

**Research Article**

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The Ethical Mystery of the Sphinx Riddle

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This thesis embarks upon a polemic trek by poring over the origin of human ethical consciousness in Adam and Eve after their eating of the Tree of Good and Evil in the Bible, then goes on to explore the ethical mystery of the Sphinx Riddle in Greek Mythology, illustrate the ethical dilemma of Hamlet in Shakespeare's renowned drama, and finally wind up with a new vision on Robert Frost's poem with Lawrence's idea of the Noble Wild Beast. Believing that there has appeared the binary of animality and rationality in man since the Biblical time, this thesis believes that human beings have repeatedly prized rationality over animality, emphasized ethical order over native desire, thus adoring knowledge and power while despising emotion and love. It tries to explore into such questions as: Why does God forbid Adam and Eve from plucking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? Is Eve making a sort of ethical choice by eating the Forbidden Fruit? What is the ethical significance of Sphinx itself? Has Oedipus really cracked the Sphinx Riddle? What is the role that rationality has played in Hamlet? What has been neglected in Hamlet's famous soliloquy? In what way has the binary of animality and rationality found its way in psychoanalysis? What does Lawrence mean by "Noble Wild Beast"? Reinforcing the ethical perspective in literary criticism, this thesis proposes that animality is as sound and essential as rationality, and that man actually needs to strike a good balance between his natural desire and rational knowledge, rather than fearing to be stricken by his primitive instinct and transformed into an alien to human civilization.

Keywords: Ethical Criticism; Animality; Rationality; Reason; Love; Tree of Knowledge; Sphinx Riddle; Hamlet; Freud; Lawrence**Animality v. Rationality**

In the pronaos of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi is inscribed the ancient Greek aphorism, "Know Thyself, Nothing Too Much." Who am I? How to define man? What is humanity? What are the ethical characteristics that differentiate man from animals? This is not only an unsolvable philosophical riddle, but also a perpetuating literary proposition. From the perspective of literature, the former part of this aphorism seems related with ethical literary criticism¹, pointing to the ultimate object of literary research, namely, "man": man's peers, man's environment, man's morality, man's ethics; the latter half seems concerned with ethical narrative criticism² looking to the basic principle of literary research, namely, "degree": degree of fiction, degree of narrative, degree of empathy, degree of interpre-

tation. Ethical literary criticism requires authors and researchers to explore the moral yardsticks and ethical choices of the protagonists, to expose the mysterious reasons why man differs from animals, and to discover the very value and significance of human existence; whereas ethical narrative criticism demands authors and researchers to read into different layers of the narratology to deal with the entangled ethical relations and responses between the author, the characters, the happenings, and the reader in a becoming degree. An underdone degree would lead to simplicity and monotony, while an overdone degree would lead to fantasy and absurdity. In a word, this aphorism is a good reminder that man is a mysterious animal [1].

Originally an animal, man attains rational maturity and becomes ethically conscious. He then presses down his bestiality and evolves into homo sapiens. As a result, the essential difference that distinguishes man from beast is believed to be the sense of ethics his rationality bestows upon him. Nevertheless, man is no angel. Not without his flaws, man still retains certain characteristics of animals, ever fueling the ethical myth that man is the Sphinx-like, half human and half animal. People believe that since the Biblical time, man has been born with rationality and animality of different shades; the former refers to man's rational capacity, forging the human factor in him, will actually metamorphosize into sober reason, rational will, and ethical knowledge, whereas the latter refers to man's primeval desire, forging the animal factor in him, will actually metamorphosize into native emotion, natural will, and ardent love. Human factor helps man cultivate individual ethical consciousness, establish a chastising ethical order, make conscientious ethical choices, discipline the unruly animal factor, regulating individual behavior in conformity with social ethical code. Consequently, man keeps upsetting the balance between this binary, and expects the former to harness the latter, so that he could conscientiously suppress his natural impulses and make rational ethical choice; and literature is believed to be essentially an art playing upon the ethical chords of human society, and helping symphonize the ethical order of different classes and develop a sense of morality to protect this order.

