



Exploring Character Dichotomy in Anna Todd's *After* Good Versus Bad

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Abstract. This research explores the dichotomy of characters in Anna Todd's *After* through the lens of binary opposition as proposed by Lois Tyson and the deconstruction approach by Jacques Derrida. The study focuses on the clear demarcation between good and bad characters, epitomized by Tessa Young and Hardin Scott, respectively. Using Tyson's framework, the binary oppositions within the narrative are identified and analyzed, revealing how these oppositions structure the reader's understanding of the characters. Derrida's deconstruction theory is then applied to challenge and destabilize these fixed oppositions, offering a nuanced interpretation of the characters' complexities. The findings indicate that while Tessa Young is predominantly portrayed as the embodiment of goodness, and Hardin Scott as the epitome of badness, a deeper analysis reveals underlying complexities and contradictions in their characterizations. This study contributes to a richer understanding of character development and thematic depth in contemporary literature. However, through the application of Derrida's deconstruction, the research concludes that these binary oppositions are not absolute. The complex interplay between Tessa and Hardin challenges the rigidity of their characterizations, demonstrating that the boundaries between "good" and "bad" are fluid and subject to reinterpretation.

Keywords: *after, binary opposition, deconstruction, dichotomy, good and bad.*

INTRODUCTION

In a community setting, notions of "good" and "bad" are foundational to comprehending morality and ethics, guiding decision-making processes. These ideas are deeply ingrained in human culture, shaping our actions, interactions, and worldviews (Icheku, 2011). The term "Good" typically denotes actions deemed suitable, advantageous, or favorable by a person or society. These actions can encompass traits like kindness, honesty, generosity, compassion, and truthfulness. Additionally, "Good" is often linked with results that enhance well-being, happiness, justice, and harmony (Tangney, 1991). "Bad" refers to negative actions, behaviors, or qualities that are wrong, harmful, or undesirable. These include cruelty, dishonesty, selfishness, injustice, and exploitation (Tangney, 1991). Ultimately, the concepts of good and bad are fundamental in shaping our moral compass, guiding our decisions, and promoting a more ethical and compassionate society.

Distinctions between good and bad are often unclear, with moral dilemmas arising from complex situations involving conflicting interests and values (Yankah, 2003). In literature, this complexity is mirrored, with characters frequently depicted as having both strengths and weaknesses. Characters labeled as "good" can display flaws, while those considered "bad" might have redeeming qualities. Literary conflict often arises from the

interplay of good and bad, either as internal moral struggles or external battles between protagonists and antagonists (Yankah, 2003). This research focuses on analyzing the binary opposition of “good” and “bad” in Anna Todd’s *After*, specifically examining the characters Tessa Young and Hardin Scott. Tessa is depicted as “good” due to her positive traits, while Hardin is portrayed as “bad” because of his negative characteristics.

Therefore, the formulation of the research problem is crucial for keeping the research focused and aligned with its objectives. The formulated research questions are (1) What is the binary opposition in the story *After*? (2) How is the binary opposition exposed in the story *After*?

There are two problem-solving plans. Firstly, to elucidate the binary opposition present within the narrative, discerning the stark contrast between characters categorized as “good” and “bad.” This objective seeks to identify and define the specific dichotomy that shapes the moral landscape of the story. Secondly, the study aims to analyze how this binary opposition is manifested and revealed throughout the narrative.

