the question why

¹⁸ A.G. Brodeur, (2016). *Prose Edda by SnorriSturluson*. Los Angeles: Enhanced Media, 2016, p. 105.

Loki is depicted as an evil being. The answer lies in his origins as well as in the structure of the world described by Norse mythology.

In the nine worlds of Norse mythology, there is a struggle between the good and the evil. These two forces work by opposing each other. In other words, Order can exist by creating an enemy for itself. No matter how ancient, these myths, too, centered on a master narrative – the master narrative of the good versus evil. Although today myths are appreciated by the majority of the modern readers – outside the academia – for their limitless imaginative quality, during the times when they were orally transmitted from one generation to the other the main function of myths were to instruct and teach certain values. The existence of an outsider like Loki among the high gods of the Aesir and why he is attributed to the worst qualities of all, then, can be explained by this specific function of myths. Loki would serve as the representative of all evil-doers and all the audience would see in Loki's example how evil-doing is punished, and thus only the approved patterns of behavior and thought would be made into norms, whereas the divergent patterns of behavior and thought would be marginalized into nonexistence. Being born to parents who belong to the race of frost giants, Loki is naturally seen as a threat to the order of the Asgardians, as the frost giants refuse to acknowledge the supremacy of the Asgardian gods and goddesses. Loki is portrayed as mischief-maker, evil, unruly and cunning. As he has the ability to shapeshift, he is depicted as unreliable. Pitted against the dominant ideology of the Asgardians, Loki is forced into the role of the trickster by means of which the dominant ideology of the Asgardians is imposed and idealized.

Therefore, it can be suggested that Loki's evil representation in the original myths is due to the master narrative of good versus evil. Every community and every culture aggrandizes its own values by creating an "other" who lacks these values. Stefanie von Schnurbein suggests that "Loki's magical capacities, especially shape- and gender-shifting abilities, consign him to a liminal position between fundamental opposites".¹⁹ As asserted in the theoretical chapter of the present study, master narratives are formed by fundamental, fixed, and absolute truths and ideas; thus, liminality cannot exist in the texture of a master narrative, and if a liminal character intrudes, he/she is declared the enemy that must be forced to fit into one side of the binary opposition. Much in the same vein as Althusser's ideological state apparatuses, the original Norse myths help to propagate the Asgardian ideology as the ideal and to marginalize anyone falling short to comply with it. Loki's lineage, in

¹⁹ Stefanie von Schnurbein, "The function of Loki in Snorri Sturluson's 'Edda'". *History of religions*, Vol: 40, 2000, pp. 109–124.

this case, and the different nature of his abilities inevitably causes him to be the other against whom Odin builds up his discourse. Loki is always present in the myths alongside the gods, because he serves a purpose: to represent the defamed other who is undesirable and marginalized. In Harris' novel, the reader finds a different Loki. He is portrayed as a curious, formless being in the realm of Chaos. This formless being is innocent of the worldly experiences, which means he has no understanding or notion of good or evil. Then he is summoned by Odin, the cunning, ambitious, and power-seeking Norse god. When they meet, Odin reveals his secret desire to obtain more power and confesses that he "cannot be seen to break [his] own rules" and he needs "someone on [his] side who can break them for [him] when necessary".²⁰ Here there is a subtle reference to the fixed notions of master narratives; it should be noted that Odin needs Loki because he himself cannot defy the rules, which means Odin, since he is on the "good" side, needs a scapegoat onto whom he means to project all the undesired qualities and whom he wishes to blame for his own misdeeds. In the same vein, Loki explains further into the story that he thinks the Asgardians bear with his residing with them just to have "a whipping boy; someone to despise, to blame".²¹ In other words, the dominant ideology/master narrative allows for Loki's existence only to legitimate its own values by projecting all the despicable qualities onto him. Unlike his portrayal as the wisest of all Norse gods, Odin is revealed to have a darker nature in the novel. He is thirsty for power and does not refrain from manipulating others for achieving his own interests. When told from Loki's perspective, the roles of Odin and Loki are reversed; Loki is the innocent victim of a god lusting for power, whereas Odin is far from the wise god he is depicted to be in the original myths. Such a reversal achieves to arouse the suspicion that rewriting/retelling aims to create.

"If the text requires a voice it is because, above all, it is a network of relationships between discontinuous énoncés, and that network is motionless, it hovers above the linearity of discourse; the voice is its coherence proper, it defines it as text, as fabric, as intertexture".²² Harris' Loki touches upon the importance of re-telling the stories from his own perspective in the opening of the novel. In his words:

"See, this is the thing about history. His story. That's all it is. The Old Man's version of events, which basically the rest of us are supposed to accept

²⁰ Joanne M. Harris, *The Gospel of Loki*, London: Gollancz, 2014, p. 23.

²¹ J.M. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 35.