This thesis embarks upon a polemic trek by poring over the origin of human ethical consciousness in Adam and Eve after their eating of the Tree of Good and Evil in the Bible, then goes on to explore the ethical mystery of the Sphinx Riddle in Greek Mythology, illustrate the ethical dilemma of Hamlet in Shakespeare's renowned drama, and wind up with a new vision on Robert Frost's poem with

Tree of Knowledge & Tree of Life



Figure 1.

According to the Bible, God created Adam and Eve in the beginning of the world, and put them in the Garden of Eden. In this Garden, there were colorful grasses, babbling streams, aromatic flowers, and fragrant Tree of Life. With wild animals and rare fowl in company, Adam and Eve roamed about the Garden and were happy every day. In their birthday suits, immersed in the nature, they enjoyed fruit from the Tree of Life, and had no wanton desire, nor sense of shame. However, the natural and happy life of Adam and Eve drew to its end at Satan's temptation. Though God had commanded Adam and Eve, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, thou

Lawrence's idea of the Noble Wild Beast. It supports the idea of the Sphinx factors, yet holds that though God has intended a fair play between human factor and animal factor, these two have been clashing and clinking loudly against each other throughout human history, and how to strike a good balance of them has remained a momentous issue in human society. Unfortunately, human beings have repeatedly prized rationality over animality, treasured knowledge over passion, thus becoming arrogant and solipsistic about themselves, and ignorant and unconcerned about others. They emphasize ethical order, thus adoring power and fortune; they despise natural desire, thus overlooking emotion and love. For this account, Adam and Eve become ashamed of their animality after obtaining the knowledge of good and evil; Oedipus over stresses the ethical knowledge, leaving his native emotion unattended; Hamlet abuses his sober rationality, laying waste of his natural love; while Lawrence perceives the trampled human animality in modern society, calling attention upon the Noble Wild Beast in individual human beings. In this light, this thesis attempts to explore into such questions as: Why does God forbid Adam and Eve from plucking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? What is the ethical significance of Sphinx itself? Has Oedipus really cracked the Sphinx Riddle? What is the role that rationality has played in Hamlet? What has been neglected in Hamlet's famous soliloquy? In what way has the binary of animality and rationality found its way in psychoanalysis? What does Lawrence mean by "Noble Wild Beast"? Reinforcing the ethical perspective in literary criticism, this thesis proposes that animality is as sound and essential as rationality, and that man actually needs to strike a good balance between natural desire and rational knowledge, rather than fearing to be enslaved by his primitive instinct and transformed into an alien to human civilization [2,3].

shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die³." Satan told them, "Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil⁴." When Eve could not resist Satan's temptation, she ate the Forbidden Fruit, and shared it with Adam. As a result, their eyes were opened. When they realized that they were naked like other animals, the sense of ethics sneaked in their mind, and they immediately felt ashamed. In this case, they disobeyed God and committed a sin that had to be redeemed by their offspring, namely, "Original Sin" [4] (Figure 1).

The Forbidden Fruit is the Fruit of Knowledge that enables man to detect good from evil. Eating it, man obtains wisdom and learns about good and evil, makes ethical choices, reduces the effect of his animal factor, becoming a being of ethical consciousness. However, if we accept that, originally as wild and ignorant as other animals, Adam and Eve shed their animality and bestiality, acquired rationality and humanity, and became homo sapiens in sociological sense only after eating the Forbidden Fruit, why did God forbid them to eat of the Tree of Knowledge? Was He merely afraid of their capacity to distinguish good from evil? Did he intend man to remain forever in the uncivilized darkness? Of course not. God created Adam, the living soul, and allowed him to name every cattle, fowl, and beast; this exhibited God's special grace and favor toward man. He certainly wished man could eat the Fruit of Knowledge and

enjoy the vivacious spring of life; but he forbid Adam and Eve from eating it, because while in his eye, those binaries such as nature and civilization, bestiality and humanity, wanton desire and cultured wisdom, were all equal and no different from each other, he worried that when achieving knowledge at eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, man would become ethically conscious, would attach more importance to civilization, rationality and cultured wisdom, and look down upon nature, bestiality, and wanton desire, and would thus become arrogant, self-important for being a human rather than a commonplace animal. True as it was indeed, God's worry was not superfluous. After Adam and Eve ate the Forbidden Fruit, they developed a sense of ethics, growing aware of their nakedness, and becoming ashamed of their natural desire. When God came again, they hid themselves from his presence [5,6].