There are some previous studies related to this research that explore the binary opposition of good and bad characters in Anna Todd’s *After*. Binary Opposition in *Fast as The Wind* Novel by Nat Gould (Aritonang, 2022; Padang), and Personality Analysis of The Main Characters in Tere Liye’s Novel *Pulang*, Through Literature Psychology Approach (Yulita, Lering & Lautama, 2022; Maumere). In *Binary Opposition in Fast as The Wind by Nat Gould*, the study primarily focuses on identifying and analyzing the binary oppositions present in the novel, such as good versus evil, rich versus poor, and hero versus villain. This research adopts a structuralist approach, emphasizing the clear-cut distinctions and contrasts between these oppositions, and examines how these binaries drive the narrative forward. It also looks into how these binary oppositions reinforce traditional societal norms and values within the context of the novel. On the other hand, *Personality Analysis of The Main Characters in Tere Liye’s Novel Pulang Through Literature Psychology Approach* (Yulita 2022), utilizes a psychological approach to delve into the complexities of the main characters' personalities. This study explores the inner conflicts, motivations, and development of the characters, offering a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding of their behaviors and traits. Unlike the clear binary oppositions in Gould's novel, this research highlights the gray areas and the dynamic nature of human psychology, reflecting on how the characters evolve throughout the story. The current study on Exploring Character Dichotomy in Anna Todd’s *After Good Versus Bad* merges structuralist and deconstructionist approaches. While it recognizes traditional binary oppositions like those in Nat Gould's work, it applies Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory to explore the fluidity and interdependence of these oppositions, revealing the complexity of characters like Tessa and Hardin, who embody both good and bad traits, thereby challenging previous rigid binaries. Unlike the previous studies above, this study focuses on narrative structure and literary techniques, such as unreliable narration and non-linear timelines, to blur binary oppositions. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper exploration of how *After* presents and deconstructs traditional binaries, bridging structuralist and post-structuralist theories.

This thesis aims to explore and analyze the fundamental binary oppositions good and bad in the characters of Tessa Young and Hardin Scott, focusing on how these differences contribute to the depth and dynamics of the storyline. By examining the interactions between virtue and vice, morality, and rebellion, and innocence and experience, the study seeks to explain the underlying themes and societal reflections presented in the novel. Understanding these complexities provides valuable insights into human relationships, personal growth, and the impact of social norms in contemporary literature. The study aims to uncover the layers of binary opposition, offering a deeper understanding of character evolution and the underlying message in Anna Todd’s *After*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Binary Opposition

Binary opposition forms the foundation for structuralist criticism. Similar to earlier Western metaphysicians, structuralists contend that humans construct knowledge, the world, and everything else through a binary oppositional thinking model (Tyson 2006). Derrida acknowledges this cognitive model, which helps identify differences. Traditional views of binary opposition suggest that the positive pole holds dominant and favorable power over the negative pole, despite both poles originating from the binary opposition. Derrida terms this imbalance as a violent hierarchy and questions why it can't be understood in reverse. Once these doubts arise, reversing the binary opposition appears natural and effortless (Jacques 1967). Binary opposition is a concept put forward by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure which is used in structuralism and semiotics theory to explain the relationship between two concepts or entities that are mutually contradictory or contradictory in a system (Tyson 2006: 216). According to Derrida Jacques (1967) concept of binary opposition is a central aspect of his deconstruction theory. Binary oppositions are pairs of contrasting concepts, such as good/evil, light/dark, and male/female, that structure human thought and language. Derrida argues that these oppositions are not neutral but hierarchical, with one term typically privileged over the other. He contends that each term's meaning depends on its relationship to its opposite, creating an interdependence. Through deconstruction, Derrida seeks to expose and destabilize these hierarchies, showing that the privileged term relies on the marginalized term, thus revealing their mutual dependence and inherent instability.

Deconstruction

Deconstructive literature, which has its roots in the philosophical work of Jacques Derrida, focuses on examining texts and linguistic elements to reveal the differences, ambiguities, and complexities inherent within them. However, according to Derrida, language is not a reliable means of communication as we believe (Sikirivwa, 2015). According to Derrida (1978), deconstruction is a way of reading a text carefully and attentively, so that the conceptual distinction underlying the author's work can undermine the author's arguments about the text, in other words, the text does not meet the criteria definitions and standards based on the text used reflexively to destroy the original conceptual difference of the text. Derrida explains that the text is something complex, so the text implicitly has multiple meanings, so the text must not be limited to fixed regulations. Deconstruction seeks to reveal the foundational assumptions and contrasts within a text, challenging binary oppositions by highlighting their inherent instability and complexity. This approach questions established meanings and interpretations, encouraging readers to scrutinize the text and identify its uncertainties, paradoxes, and contradictions. According to Tyson (2006), meaning is generated by the reader during the reading process. More precisely, meaning emerges through the interaction of language as facilitated by the reader, even though we commonly refer to this process as the role of "the reader."

