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Memento Mori: A Spiritual War traced through the character of Aswatthama in Amruta Patil's *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers*

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Abstract

*This article conducts a comprehensive analysis of Amruta Patil's *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers*, focusing on the profound concept of Memento Mori and its implications within the narrative. Through an intricate examination of symbolism, allegory, and mythological motifs, the research elucidates the spiritual journey of the protagonist Ashwatthama and the existential depths they navigate. Central to the study is the assertion that death serves not only as the cessation of physical existence but as the eternal continuation of one's ideologies and spiritual essence. Drawing from diverse literary and philosophical frameworks, the article contextualizes the narrative within Indian mythology and cultural tradition, uncovering timeless wisdom and universal truths embedded within its pages. It highlights the transformative power of mortality in awakening the human spirit to the interconnectedness of existence, amidst themes of war, sacrifice, and redemption. Ultimately, the research contends that "*Sauptik: Blood and Flowers*" invites readers to confront their mortality, embrace their eternal legacy, and embark on a journey toward self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment.*

Keywords: Memento Mori, Death, Spirituality, Identity and Mortality.

Introduction

In the ethereal tapestry of existence, the notion of Memento Mori transcends the physical realm, echoing the profound truth that even in death, the essence of an individual persists, shaping the spiritual landscape of the world. Derived from Latin, "Memento Mori" translates to "Remember that you must die," serving as a timeless reminder of mortality's inevitability and the impermanence of earthly existence. This article embarks on a profound exploration of this timeless concept within the intricate narrative tapestry of Amruta Patil's *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers*, delving into its multifaceted interpretations and spiritual significance.

Amruta Patil is a trailblazing force in the realm of Indian graphic novels, renowned for her visually stunning creations and profound narratives that delve into the depths of human experience. With a background in fine arts and a keen literary sensibility, Patil's work transcends traditional boundaries, weaving together intricate

imagery and thought-provoking prose to create immersive worlds that captivate the imagination. Her graphic novels serve as conduits for exploring complex themes such as identity, spirituality, and the human condition, resonating with readers on a profound level.

Patil's graphic novels have garnered significant attention for their critical approaches and thematic complexities. From *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* to *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*, her works delve into Indian mythology, folklore, and personal introspection, offering readers a glimpse into the multifaceted nature of the human experience. Through her unique storytelling style, Patil navigates the intersection of tradition and modernity, inviting readers to contemplate timeless philosophical questions within the context of contemporary narratives.

Sauptik: Blood and Flowers, the concluding installment of the Parva Duology, serves as a profound meditation on the transience of life and the eternal persistence of the soul. Set against the backdrop of the Mahabharata, this graphic novel intertwines themes of war, sacrifice, and redemption, offering a fresh perspective on ancient mythology. Through meticulous analysis of symbolism and allegory, this research delves into the existential depths of Patil's narrative, illuminating how the interplay between life and death shapes the consciousness of her characters and reverberates throughout the spiritual fabric of the cosmos.

Central to this investigation is the hypothesis that death signifies not only the end of physical existence but also the eternal continuation of one's ideologies and spiritual essence. By tracing the spiritual journey of Patil's protagonists amidst the backdrop of war, sacrifice, and redemption, this study invites readers to confront their mortality, embrace the eternal legacy of their ideologies, and embark on a journey towards self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. Through the lens of *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers*, readers are encouraged to explore the profound truths embedded within the timeless concept of Memento Mori and its enduring relevance in shaping human perspectives on life, death, and the afterlife.

A Quick Glance through the Graphic Novel

Amruta Patil's graphic novel *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* serves as a profound exploration of the concept of Memento Mori within the rich tapestry of the Mahabharata's lesser-known characters. Through vibrant artwork and compelling storytelling, Patil delves into the complexities of human nature, the consequences of violence, and the pursuit of redemption. The narrative unfolds through the eyes of Ashwatthama, once a figure of majestic authority, now stripped of his regal grandeur and cast adrift within the narrative's tapestry. As the reluctant storyteller or Sutradhaar, Ashwatthama recounts the bygone tales of the Mahabharata, including those of Lord Vishnu, Mahadev Shiv, and Krishna. The novel's title, 'Sauptik-Parvan', meaning 'Those who are sleeping', encapsulates the theme of revenge as Ashwatthama, along with Kritavarman and Kripa, seeks retribution. His portrayal as a poignant outlier mirrors the disarray of a mind teetering on the brink of madness, seeking refuge in the shadows amidst societal scrutiny. Ashwatthama's inability to articulate further alienates him, provoking both fascination and repulsion from those around him. Through his plight, the narrative unfolds a visceral tableau of human intolerance and cruelty, highlighting society's darkest flaws. Ashwatthama's fractured existence serves as a sobering reminder of the fragility of human dignity in the face of prejudice and ignorance, inviting reflection on the delicate balance between empathy and condemnation in humanity's collective journey toward understanding.