Figure 2.

We must admit that, though Adam and Eve ate the Fruit of Knowledge against God's command and enraged God tremendously, they had actually ushered in an ethical revolution in human life and embarked upon the road of civilization. By making an ethical choice, they liberated themselves from the animal ignorance, accomplished the evolution of mankind from animality to rationality, from bestiality to humanity, from barbarism to civilization. In this sense, man's human rational knowledge suppressed and reined his animal natural desire, man could thus successfully develop into an intelligent advanced primate. However, it must be noticed that Adam and Eve's very act of plucking the Fruit of Knowledge derived virtually from their wild natural impulse, which, embodying their animal factor and revealing their natural desire, was actually the original drive of their life. Instead of obeying God's command, Adam and Eve surrendered to their animal factor, followed their natural desire, and instinctively made a momentous ethical choice. This choice proves that the animal factor is as essential as the human factor, and that animality is as important as rationality. In fact, animality is even the foundation of rationality because, after all, man's natural desire propelled him to extend his hand to reach for the Fruit of Knowledge, which instilled in him the rational knowledge [7].

Acquired from the Fruit of Life, the animal factor was actually the fountain of human life; acquired from the Fruit of Knowledge, the human factor furnished mankind with knowledge and the sense of ethics. Should this set of binary, the animal factor and the human factor, be well balanced, they could have compensated and comple-

mented each other, Adam and Eve could have stayed and enjoyed in Eden. However, after eating of the Fruit of Knowledge, they became arrogant, complacent, prejudiced, and contemptuous of the wild nature. Knowledge biased them to be partial to human factor and rational knowledge, and hostile to animal factor and natural desire. In utter disappointment, an enraged God drove them out of the Garden of Eden of happiness and perfection, "he placed at the east of the Garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the Tree of Life⁵." Therefore, the Fruit of Knowledge was brought along into the secular world by Adam and Eve, while the Fruit of Life was kept in the Garden of Eden after them [8] (Figure 2).

Ethical Key to Sphinx Riddle

The Sphinx Riddle in the Greek Mythology provides an important instance for better understanding human ethical consciousness. Mysterious as the Riddle, the Sphinx was a monster with the head and breast of a woman, the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle, and the tail of a serpent⁶. She squatted at the crossroad leading to Thebes, and demanded from the passengers an answer to a riddle, and devoured those who failed to come up with one. The Sphinx Riddle is famous: What goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at noon, and three feet in the evening? And the answer was going to be provided by the famous Oedipus: Man! As a baby he crawls on four feet in the morning of his life, as an adult he strides on two feet in the noon of his life, and when growing old, he walks with a cane, symbolically his third feet, in the evening of his life⁷. When Oedipus

uttered the answer, Sphinx was said to be so upset that she killed herself by jumping over the cliff. For thousands of years ever since, people have all been convinced that Oedipus did crack the Sphinx Riddle and pointed to the complexness of the most advanced primate in the world. Meditation upon this answer of the Riddle has invited and hammered the wisdom of a myriad of thinkers in philosophy, linguistics, psychology, literature and aesthetics, whose

diverse interpretations of human nature have indeed deepened human self-understanding.

However, though people have rendered expansive and insightful exploration into the human nature, the Sphinx Riddle remains an unsolved enigma. Oedipus did offer the answer of “man”, but he had not really cracked human Sphinx Riddle. Instead, his answer simply stopped at the threshold of superficial animality of mankind.

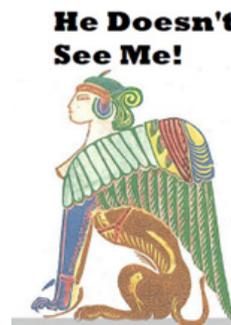


Figure 3.