Character

According to Edward Forster (1927), Characters can have various traits, personalities, and backgrounds that make them unique and complex. They can be protagonists who fascinate with their goodness and weaknesses, antagonists who challenge their evil and internal conflict, or supporting characters who provide color and support for the development of the story. Through their interactions and the changes they undergo throughout the storyline, these characters help shape the narrative and convey the author's intended themes to the reader. As a result, the characters in literature are not merely

figures on the page but also reflections of life, conflict, and human journeys, which can inspire, entertain, and teach readers about the diversity and complexity of humanity and the world around them.

In many narratives, characters are divided into “good” or “bad” categories, shaping reader perceptions, moral judgments, and narrative expectations (Wang & Tian 2016: 81). However, a deconstructive reading of the characters in *After* challenges these simplistic classifications, uncovering the inherent complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities.

Deconstructing Character Identities

By applying deconstructive principles to the characters in *After*, the researcher can reveal the complexities of their identities, motivations, and actions as depicted through the author’s language. This involves analyzing characters’ actions, motivations, and interactions, noting their initial moral alignments, and challenging conventional portrayals of “good” and “bad” by questioning underlying assumptions (Tyson 2006). The study investigates the ambiguities and contradictions within characters, tracking their development and moral struggles, and evaluates how narrative techniques like unreliable narration, multiple perspectives, and nonlinear storytelling contribute to deconstructing binary oppositions. It reflects on the broader themes, showing that characters labeled as “bad” might have redeeming qualities, while those seen as “good” could exhibit flaws and contradictions (Jacques 1981).

METHOD

This study employs a deconstruction approach to explore the complexity of characters in Anna Todd’s *After*, focusing on those classified as binary good and bad. According to Derrida (1967), deconstruction aims to uncover the hidden layers behind these stereotypes, as presented through dialogue, actions, and character changes.

This study uses descriptive qualitative research. Research using descriptive qualitative analysis leads to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, such as the binary opposition of good and bad in the story Anna Todd’s *After*, by exploring the context and meaning behind the data obtained. According to Silalahi (2018:154) stated that qualitative research is descriptive in that the researchers are interested in the process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.

The population for this study focuses on the main characters Tessa Young and Hardin Scott in Anna Todd’s *After*. The sample will be selected based on their central roles in the narrative and their representation of key binary oppositions good vs. bad. Specifically, Tessa Young and Hardin Scott will be analyzed as primary samples due to their pivotal roles and dynamic character development throughout the novel.

Characters will be selected through purposive sampling, focusing on those who significantly embody or challenge binary oppositions good and bad in *After*. Data will be collected by performing a detailed textual analysis of the selected characters, including their actions, dialogues, and interactions throughout the story (Silverman 2013).

According to Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014) the primary instrument for this study will be a qualitative coding framework developed for textual analysis. This framework will be designed to identify and categorize instances of binary oppositions, contradictions, and ambiguities in character portrayals.

Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the characters with Tyson’s theory of binary oppositions and Derrida’s deconstruction approach to explore how meaning is constructed, deferred, and established within texts to reveal the binary opposition of good and bad characters in Tessa and Hardin in Anna Todd’s *After*.

The source of data is taken from the novel *After* by American author Anna Todd which was published by Gallery Books in 2014, and this novel has 500 pages. The data of this research are words, sentences, and dialogues that exposed the binary opposition in the

characters Tessa and Hardin as good and bad characters. The researcher collected data by going through several steps. (1) The researcher read carefully and understood the storyline, characters and characterization, themes, and settings in the novel *After*. (2) Take notes such as words or sentences from dialogue in the story that describe Tessa and Hardin's good and bad characters. (3) Identify and classify data that shows the good and bad characters of Tessa and Hardin in the story *After*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section is about to answer the question about that explain above. Two things will be discussed, the first is to identify the binary opposition good and bad in the *After* story. Second, the binary opposition is exposed in the *After* story.