Beyond Existence: Death as Life's Defining Purpose

Memento Mori, the profound concept of remembering death, fundamentally alters individuals' perspectives on life, prompting a shift in actions and priorities. Contrary to viewing death as an endpoint, many philosophical and spiritual traditions argue that mortality imbues life with purpose

and meaning. This research delves into the intricate connection between death and life, framing death as an integral part of the human journey. Central to this exploration is the timeless reminder of mortality, *Memento Mori*, which invites individuals to contemplate the transient nature of existence and embrace its spiritual dimensions. Serving as a catalyst for inner transformation, *Memento Mori* encourages individuals to confront fears, relinquish attachments, and cultivate gratitude for the present moment. By embracing death's inevitability, individuals transcend ego limitations and connect with the eternal essence of being.

Ashwatthama, once esteemed, now embodies a tragic figure stripped of his former glory, forced into the role of reluctant storyteller burdened by his tumultuous past. Teetering on the brink of madness, he exists on the fringes of societal norms, his unraveling sanity evident in his unkempt appearance. Relegated to the shadows, he seeks solace amidst society's judgmental gaze, yet finds only mockery and ridicule. Through Ashwatthama's plight, the narrative unveils a stark portrayal of human intolerance and cruelty, serving as a poignant reminder of the fragility of human dignity in the face of prejudice. His shattered existence prompts reflection on the delicate balance between empathy and condemnation in humanity's collective journey toward understanding.

In Ashwatthama's lamentation, he reflects on his curse, resonating with the timeless concept of *Memento Mori* - "Remember that you must die." This curse introduces a distinctive layer to the philosophical paradigm, reframing longevity as a curse rather than a boon. Immortality becomes an incessant reminder of past transgressions and ceaseless anguish, devoid of the release found in death. This is evident through Ashwatthama's lamentation as follows,

"Surviving the war was collateral damage. I should have died on Kurukshetra with everyone else

I knew. Instead, marked by a gouge-wound, I was sent into insignificance and solitude, into strange epochs peopled by strangers" (Patil 6).

Ashwatthama's plight prompts reflection on themes of forgiveness and redemption, denied the opportunity for reconciliation or closure amidst an eternity marked by regret and desolation. Through his lamentation, Ashwatthama unveils a layered understanding of mortality and immortality, intertwining the psychological toll of witnessing endless violence with the burden of eternal existence. The narrative serves as a profound meditation on the intricacies of existence and the limitations of human comprehension, beckoning individuals to grapple with mortality not merely as a reminder of life's transience but also as a catalyst for introspection, forgiveness, and ultimately, transcendence.

Ashwatthama acknowledges the relative ease of facing one's own death compared to the torment of witnessing countless violent deaths. This sentiment underscores the psychological trauma inflicted by exposure to unrelenting brutality, highlighting the desensitization and erosion of empathy that accompanies such experiences. Through this lens, *Memento Mori* becomes a visceral reminder not only of individual mortality but also of the fragility of human compassion in the face of ceaseless carnage.

Secondly, Ashwatthama reflects on the paradox of immortality as a curse rather than a blessing. While immortality typically connotes everlasting life, Ashwatthama perceives it as a burden due to the absence of forgetfulness. Immortality devoid of the gift of forgetting becomes a relentless cycle of enduring the memories of past horrors, rendering existence a perpetual ordeal. Here, *Memento Mori* takes on a broader significance, serving as a cautionary tale against the hubris of seeking eternal life without considering the toll of perpetual remembrance.

Thirdly, In Ashwatthama's reflection on the Chiranjeevis, he delves into the profound existential theme of *Memento Mori*, he remarks as follows,

There are seven other Chiranjeevis in the remembered history of the worlds. Asur Bali, who offered his head to Vishnu to place his foot on. The perfectly subdued monkey mind, Hanuman. My maternal uncle Kripa. The avatar Parashuram. Ravan's brother, Vibishnan. Vyas rishi. And me. Of the seven, I'm the only one on whom preternatural long life was slapped on as a curse, not a blessing – for that's what immortality is without the gift of forgetting. I wait for my term to end. (Patil 7).