Pointing merely to the shallow and ugly truth of human life: man's procreation, vegetation, and enervation. This seemingly right yet factually wrong answer deeply disappointed the hopeful Sphinx, who eagerly expected an ideal answer from this young elegant and handsome prince. Sphinx thus killed herself in utter despair and depression, and Oedipus blinded himself in regret and shame after a weird and absurd marriage. In the Biblical era, failing to hold a neutral attitude toward human factor and animal factor, Adam and Eve disappointed God and were driven out of the Eden Garden; in ancient Greek era, failing to strike a good balance between ethical rationality and natural animality, Oedipus did not really crack the Sphinx Riddle and, in consequence, rushed headlong into a pathetic ethical tragedy by killing his father and marrying his mother. In spite of the aphorism of “Know Thyself, Nothing Too Much” in the ancient Temple of Apollo, “man” remains a mysterious riddle to human beings after thousands of years have fled by (Figure 3).

What, then, is the truth of the Sphinx Riddle? In other words, what is the essence of man? The answer is simple enough: it is Sphinx herself. After scrupulous contemplation on this ancient allegory, the author of this thesis comes to realize that Oedipus is preoccupied with human factor, knowledge, wisdom, and rationality, while Sphinx is preoccupied with animal factor, animality, desire, emotion and love. These two compose a binary and are supposed to be equal, and life would be consummate and perfect if they fall in love with each other; unfortunately, Oedipus in his rationality looked merely to the human factor in man, the phenomenon distinguishing man from other animals: from crawling to walking, and to sticking. In human arrogance and chauvinism, he failed to recognize the animal factor in man, the wild natural desire, the native emotion that drove Adam and Eve to the Forbidden Fruit. He failed to recognize the affection Sphinx harbored for him, and did not realize that like the image of Sphinx, love precisely possesses woman's

tenderness, lion's violence, eagle's agility, and snake's wantonness. Sphinx seemed quite the incarnation of this primordial desire of love. She tenderly squatted at the crossroad of life, waiting for a knowledgeable and affectionate hero to answer the Riddle, to perceive the mystery of life, to recognize her primitive glamour, and to embark together with her upon the road to a happy life. Previous passengers who had ever approached her were all hopelessly dumb and foolish. They had profuse rationality but scarce animality, they belittled natural desire while embracing rational faculty. Once in contact with Sphinx the embodiment of love, they lost self-control, lost sober mind, and profaned the natural desire and emotion, and were thus devoured by Sphinx. Supposing Oedipus might have inherited the cleverness of the Thebean royalty and the tenderness of his flirtatious father, Sphinx had expected Oedipus to be the very person that might unveil the mystery of man by cherishing both human animality and rationality; but when Oedipus did arrive, he utterly disappointed Sphinx. He lacked humility and tolerance and thus later killed his father in arrogance and contemptuousness. Hopelessly immersed in narcissism and rationality, he only looked to the superficial phenomena of man's Birth, Growth, and Death, and harshly despised the very fountain of life, namely, love, or human primordial desire and native emotion, which all were incarnated in Sphinx herself. When Sphinx saw that Oedipus was arrogant in his rationality and solipsism and contemptuous of her affection and devotion, prizing his rational knowledge while ignoring her natural love, she felt ashamed of her high expectation pinned on such an unemotional and impersonal idiot and committed suicide in humiliation (Figure 4).

When Sphinx died, Oedipus chose his road and proceeded on in beaming triumph. Convinced that he had discovered the knack of life in answering the Riddle, he became more confident in rationality and more contemptuous of animality. When the story of his

audacity and wisdom was spread, his rational faculty was respected and worshiped by people everywhere, and citizens of Thebes made him the king when their King Laois, actually Oedipus's Father, was murdered.



Figure 4.

In his arrogance, Oedipus married Iocaste the Queen, who was actually his mother, and occupied his father's bed, which symbolized the pinnacle of the ethical pyramid of the Thebes kingdom. Taking marriage, the very symbol of love, merely as a ritual for crowning his rationality, Oedipus was ecstatic and ambitious, hoping to bring his rational knowledge into practical play and put the Thebes society in perfect ethical harmony. He did not expect his complacency and vanity had sacrificed his natural emotion, and in unconscious ignorance trampled on his beloved mother and in cocksure arrogance committed abominable incest. Along with Oedipus' crime, disasters symbolically fell on his kingdom and there took place in a row a severe drought, a cattle plague, abortions of women, and some fire damages. When the Sacrificial Officer invited by Kreon, the Queen's brother and Oedipus's uncle, suggested that these disasters were brought about by Oedipus's unconscious