²² Pierre Alferi, *Chercher une Phrase*, Paris: Christian Bourgoiséditeur, 1991, p. 69.

as the undisputed truth. ... I happen to know that history is nothing but spin and metaphor ... Others have already had their chance to tell their version of events. This is mine. ... it's at least as true as the official version ... So far, history, such as it is, has cast me in a rather unflattering role. Now it's my turn to take the stage.”²³

Loki's character is well aware of the manipulative relationship between the narrator and the story. In the quotation above, Loki hints at the subjectivity of reality, calling his own version of the events as true as the official – meaning Odin's – version. Later, he goes on to describe himself; his choice of words should be carefully noted: “the Light-Bringer, the misunderstood, the elusive, the handsome and modest hero”.²⁴ By using these adjectives, Loki redefines his identity. It is through these adjectives that he desires the reader to view him. Harris' Loki hints at the power that naming has over the way anybody is perceived and seen. He says: “All words have power, of course, but names are the most potent of all [...] To name a being is to subdue it”. Rightly accused by Loki, naming is the most effective weapon, so to say, by which a character can be portrayed as the other. Those who have the authority to write down an event or a story own the power of words; thus, they are free to impose their own ideologies as the standard mindset and anyone challenging their authority can be demonized. That is why it is important for Harris' Loki to rewrite the myths and redefine himself with new adjectives. It is undoubtedly the only effective way of countering the imposed notions of the authority. Perhaps the most negative adjective Loki is described in all literature about his character is that of the evil trickster. There are certain misdeeds of Loki that earn him his notorious reputation as an evil trickster. Harris' Loki does not fail to address his being called “the trickster”; he mentions the way the gods and goddesses of Valhalla treats him:

“Whatever I did, whatever I risked, however much I tried to fit in, I would never be one of them. I would never have a hall, or earn the respect I so clearly deserved. I would never be a god; only ever a dog on a chain. Oh, I might be of use to them now and then, but as soon as the current crisis was done, it would be back to the kennel.”

As much as the quotation above is considered, a new perspective is provided by Loki; the evil image drawn for Loki by the stories that favor the Asgardians is undermined. At this point, Loki in all his honesty admits to having sacrificed many things for the acceptance of the Asgardians, and, by doing so, he also reveals the Asgardians' hypocrisy and xenophobic attitude.

²³ J.M. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

It is now put forth in daylight that the gods and goddesses of Asgard see Loki as a tool which is to be used and abused only for their own interests. Therefore, Loki's "misdeeds" are justified as nothing but attempts to earning their respect and acceptance. This decentering of the good/evil binary opposition clearly evidences the one-sided, biased nature of the original myths in which Loki is reduced to a purely evil flat character. The novelist, by debunking the binary oppositions which are mostly integrated in the practical methodology of literary characterization, is able to recreate Loki as a multidimensional character, not purely black nor purely white, but somewhat grey as he embodies both good and bad in himself. The Asgardians too are not purely white and good characters, either, as they selfishly pursue means of achieving their own desires and interests even at the cost of blaming their evil nature on an unlucky scapegoat.

There are certain misdeeds of Loki that earn him his notorious reputation as an evil trickster. One of these misdeeds is the death of Balder, the god of beauty, peace, and forgiveness. In the original myth, Loki causes his death by making the blind god Hoder throw mistletoe sharpened like a spear at Balder. In the original myth, Loki's motivation for getting Balder killed is shown to be his hatred towards the gods. However, in the novel, Loki tells the reader that he causes Balder's death only to make his daughter, Hel, happy. Hel is the goddess of the dead and resides in the realm called Niflheim. She is desperately in love with the god of beauty. While paying her a visit, Loki asks her: "How badly do you want him?"²⁵ Hel replies "I'd do anything" and promises to do her father a favor if he helps her.²⁶ Out of paternal love for his daughter, Loki schemes to get Balder killed, since this is the only way his daughter can be together with him. Thus, from the perspective of Loki, a feeling of paternal duty does not make the person evil. This is how he attempts to acquit himself of the role he played in Balder's death. Another way he defends himself when accused of a certain misdeed is to claim that he is inexperienced about the life in Asgard and that he cannot figure out the consequences of his actions. He blames Odin as the cause of his faulty actions: "Greed, hatred, jealousy – all the corrupting emotions with which Odin had infected me."²⁷ In a way, Loki rejects that he is the source of all evil and accuses Odin of defiling him with sinister emotions. What Loki does here is to deconstruct the image of "goodness". The master narrative of good versus evil is debunked, since the meaning-creating center of the story is

²⁵ J.M. Harris, *ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

deconstructed and concepts such as good and evil are set loose in a decentered text.

Conclusion

By means of retelling the events through his perspective, Loki not only redefines his identity in the face of all the historical accusations of being evil, but also brings into light the dark sides of Odin who symbolizes the dominant ideology due to his status as the king of gods. That Loki's re-telling is also a mockery of master narratives is hinted by the title of the novel, *The Gospel of Loki*. Gospel, by definition, is "something accepted or promoted as infallible truth or as a guiding principle or doctrine". Loki, as the narrator, hints that both Odin's and his version of the events are equally true; yet, they tell the events starkly different, which means the truth/reality is relative and not a universal absolute. By calling his version a gospel, Loki foreshadows what he is critical of.

Rewriting in postmodern fiction is an invaluable means of creating space for the mini-narratives of the marginalized, silenced, and excluded individuals as well as communities. Rewriting older texts which claim that there is a single, universal reality is considered by many scholars and academics as the best method of responding to these texts. Contrary to the misconception that postmodernist fiction is nothing but anti-literature, without any respect to literary traditions and without any "real" concern for the world and the society, the thesis has demonstrated that postmodernist novels which employ the technique of rewriting are, in fact, as interested in and concerned about understanding the world we live in as any other literary movement. Therefore, it has been concluded that rewriting as a postmodern challenge to grand narratives is a conscious, critical, and politically motivated technique which is capable of undermining grand narratives and enabling the reader to approach old literary texts with a fresh and disorienting perspective. In other words, since both novels rewrite older stories and reconstruct the characters – namely Loki – that are portrayed as "the Other", it is hoped that deconstructive reading of postmodern rewriting can guide the way to understanding rewriting as a conscious critical and political practice within several schools of thought such as postmodernism in the context of the present study, but also postcolonialism and feminism for further studies which may hope to analyze rewriting in such contexts.

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