Tessa is described as an 18-year-old girl who has just graduated from high school and is preparing to enter college at Washington Central University (WCU). Tessa Young is portrayed as the epitome of goodness in the novel. She is kind-hearted, diligent, and morally upright. Tessa is depicted as a responsible student who prioritizes her education and future career. She has a strong sense of right and wrong and strives to maintain her integrity even in challenging situations. Her actions are often guided by compassion, empathy, and a desire to do what is morally correct. She has a very introverted nature and prefers reading books and watching movies at home rather than going to parties or having fun spending time outside playing. There are some following shows that Tessa is a good side.

“Parties aren’t really my thing. Plus I have to go to get some things for my desk and walls.” ... My mother’s warning about parties goes through my head (Todd, 2014: 12-13)

From the conversation above, when Steph asked Tessa to go to a party with her, she refused because she knew that her mother said going to parties was a waste of time and it would be better for her to study or read her favorite book to pass the time. Because her mother always warned him not to go to parties and made her feel that parties were not beneficial, she refused to go to parties. It can be seen that Tessa showed a positive side when she heard her mother's advice that instead of going to a party, she should use this time to study to prepare for her first day at college. Tessa was raised by a family that was very disciplined and upheld perfectionism, her mother namely Carol Young because her father was an irresponsible drunkard who then left the two of them. Her mother was one of the reasons why Tessa was raised only in good and positive things. On the other hand, she raised Tessa with very high standards and strict expectations, which she believes will guarantee her daughter Tessa a successful and good future. Her mother is a perfectionist and likes to emphasize, control, and ensure that Tessa always focuses on education, academic achievement, and maintaining a perfect image/behavior. She encouraged Tessa to go to school in a good place, study hard, be an excellent student, and avoid things that she considered could distract from academic goals, including relationships that did not comply with her strict moral standards because according to her mother education was Tessa’s main priority and her mother is very involved in making sure her daughter stays on the right track according to her.

“You’re getting a new dorm!” my mother roars as soon as the door clicks shut. “No, I can’t.” I sigh. “It’s fine, Mother.” ... I want is my overbearing mother causing a scene on my *first day* of college. “I’m sure she won’t be around much at all anyway.” I try try to convince her, along with myself. “Absolutely not. We are going to switch now.” ... “You will not room with someone who allows men in like that – those punks, at that!” (Todd, 2014: 6)

From the conversation above between Tessa and her mother who are arguing because Tessa’s roommate Steph looks full of tattoos and body piercings, Steph’s style is very

prominent, and she freely lets men (friends and boyfriends) into the room. Her mother started to get angry and told her to just change the rooms so that Steph's social style wouldn't influence Tessa because her mother saw that Steph and her friends' appearance looked unusual. But Tessa insisted that she was fine and tried to refuse nervously and politely so that her mother wouldn't ruin her first day on campus. Judging from this conversation, it proves that her mother is too protective of her daughter Tessa.

For the next twenty minutes, my mother sits on my bed and explains that she is just worried about me ruining my chance at an amazing education and doesn't want me to drink again. She also tells me that she doesn't approve of my friendship with Steph, Hardin, or anyone in their group. She makes me promise that I will stop hanging around with them... I won't be going to any more parties with Steph, so there's no way my mother will know if I am friendly with her or not (Todd, 2014: 61)

From Tessa's statement above, after she got up the courage and told her mother that she was eighteen years old, which means it was legal for her to go to parties and drink, so she felt she was just acting like a child of her age who knew how to have fun and that wasn't wrong. After she said this, her mother began to accept her reasons, but after that, her mother began to lecture her that being friends with people with tattoos was not good. Because her mother had said that, Tessa just listened and accepted her mother's words not to be friends with "them" anymore. From this it can be seen how strong her mother's control over Tessa herself is, her mother is too protective and too controlling of Tessa's socialization with friends, including her relationships and activities.

