Analysis Of The Main Characters In "The School For Good And Evil"

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the characterization of the main characters in Soman Chainani's novel *The School for Good and Evil*. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method with data collected through close reading and textual analysis. The findings reveal that the novel presents two central characters whose roles subvert conventional expectations of good and evil. Sophie, initially portrayed with the qualities of a traditional protagonist, gradually develops into an antagonist driven by vanity and ambition. In contrast, Agatha, who is outwardly perceived as an antagonist due to her gloomy appearance and social isolation, emerges as the true protagonist, characterized by empathy, loyalty, and moral integrity. These results highlight the novel's contribution to rethinking binary moral frameworks in literature, offering insight into how character development challenges stereotypes of good and evil.

Keywords: main characters, characterization, novel, *The School for Good and Evil*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is a form of artistic expression that reflects human experiences, emotions, and values through language. Beyond entertainment, it serves as a mirror of social, cultural, and moral dimensions of life. Among literary genres, the novel occupies an important role because it presents complex narratives involving characters, conflicts, and themes that allow readers to engage with human experiences in depth.

Characters are one of the most essential elements of a novel, functioning as the driving force of the narrative and embodying the author's perspectives. As Nurgiyantoro (2007) notes, the main character holds a central position, shaping both the storyline and the interactions with other characters. Without strong characterization, a novel risks losing its ability to convey meaning and capture readers' interest.

Previous research has demonstrated varied approaches to character analysis. Hasibuan (2022) explored protagonist and antagonist roles in N.H. Dini's *Keberangkatan*. Chevie, Muhammad, and Indah (2020) examined archetypes in *Hush, Hush* using Jungian theory, while Belin, Antari, and Mulyawan (2017) analyzed psychological, sociological, and physiological aspects of characters in Lemony Snicket's *Bad Beginning*. These studies highlight the significance of character study but largely emphasize structural or archetypal frameworks.

This study addresses the gap by analyzing the characterization of Sophie and Agatha in Soman Chainani's *The School for Good and Evil*. Unlike traditional fairy tales with clear distinctions between good and evil, the novel presents complex character developments that blur these boundaries. Accordingly, this research aims to (1) examine how Sophie and Agatha are characterized at the beginning of the story, and (2) analyze how their development challenges conventional notions of morality.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the characterization of the main characters in Soman Chainani's novel *The School for Good and Evil*. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it seeks to understand human and social phenomena by constructing a comprehensive picture expressed through words, reporting detailed perspectives, and interpreting them within a natural context (Walidin, Saifullah, & Tabrani, 2015). Specifically, this method was used to explore the conflicts experienced by the main characters as represented textually in the novel. In literary analysis, understanding the trajectory of a character's life and the conflicts they face is an essential aspect of interpretation.

Data were collected through documentation techniques, which involved systematically recording and organizing relevant textual evidence from the novel (Laba, Riana, & Schmoll, 2015). In this context, "documents" refer to the textual elements embedded within the narrative structure that reveal character development, conflict, and thematic meaning. Discourse analysis was then applied to examine and interpret linguistic features, narrative strategies, and symbolic representations in the text. This approach enabled the researcher to uncover deeper meanings within the novel's language, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of how the author constructs the moral and psychological dimensions of the characters.

The study relied on two types of data sources: primary and secondary. The primary source was the novel *The School for Good and Evil* itself, which served as the central object of analysis. The secondary sources consisted of supporting references, including scholarly books, journal articles, theses, and other academic materials accessed through online databases. The integration of primary and secondary data strengthened the research foundation, ensuring both textual depth and theoretical support. This combination allowed for a more nuanced analysis of character representation and the novel's broader contribution to discussions of morality and identity in literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of the main characters in the beginning of the story in The School for Good and Evil novel by Soman Chainani