crime, Oedipus accused Kreon of coveting his crown and fortune and conspiring with the Officer to frame him. This accusation, however, proved that Oedipus prized above everything his crown and fortune, the very symbols of the ethical acme of Thebes social hierarchy. After Oedipus was convicted and detained for murder and incest, he was unwilling to depart with his two daughters, and Kreon made a meaningful remark, "Do not try to occupy everything; what you have in possession will not follow you forever⁸." This remark again reiterated the fact that Oedipus prized wealth; yet we understand his wealth comes from his power, his power from his crown, his crown from feudal hierarchy, feudal hierarchy from social ethics, and social ethics from rational knowledge. As for native emotion, basic friendship, natural love, Oedipus wished to keep to himself rather than share and experience with others. In a word, his animality was merely a slave to his rationality.

Hamlet's Overdose Rationality



Figure 5.

The celebrated play of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare offers us another meaningful example of human ethical tragedy. When the Danish Prince Hamlet is receiving education at a German school, he learns in shock of his father's death. Hastening back home for the funeral, he is further impacted by the news that his uncle Claudius has already inherited the Danish crown, and more to his humiliation, his mother Gertrude marries Claudius shortly after his father's death. Extremely bewildered by the series of happenings, Hamlet investigates into the causes of his father's death. When the apparition of

Old Hamlet accuses Claudius of poisoning him to death, Hamlet is overwhelmed with devastating grief and wrath. He orchestrates a play to simulate Claudius killing of his father, and when seeing his uncle react unusually, he is convinced of Claudius's crime of murder and all the more grieving for his mother's flagrant betrayal and unashamed marriage: "Frailty, thy name is woman! Within a month, ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears had left the flushing in her galled eyes, She married. O! Most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets⁹." Nevertheless, though wishing to

avenge his father, Hamlet finds himself confronted with an ethical dilemma: if he kills Claudius the king and stepfather, he will commit the same crimes Claudius has committed, regicide and patricide; meanwhile, in doing so he will harm his mother by widowing her. Afraid that Claudius will be vigilant against him, Hamlet feigns madness, awaiting his chance of revenge, but in this process, he not only fails to echo Ophelia's love for him, but also loses the best chance to kill Claudius. Finally, at a duel with Ophelia's brother in front of all the peers, Hamlet does kill the king and avenge his father, but with himself and his mother into the bargain (Figure 5).

Failing to penetrate the very truth of the Sphinx Riddle, Oedipus killed his father and married his mother and sparked off an ethical tragedy; Hamlet, too, forsaking his natural emotion and wallowing in his rational knowledge, slays his love and martyrs himself in revenge. His tragedy does reflect the spirit of the Renaissance, when human rationality was exalted and religious fatuity denounced. Hamlet once praises human rationality: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in Reason! How infinite in faculty! In form, in moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel!"¹⁰ Hamlet is just this type of scholarly prince, smart, astute, analytic, contemplative, rationalistic enough to rule the kingdom; however, Hamlet is over-rational, letting his rationality crush down his animality. Immersed in his rational knowledge, he neglects and abandons Ophelia, the embodiment of his love, his emotion, his natural desire, and his natural will. Ophelia thus becomes the Sphinx Riddle of his life. Hamlet's rationality convinces him that Claudius has committed regicide and patricide in killing his father, and that his mother has shamelessly committed incest and married Claudius shortly after his father dies. With their utterly immoral acts, both of them have destructed Old Hamlet's ethical kingdom and robbed young Hamlet of the crown. Hamlet is thus determined to avenge his father and reestablish the ethical order of his father's kingdom. However, like Oedipus, Hamlet does not strike a good balance between his human factor and animal factor; he abuses his rational wisdom and compromises his natural emotion. In appealing to his rationality for revenge, he arbitrarily tramples upon the love of Ophelia, the symbol of his animality and natural desire. Ophelia thus laments Hamlet's crazy sanity in utter grief: "O! what a Noble Mind is here o'erthrown; And I, of ladies most deject and wretched, That suck'd the honey of his music vows, Now see that noble and most Sovereign Reason, Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh; That unmatch'd form and feature of blown youth blasted with ecstasy"¹¹.