In the context of the deconstruction theory introduced by Jacques Derrida, the character of Tessa Young in the story *After* can be seen as a complex illustration of the concept of the binary opposition "good". Initially, Tessa is presented as a character who adheres to moral norms and acts following values considered good by society, such as honesty and empathy. However, through deconstruction, we can see that in her development, Tessa also shows a more complex and ambiguous side. She undergoes a transformation that allows her to evolve from a stereotypical "good" image into a character who faces moral challenges and various internal conflicts that may cast doubt on her holiness or goodness. This shows that in deconstruction studies, character assessments are not static or limited to simple labels "good" or "bad", but reveal deeper layers of moral and psychological complexity that shape Tessa's identity in the story.

Hardin Scott is presented as the quintessential bad boy character. Hardin is described as a very handsome young man with a sharp gaze and messy hair which adds a mysterious aura to him. His attractive appearance often attracts the attention of people around him. Despite his striking appearance, Hardin is largely a quiet and mysterious figure. He tends to hide his true feelings and thoughts, making him difficult for others, including Tessa, to understand. He often does not notice or care about other people's feelings, especially Tessa. He often acts selfishly and does not think about how his actions will affect other people's feelings and lives because he has a big ego and often acts arrogantly. He tends to think that he is always right and that his opinion is more important than anyone else's. His own interests are often placed above the interests of others. There are some following shows that Hardin is a bad side.

I expect him to introduce himself the way that his friends did, but he stays quiet, rolling his eyes in annoyance and pulling a cell phone from the pocket of his tight black jeans. He definitely isn't as friendly as Steph or Nate. He's more appealing, though; something about him makes it hard to tear my eyes from his face. (Todd, 2014: 6)

From the above Tessa describes Hardin as a mysterious figure who is a young handsome man but he looks annoying and rude with his unfriendly style and presence. It can be seen

from his style that he doesn't want to introduce himself like his friends.

In the story, Hardin is described as someone who sometimes relies on alcohol and illegal drugs to overcome his problems. This dependency often worsens his behavior and causes further problems.

“That wasn't my room. But if you're trying to say you want to make out with me, sorry, you're not my type,” (Todd, 2014: 25)

The statement above shows Hardin's harsh and sensitive attitude towards Tessa. He responds with a lack of empathy for Tessa's feelings and dismisses her wishes or hopes with a flippant tone. He dismisses it rudely and condescendingly, ignoring Tessa's feelings and showing indifference to the possible emotional impact of the comment. Hardin's behavior in this context shows a lack of respect and sensitivity towards Tessa as an individual with feelings and desires worthy of respect. This illustrates the ugly side of Hardin's behavior in interpersonal relationships, where he expresses himself harshly and without regard for the feelings of others.

“Us? You're not trying to tell me you're going to break up with him...for me, are you?”

My head starts to spin. I know I should climb off his lap but I am frozen.

“You don't . . . want me to?”...“No, why would you? I mean, yeah, if you want to dump him, go for it, but don't do it on my behalf.” (Todd, 2014: 102)

This statement expresses Tessa's feelings of confusion and uncertainty regarding their relationship with Hardin. Tessa feels that Hardin may be hinting that he wants Tessa to leave her boyfriend to be with him. However, then Tessa realized that Hardin probably didn't have such intentions, or at least he didn't want Tessa to end her relationship with her boyfriend just because of him.

Hardin may display ambiguous or conflicting behavior in his relationship with Tessa. However, when Tessa asks if he wants her to leave her boyfriend for him, Hardin makes it clear that he doesn't want Tessa to do that just because of him.

This situation reflects the elusive and unpredictable side of Hardin. While he may be showing signs of interest in Tessa, he may also not be completely sure about their relationship or not want to put pressure on Tessa to take such a big step. This creates uncertainty and confusion for Tessa about Hardin's feelings for her and the dynamics of their relationship. But the problem is that he hurt Tessa's feelings by saying that.