Character is a way of thinking and acting that distinguishes each individual to live and work together, both in the family, society, nation and nation. People with good character can make decisions and are willing to take responsibility for any consequences of their decisions (Rohmana, et. al, 2023). Characters with the highest frequency of presence in the narrative typically carry the most significance inside the novel, with their characteristics serving as the focal point of action and the central topic. These characters are referred to as primary characters. Following a formalist critique analysis of The School for Good and Evil, the researcher discovered that the book is centered around two primary characters. Soman provides a very clear explanation of how Sophie and Agatha's main characters are characterized in the beginning. Soman Chainani has the narrator describe how Sophie, a kind and gentle girl, struggles to become the head of this school at the start of the book in the village of Gavaldon. She explained that she might become an independent woman, have a happy life, and experience her own happiness ever after. At the beginning of the story, it is known that Sophie dreams of herself as a beautiful princess from a kingdom who has a handsome prince as her partner. This can be seen from Sophie's dream at the beginning of the story. Sophie is also someone who really cares about her appearance and beauty. This can be proven when she scolds her father for having less than nine hours of sleep in the sentence below.

> *"Father, if I don't sleep nine hours, my eyes look swollen."* (Page. 2)

When we find out that Sophie never cooked for her father after her mother died, just because Sophie wanted to protect her skin, she thought oil and smoke could clog the pores of the skin. It was reflected in the sentence below.

> *" She had never once cooked a full meal for him, even after her mother died. Naturally she had good reason (the oil and smoke would clog her pores) but she knew it was a sore point."* (Page.3)

There is lots of other evidence that Sophie is a girl who really pays attention to her appearance. When she pouted, she found that her beautiful window had turned into a witch's cage because her father was worried that Sophie had been kidnapped by The School for Good and Evil. She always looked at her face before bathing to make sure her skin was fine, she also took good care of her hair, and she was worried about the cucumbers that might run out because her daughter would finish them. She started to worry that if the cucumbers weren't there, it would make her skin wrinkle. You can imagine that Sophie is a beautiful village girl. This can be proven by the following sentence.

> *"Her father couldn't see she was special, but her mother had. "You are too beautiful for this world, Sophie,"* (Page.3)

We are introduced to Sophie's best friend, who has the opposite image of Sophie. Sophie's closest friend Agatha has a gloomy demeanor, an unattractive appearance, and old shoes. She was recognized as a witch by the villagers since she grew up near the graveyard with her siblings, who appeared healthy. Even people in Gavaldon saw Agatha as having a bad image. This can be proven when Radley, the pale-haired bucktooth, has the habit of following Sophie every morning. The data was taken from Radley's statement below.

> *"'Why are you friends with the witch?' said Radley"* (Page.5)
> *"She has no friends and she's queer. That makes her a witch."* (Page.5)
> *"'The School Master will take her for Evil School,' he said"* (Page.5)

It was explained that Agatha lived in a house without doors filled with green moss and walls made of dark wood, surrounded by sharp weeds; there was an unpleasant smell of a mixture of garlic and wet cats; and a pile of headless bird carcasses was found in the middle of the cemetery. Not only the villagers, but Agatha's mother also expressed the same thing. This data is proven by Agatha's words from her mother.

> *"'My mother says I'm bitter and grumpy,' said Agatha."* (Page. 8)

From this, it is clear that the narrator describes Sophie as the protagonist and Agatha as the antagonist. This can be proven by their appearance as well as the opinions of local villagers. Evidence is taken from the narrator's statement about the village people's views on them. The data was taken from the statement below.

> *"The villagers were staring at them like the solution to a mystery. Good in pink, Evil in black. The School Master's perfect pair.* (Page. 9)

In the "School for Good and Evil" by Soman Chainani, the characters Sophie and Agatha experience significant development that challenges stereotypes of good and evil. As the story progresses, Sophie's character undergoes a striking transformation. Sophie, who initially had the ambition and determination to become a princess and hero of good, was apparently taken to The School for Evil. At certain crucial moments, her actions can be interpreted as behavior that contains elements of a crime or is manipulative and disturbing, which is the opposite of her character as explained in the initial chapter. Sophie's character development shows that she turns into pure evil. This could be an influence on the environment. There is his most famous research, called the "Stanford Prison Experiment," from 1971. This research also shows that the environment is an important factor that determines whether someone behaves well or badly (Nasution, 2022). This is what happened to Sophie when she was in an evil environment. She chose to be evil and depended on the situation. It can be proven with Sophie's action below.