Besides his loss of love, Hamlet's ethical dilemma may have derived from the over-practice of his rationality. It naturally arouses suspicion that the death of the Old Hamlet is first whispered by Horatio, Hamlet's faithful friend, then evidenced by a ghostly dialogue between Hamlet and his father's apparition. Curiously enough, when Hamlet is conversing with his father, his mother Gertrude, though a long-time bedmate with and indignantly resented by the old king, does not receive a slight trace of her husband's burning wrath. Regarding this, the reader might wonder if Hamlet is too devastated and overwhelmed by the loss of both his father and his crown, and if he in rational collaboration with Hora-

tio deliberately spreads the rumor about his father's apparition. To a certain degree, we might infer that the series of severe impacts, the loss of his father, the usurpation of his uncle, the betrayal of his mother, have inflicted an immeasurably severe spiritual trauma on Hamlet, so that the wise, proud, and intellectual young prince loses his mind in extreme rationality. Unwilling to accept that his God-like father has died of a sudden acute disease, Hamlet suspects that there might indeed exist some real emotional flirtation between his uncle and his mother. He becomes convinced that there must be something insidious and sinister behind his father's death and his mother's second marriage. Under the work of his overwhelming rationality, Hamlet grows insane and sees his deceased father in hallucination; in his trance his fiery fury over his uncle's usurpation and his mother's betrayal creates in his mind's eye an imagined picture of how his father has been poisoned by his uncle and cuckolded by his mother. This picture is finally embodied in the angry accusation of his father's apparition. When he feigns madness, Hamlet has already lost his trust in basic affection and love between human beings, and is convinced that his mother must be flirtatious and coquettish and his uncle lecherous and murderous: "But virtue, as it never will be mov'd, Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven, So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd, Will sate itself in a celestial bed, And prey on garbage"¹².

Claudius might actually have the motive and chance to kill his brother and usurp the kingdom, yet we do not have substantial proof for that. His fear and guilt are mostly exhibited through Hamlet's insane perspective. His confession "O! My offence is rank, it smells to heaven"¹³ seems to be the psychological implication and projection of the hostile and hesitating and vindictive young Prince. His dispatching Hamlet to Britain, his estranging Ophelia's brother and Hamlet, and his attempt at killing Hamlet with a poisoned sword, all appear to be self-protective measures under the pressuring intimidation of Hamlet. On the whole, Hamlet's tragedy further proves that if a man tilts toward one side between his animality and rationality, between his rational will and natural will, the other side would correspondingly wane and diminish. Therefore, if Hamlet had, instead of over-practicing his rational wisdom in utter grief, held a more objective attitude toward his fatherly apparition, responded more ardently to Ophelia's love, and taken a second thought of possible emotional attachment between his uncle and his mother, this tragedy might have wound up in another direction. In that case, however, Hamlet would not have been Hamlet.

Ethical Enigma of Hamlet's Soliloquy

Actually, although few scholar has yet perceived it, Hamlet's tragedy of rationality is revealed to its fullest extent in his famous soliloquy. In this soliloquy, Hamlet presents a phenomenal proposition: "To be or not to be, that is the question." This rational issue of life or death is indeed of significant import for mankind. However, the causes for man to be man are not only his reason and rationality, but also his emotion and animality. While most Hamlet readers have merely focused their attention on the seemingly profound rationalistic contemplation of a life dilemma, of whether or not Hamlet ought to take revenge on Claudius, the author of this essay believes the emotional lamentation and plea for redemption in the end of

the soliloquy provides a key to understanding Hamlet's tragedy and factually unveils the very ethical enigma of human life.