In the context of Deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida, Hardin's character in *After* is depicted as often going against social and moral norms, such as rude attitudes and impulsive decisions that are detrimental. However, Deconstruction emphasizes that characters like Hardin cannot be reduced to just the label “bad” because they have deeper and more ambiguous dimensions. Meanwhile, Tessa experiences a complex transformation from beginnings that may seem to have a “bad” side to developments that show deeper nuances. Through Deconstruction, a critical analysis of Tessa reveals how the narrative reframes perceptions of “good” and “bad”, with Tessa not changing from “bad” to “good” in a linear manner, but rather through an exploration of identity that reveals deeper moral and psychological layers. Deconstruction offers a complex perspective in analyzing Hardin and Tessa's characters, exploring the meaning behind simple moral stereotypes.

Binary opposition is exposed through the fundamental differences between the two main characters, Tessa Young and Hardin Scott. These differences encompass various aspects of their lives, including personalities, backgrounds, outlooks on life, and relationship dynamics. This binary opposition is used to create narrative tension and deepen the exploration of the main themes in the story. Below is a detailed explanation of how this binary opposition is exposed in the story.

Tessa is described as a diligent, orderly, and innocent figure. She is a dedicated student with high grades and a very structured life. Tessa tends to follow the rules, be responsible, and focus on her future. She lives a life full of plans and a little spontaneity.

Hardin is a rebellious, chaotic, and troubled figure. He is often cynical, emotional, and unpredictable. Hardin tends to break rules, act impulsively, and is often self-destructive. His life is filled with spontaneous decisions and unexpected actions.

Tessa comes from a stable albeit overprotective family. She was raised with conservative values and a drive to succeed academically. Tessa chose a safe and planned life path, focusing on her education and career.

Hardin has a complicated and traumatized family background. His past experiences shaped his negative and rebellious outlook on life. Hardin often chooses a risky and destructive path in life, driven by a desire to escape his emotional problems.

Tessa tends to be open and honest in expressing her feelings. She strives to communicate her feelings clearly and directly. Tessa's interactions with others often show empathy and a desire to understand.

Hardin has difficulty expressing his emotions directly. He often masks his feelings with anger or indifference. Hardin's interactions with others are often fraught with conflict and tension, reflecting his struggles with his own emotions.

Optimistic and hopeful, Tessa believes in love, trust, and positive change. She looks at the future with a positive and open attitude. Tessa's approach to relationships is supportive and understanding. She seeks stability and trust in her relationships.

Pessimistic and often cynical, Hardin has difficulty trusting others and is afraid of commitment. His traumatic past makes him skeptical of the possibility of positive change. Hardin's approach to relationships is full of conflict and uncertainty. He is often defensive and has difficulty opening up.

In *After*, the binary opposition between Tessa Young and Hardin Scott is a central narrative device that exposes their differences in personality, behavior, background, emotional expression, and outlook on life. This opposition not only drives the plot and character development but also deepens the exploration of themes such as conflict, growth, love, and redemption.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to examine the binary opposition between good and bad characters in Anna Todd's *After*, using the theories of binary opposition and deconstruction by Derrida Jacques and Lois Tyson. The analysis reveals that Tessa Young is depicted as embodying the good side, while Hardin Scott represents the bad side. These characterizations are conveyed through their physical descriptions and behaviors, with Tessa portrayed as kind and modest, and Hardin as rough and rebellious. This binary opposition is initially clear but becomes more complex as the story progresses.

The study found that the binary opposition between good and bad permeates the dynamics of Tessa and Hardin's relationship. Tessa's good qualities are often challenged by Hardin's bad behavior, but Derrida's deconstruction theory shows that these boundaries are not rigid. As the narrative unfolds, Tessa's darker side emerges, influenced by Hardin, while Hardin shows potential for positive change, influenced by Tessa. This interrelation highlights that human nature is complex and fluid, defying simple categorizations of good and bad.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that the binary opposition of good and bad in *After* is not absolute. Tessa and Hardin's characters evolve, revealing that good and bad are interconnected and can shift depending on context and experiences. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how binary opposition and deconstruction can be applied to literary analysis, uncovering the intricacies behind characters and narratives

that initially seem straightforward.

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