> *"Sophie threw down the glass, threw back her head, and unleashed a horrible cackle that promised Evil, beautiful Evil too pure to fight."* (Page. 326)

Agatha also experiences significant character development as the story progresses. Even though she initially appeared as a prospective student at the School for

Evil, it turns out he was taken to The School for Good, in contrast to Sophie who wanted to be at that school. One of the love languages that Agatha uses with Sophie. By supporting and making Sophie's self-confidence grow, she builds a good personality in Agatha. Agatha is like that because Agatha loves Sophie as her best friend. According to Rohmana 2023, When a person is in love, they typically say romantic things to their partner, like "I love you," "You are beautiful/handsome," "Keep your spirit," or "Yes you.". Although Sophie was initially considered a candidate for The School for Evil, she is actually a good girl and has firmness in her stance. From this discovery, Zimbardo considers that humans actually have the potential to become heroes, but sometimes wait for a certain moment to carry out heroic actions. This happened to Agatha (Nasution, 2022). Agatha is a person who tends to be alone, doesn't care about other people, stays away, and doesn't want to be seen. But when it came to her best friend, pure kindness came to Agatha for her best friend's sake. Pure kindness is a heroic act. It was proven by the statement below.

> *"Agatha thought she might float out of her chair. She wasn't a witch! She wasn't a freak! She felt her smile return, bigger, brighter than before."* (Page. 273)

Sophie and Agatha's character development in the series reflects common themes that challenge stereotypes and detail classic fairy tale concepts. By questioning simple views about good and evil, this story invites readers to rethink their views on morality and the nature of characters in fairy tales. As the story progresses, Sophie and Agatha's journey shows that individuals cannot be easily classified as good or evil. This adds complexity to the story and characters, making "A School for Good and Evil" an interesting exploration of moral nuances in the context of a fairy tale world.

The Use of Main Characters to Break Down Good and Evil in The Story

Characters in a literary work are created by the author to convey his ideas and feelings about something that happens in this world. Characters have the power to dominate the entire story in a literary work. The author can take the character through a lot of problems in different situations (Byl, 2016). In this section, Soman Chainani uses the main characters, especially Sophie and Agatha, intelligently to break the stereotype of good and evil in the story "The School for Good and Evil". Sophie and Agatha are not just trapped in stereotypes but experience complex character development throughout the story. Their traits develop and exceed initial expectations, illustrating that characters cannot be identified solely based on appearance or stereotypical traits.

At the end of the story, Sophie has experienced significant changes, both in terms of appearance and character. Her beauty and personality, which used to be so striking, have now dimmed and do not look as good as before. Her appearance, which used to be like a princess, has now changed to that of a witch. It was reflected in the following statement.

> *"Patches of white speckled her dyed black hair. Her emerald eyes were now murky gray, her skin thin enough to see veins."* (Page. 319).

In the quote, the 'Patches of white' mentioned refers to the white patches in Sophie's dyed black hair. In addition, Sophie's previously emerald eyes now seemed to have turned cloudy gray, and her thinner skin made it possible to see the blood vessels beneath. This description provides an overview of the changes experienced by Sophie in the story, both physically and emotionally. This change in Sophie can be seen not only from her appearance which no longer shines like before, but also from the change in her character which seems to dim the kindness that was once so striking. Her attitude towards Agatha, which previously might have been friendly and considered him a friend, has now shifted to a less friendly attitude and considers Agatha her enemy. It can be proven by the statement below.

> *"With a single push, Sophie shoved Agatha into the storm. Agatha plummeted towards the shining Bridge and instant death—Tedros screamed"* (Page. 326)

The accident described in the quote appears when Sophie pushed Agatha into the storm. This action caused Agatha to fall towards the sparkling bridge and face the danger of instant death. Tedros' screaming reaction shows that this incident was very dramatic and resulted in a very dangerous situation for Agatha. Sophie, through the act of pushing her, seems to have directed Agatha towards a serious threat or potential danger in the story. Even though Sophie has changed greatly, Agatha remains loyal to their old friendship. Sophie, who used to be kind to her, has now turned worse, Agatha is still thinking about and trying to understand this change. Agatha's concern for Sophie shows that Agatha, even though she is faced with complicated changes in her friend, still maintains goodness in their friendship. It was reflected in the statement below.