Ashwatthama juxtaposes his own plight with that of the other chiranjeevis, individuals bestowed with longevity through divine intervention. He aligns himself with figures from myth and legend, each grappling with the ramifications of their prolonged existence. Through this comparison, Ashwatthama explores the nuances of immortality, emphasizing its isolating nature and the profound loneliness inherent in outliving mortal companions. Memento Mori thus emerges as a thematic thread connecting disparate narratives of eternal beings, highlighting the universal truth of mortality amidst the diversity of human experiences.

Fourthly, Ashwatthama's narrative intertwines with themes of familial bonds and moral ambiguity. He struggles with the conflicting emotions of loyalty to his lineage and the atrocities committed by his own kin. The mention of his brother's rotting carcass underscores the perversion of familial ties in the wake of relentless violence, echoing the broader theme of moral decay in the face of immortality. Memento Mori serves as a moral compass, urging reflection on the consequences of one's actions and the impermanence of earthly attachments.

Lastly, Ashwatthama's resignation to his fate encapsulates the acceptance of mortality as an inevitable part of the human condition. Despite his immortality, he longs for the release of death, recognizing the futility of eternal existence without the solace of oblivion. In this final realization, Memento Mori transcends individual suffering to encompass the universal truth of human mortality, inviting contemplation on the ephemeral nature of life and the enduring legacy of death. Ashwatthama's introspection on the chiranjeevis weaves together themes of violence, immortality, familial bonds, and existential dread, all under the overarching motif of Memento Mori. Through his narrative, the concept of remembering one's mortality emerges as a potent philosophical inquiry into the nature of existence. This agony of Ashwatthama is proved to inevitable as he interrogates Krshn as follow:

“What is so great about a man who can only see the left eye of a wooden bird when a glorious forest lies beyond?” (Patil 238).

In the concluding chapter of 'Sauptik', Ashwatthama's descent into darkness reaches its apex as he grapples with inner turmoil and the weight of his cursed existence. Cursed with immortality, he yearns for release from the haunting memories of his past actions during the Kurukshetra war. The concept of Memento Mori, serving as a reminder of death's inevitability, permeates his narrative as he reflects on his relentless pursuit of vengeance and the hollow emptiness it yields. Despite his fervent desires for retribution, Ashwatthama remains ensnared in spiritual unrest, detached from morality, and unable to find solace in death. His introspection reveals deep-seated insecurities and disillusionment, accentuating the futility of his pursuits and the profound agony of his cursed existence.

Amidst his anguish, Ashwatthama's narrative becomes a poignant exploration of themes such as mortality, redemption, and the eternal struggle of the soul. His relentless pursuit of vengeance juxtaposed with his yearning for spiritual liberation underscores the complexity of human nature and the enduring consequences of one's actions. Through Ashwatthama's plight, "Sauptik" delves into the profound intricacies of existence, inviting readers to contemplate the cyclical nature of suffering and the elusive quest for inner peace. As Ashwatthama grapples with the burdens of immortality and the haunting memories of his past, the thesis aims to unravel the layers of his

narrative, offering insights into the human condition and the timeless pursuit of redemption amidst the shadows of despair.

Conclusion

To remember you must die is to remember you must live. At the heart of human existence lies the inevitability of mortality, a concept encapsulated by the artistic movement *Memento Mori*. This notion serves as the cornerstone of Amruta Patil's "*Sauptik: Blood and Flowers*," where death serves not only as the cessation of physical existence but also as the eternal continuation of one's ideologies and spiritual essence.

In this graphic novel, the overarching metaphor of the upside-down tree serves as a poignant *Memento Mori*, reminding humans of the transient nature of life. Initially portraying the tree of life, it embodies the world of mortals sustained by heavenly roots, mirroring the human condition where the brain, akin to the roots, nourishes the earthly branches of existence. Ashwatthama, immortal and burdened with witnessing human folly, embodies this theme, enduring perpetual suffering as he traverses endless existence. Through this analogy, the narrative cautions against the illusion of everyday objectivity, urging every individual to confront the unsettling realities ahead. The upside-down tree not only signifies the impending madness of the tale but also serves as a constant reminder of mortality, urging introspection and contemplation amidst the chaos of human existence.

The concept of "*Memento Mori*," translating to "Remember you will die," is central to Stoic philosophy, advocating for a constant awareness of mortality as an inevitable aspect of existence. This perspective serves as a reminder not to be overwhelmed by the inevitability of death, but rather to recognize it as a natural transition returning to the same source from which all life originates. Embracing the limited nature of our time, individuals are encouraged to optimize their existence. Just because one cannot conceive of an existence beyond death, it does not negate its possibility. Thus, by integrating the awareness of mortality into the journey of life, individuals can transcend the fear of death and aspire towards a spiritual existence beyond it.

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