In the beginning of the Soliloquy, Hamlet seems helpless in vacillating between the two important choices in his life: to be or not to be in other words, to do or not to do, to kill or not to kill, to revenge or not to revenge, to live or not to live. To make his decision, Hamlet must exercise his ethical reasoning faculty of rationality. He surmises it would be better "To die, to sleep -- / No more" rather than to make a decision on whether "To suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" or to "Take arms against a sea of troubles." Nevertheless, he doubts his decision when it occurs to him that "What dreams May come, / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause: there's the respect / That makes calamity of so long life." He realizes there is "the dread of something after death" that eventually "puzzles the will / And makes us rather bear those ills we have / Than fly to others that we know not of," and that, whether in life or in death, the ethical burden of guilt will remain his primary concern: while rational knowledge may help him decide on life or death, natural emotion, or the primordial desire for love, renders meaningless the issue of life or death. Hamlet thus bewails:

Thus, conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprise of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

Here, "conscience" refers to human morality, ethics, or rational knowledge; "resolution" indicates human emotion, love, or natural desire. Hamlet obviously recognizes that "thought", or rationality, sicklies rather than energizes man by blunting his "native resolution" toward animality with a pale cast, and makes him unable to act in great enterprises of love and understanding. As to himself, Hamlet realizes that his overdose rationality has blinded him to his animality and delivered him into the grip of sins against his love. He finally laments in the end of his Soliloquy:

Soft you now! The fair Ophelia!
Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd¹⁴.



Figure 6.

(Figure 6) Why does Hamlet regard Ophelia as his "Nymph"? Because she is his love, or rather, the embodiment of his animality, his animal factor, his native desire, or his natural will, and has been neglected by his human factor, his reason, his speculative faculty, or his rational will. This constitutes the very "Sphinx Riddle" in the life of Hamlet, who in his hallucinatory rationality has sinned by laying waste his love, his emotion, his natural desire, and his animality. These "Sins", as confessed by Hamlet himself, could only be redeemed in the "orisons" of his primordial love. This, however, is the ethical enigma and the most inspiring stroke of Hamlet's Soliloquy.

The Noble Wild Beast

Factually, the binary of animality and rationality has found its way in the famous Freudian theory of sub-consciousness. The key concepts in ethical criticism such as animal factor, primordial desire, native emotion, natural love and natural will, are obviously the exhibition of the "Id" in psychoanalysis, being "a chaos, a cauldron of seething excitement with no organization and no unified will, only an impulsion to obtain satisfaction for the instinctual needs, in accordance with the Pleasure Principle¹⁵." Like "Id", animal factor and

natural love are the reservoir of all human spiritual and emotional energy, providing overwhelming dynamic for life or death. Other key concepts in ethical criticism such as human factor, reasoning faculty, ethical knowledge and rational will, on the other hand, are the exhibition of the "Ego" and "Superego": "The Id stands for the untamed passion, while the Ego stands for reason and circumspection and the Superego is, representative of all moral restriction, the advocate of the impulse toward perfection¹⁶." Therefore, like the "Ego" and "Superego", human factor and ethical rationality assume the power of the Tree of Knowledge, manipulating man's thinking, disciplining man's behavior, and urging individuals to abide by the ethical code and moral requirement in the society; whereas man's animal factor and natural emotion, though suppressed and channeled by his human factor and rational knowledge, assume the very power of the "Id" and the Tree of Life, oozing the primordial and creative power of life, nursing profuse human potentiality, and nourishing the vivacious capability of human love. While the former renders man a social being in the ethical order of human society, the latter endows man with an original and initiative power peculiar in his individualism. Accordingly, the importance of the animal factor

and natural emotion ought to be eulogized along with that of human factor and rational knowledge (Figure 7).

Enlightened by Freud's theory and recognizing the importance

of this binary of animality and rationality, D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), the famous British writer, realized that in modern industrial society the human factor and rational knowledge have exerted enormous pressure upon the animal factor and natural emotion.



Figure 7.

This facilitates the ethical society to prevent people from enjoying and savoring the primary pleasure in human life and antagonize people against sexuality by defining it as human "Original Sin". From Lawrence's viewpoint, social cultivation and modern civilization have unscrupulously restrained and straitjacketed human beings and severely choked back the primeval impulses of human desire and emotion. We have thus ignored the aspect that these primeval impulses are just the swelling of the animal factor and natural desire in individuals, and that, like "A Noble Wild Beast"¹⁷ these impulses could release overwhelmingly creative power when given proper free rein. In reality, man's natural desire is over-pressured by his rational knowledge, and his animal factor is over-pressured by his human factor. Upon entering the society, a free individual will at once be subject to the limitation of the social restraints and instantly fettered by the chain of civilization, the primeval forest of the individual emotion will be brutally scorched, and the wild continent of the individual humanity will be savagely exploited and destroyed. Natural desire, the Noble Wild Beast of humanity, stripped of its particular creativity and its facility for free choice, will be pathetically reduced to the yanking rein of ethical rationality, like a tamed pony¹⁸.