> *"...she thought of the girl who once brought her cucumber juice and bran-flour cookies, who took her on walks and confided her dreams."* (Page. 329)

In this part, Agatha seems to be thinking about Sophie, who used to pay close attention to her. Sophie has performed various acts of kindness, such as bringing cucumber juice and oatmeal cookies, taking him on walks, and entrusting him with his dreams. Agatha was reflecting on positive memories from their relationship, describing that Sophie had served as a friend and supporter to Agatha in various ways.

In deeper irony, Sophie did not hesitate to launch an attack on her own close friend. The feeling of envy that crept within her grew stronger as she realized that Agatha, who was now living in happiness, had achieved the life that Sophie had always dreamed of. This feeling of envy has blinded Sophie to the point where she feels that hurting her best friend is a way to relieve her disappointment and unfulfilled desires. Sophie may not realize that her actions damaged a bond that was once so strong, and ironically, the happiness she has always dreamed of is still unattainable for her. It was reflected in Agatha's action below.

> *"Dazed, Agatha looked up to see Sophie astride the biggest rat of all, charging for her again. Agatha tried to find a spell too late—"* (Page. 351)

There has been a battle or confrontation between Agatha and Sophie. Agatha, who was in a state of surprise or confusion, saw Sophie coming towards her riding the

biggest mouse. Agatha tries to find a magic spell to fight back, but her actions are too late. This whole scene gives an idea of the tension or conflict in the story, where Agatha may be trying to fight or face the threat posed by Sophie.

Agatha, who previously might have seemed closed and unfriendly, has now changed into a better person. Agatha seems friendlier, more caring and likes to help her friends. These changes create a positive dynamic in interactions with others, illustrating that a person can grow and develop beyond the expectations that may be attached to them. The data taken by Agatha's action and statement.

"Agatha whipped to the girls. "We have to help them!" (Page.351)

Agatha states that they have to help the girls. This shows that Agatha feels the need to provide help or support in certain situations or conditions that the girls may be facing. Agatha's actions reflect her caring personality and perhaps show that she feels responsible for helping others in difficult situations, in contrast to her previous attitude of not caring about other people. This matter shows that Agatha has caring characteristic. According to Rohmana (2022), caring is a basic value and attitude of paying attention and acting proactively towards the conditions. More broadly caring is one's self-aligned attitude towards problems that exist in the surrounding environment.

CONCLUSION

Soman Chainani developed and described the two main characters, namely Sophie and Agatha, very well. At the beginning of the story, Soman Chainani leads readers to judge the characters brought by Sophie and Agatha based on their appearance. Readers will imagine and agree that Sophie is the protagonist with her life like a princess and her beautiful face, while Agatha is the antagonist character with her dirty appearance and living in a house in the middle of a cemetery. However, Soman Chainani managed to amaze readers when the character changes occurred in Sophie and Agatha. Sophie slowly shows her bad character, who always wants to be seen and is willing to lie and hurt her best friend. Meanwhile, Agatha is willing to do anything to do the right thing. including saving the school and helping her best friend. Here, Soman Chainani explains to readers not to see or judge someone by their cover because everyone has their own good and bad sides.

By the end of The School for Good and Evil, Tedros is saying that he needs Aggie back to help him figure out the problem because, in contrast to Sophie, who is starting to lose motivation, Aggie is steadfast in her resolve to do the right thing. According to Chainani, "Agatha's heart and empathy are the emotional center of her journey and they guide [A School for Good and Evil]." When Agatha gives Sophie a kiss after she passes away, Sophie is miraculously revived because Agatha showed her true love. Tedros begs Agatha to stay with him, but Sophie and Agatha return to Gavaldon, and the two schools come together to acknowledge that Good and Evil can coexist peacefully.

The principal takeaways from The School for Good and Evil are as follows: Caring for others is the true test of goodness. Being loyal to yourself and not letting

other people's thoughts or deeds influence you is where real power resides. Heroes and villains are essential to the best stories.

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