Robert Frost (1874–1963), the renowned American poet, once presents his contemplation upon a fabulous dark forest in his "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" (1923). In appearance, this poem illustrates a beautiful artistic picture: the poet might be wondering whether to proceed on his rough journey of an enter-

prise or settle at a cozy seclusion, or he might be meditating the great discrepancy between the mysterious forest, the very symbol of nature, and a faraway hamlet, the very symbol of human society¹⁹. However, if we read this poem from the perspective of ethical criticism, we would come up with a new insight and a fresh interpretation of the poem: In the white freezing rational world of the downy flake, while the poet is marching on a beaten road of ethical knowledge and moral code of the society, he beholds this dark forest that seems extremely wild, mysterious and beautiful. His soul immediately shudders at the sanctity and inviolability of this shrine of grand nobility and profound solemnity. This dark primeval forest echoes the Id deep down in the innermost of the poet and resonates with his animal factor and natural emotion remarkably. Standing in the vast cold whiteness of rational knowledge and social ethical order, the poet in an epiphany perceives and marvels at the vigorous natural desire and the untrammelled individualistic potentiality represented by the dark wild forest. However, he still has to proceed on his journey because of moral consciousness and social responsibility: "But I have promises to keep, / And miles to go before I sleep, / And miles to go before I sleep."

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Conflict of Interest

None

i Ethical criticism in literature has thus been raging on all the time since the era of Plato and Aristotle. From classicism to romanticism, from realism to naturalism, and from modernism post-modernism, ethical literary criticism has never ceased in dominating the literary kingdom. In the last half of the twentieth century, after the fragmentary mosaics of post-modernism, literary scholars return again to reiterate the ethical spectrum of literary works. In 1983, *New Literary History* published a special issue on "Literature and Moral Philosophy". In 1999, *PMLA* published a special issue on "Ethics and Literary Study". In 2004, *Poetic Today* featured a special issue on "Literature and Ethics". Since 2005, Professor Zhenzhao NIE, a famous Chinese scholar, and his contemporaries started a new renaissance of ethical literary criticism.

ii Ethical narrative criticism, or Rhetorical theory of narrative, was first initiated by Ohio State University Distinguished Professor James Phelan, in 1980s.

iii "Genesis", *Bible*, 2:16-17.

iv *Ibid*, 3:3-4.

v *Ibid*, 3:24.

vi *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. London: Cassell Ltd., 1981, p.1058.

vii <http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/literature/sphinx.htm>.

viii Sophocles, "Oedipus", *Selection of Foreign Drama*. Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Press, 1979, p.116.

viii Shakespeare, William, *Collection of Shakespeare* (Vol. 3). Beijing: China's Movie Press, 1997, p.333.

x Ibid, p.361. (Act II. Scene II.)

xi Ibid, p.375. (Act III. Scene I.)

xii Ibid, p.344. (Act I. Scene V.)

xiii Ibid, p.390. (Act III. Scene III.)

xiv Most readers have overlooked this final sentence. The movies adapted from *Hamlet* in 1948 and 1990, respectively by Laurence Olivier and Mel Gibson, have both deleted this sentence; and the movie in 2009 starred by Gregory Doran did keep this sentence, but deleted the middle part of this soliloquy and demonstrated disorder and casualness in handling this sentence.

xv Freud, Sigmund, "The Anatomy of the Mental Personality." *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. New York: Norton, 1964, pp.103-4.

xvi Ibid, pp.105.

xvii Lawrence, D. H., "Novel and Emotion", *Lawrence's Notebook of Reading*, Shanghai SDX Bookstore, 2007, p.37.

xviii Ibid, pp.37-8.

xix Liu, Shoulun, *Famous British and American Poems*, Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press, 2003, p.515.

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