



Research Paper

Deciphering Humanity's Shadow: Symbolic Depiction of Decadence in Oyinka Braithwait's My Sister, the Serial Killer.

Adaobi Olivia Ihueze PhD

oa.ihueze@unizik.edu.ng

*Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.*

Chidimma Blessing Nneka Ike

cb.ike@unizik.edu.ng

*Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
Corresponding Author – Adaobi Olivia Ihueze*

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the symbolic representation of moral corruption in Oyinkan Braithwaite's psychologically complex novel, My Sister, the Serial Killer. It focuses on the knife that passes from abusive father to vulnerable daughters, embodied as a foreboding symbol of humanity's inner darkness. When the protagonists Ayoola and Korede were young, their father's cruelty and violence left deep scars, shaping their fates. His cherished knife becomes an instrument of distorted family bonds, driving the sisters down diverging yet intertwined paths toward destruction. For ambitious Ayoola, the blade fuels bitter revenge, purging pain through murderous rage turned ritualistic. Though wary nurse Korede tries resisting complicity, sisterly loyalty contests her conscience at each gruesome scene. As the knife slashes through superficial ties to reveal the wounds beneath, it gestures to moral questions piercing through Braithwaite's subtle social critique. By cycling the weapon through generations, the narrative implies that unhealed trauma too easily corrupts into decadence, with victimhood threatening to spawn violation anew. Yet never losing balance, Braithwaite avoids branding the sisters as monsters, instead allowing glimmers of shared hope between Korede's guilt and Ayoola's touches of humanity. This symbolic tale suspends readers between empathy and judgment, indicting cycles that twist vulnerable people without denying them complexity. Anchored in the knife's tip, My Sister, the Serial Killer draws lyrical blood not to condemn but to reveal the shadows within us all, begging examination under society's searching light.

KEYWORDS: *Knife, Bitter revenge, Symbol, Decadence, Patriarchy, Violence, murder, serial killer*

Received 08 Dec., 2023; Revised 19 Dec., 2023; Accepted 21 Dec., 2023 © The author(s) 2023.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Manifestations of moral decay have long permeated literary works, with authors probing varied dimensions of societal and individual decadence. While texts like Ayi Kwei Armah's [1] *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Kaine Agary's [2] *Yellow Yellow* contain explicit depictions of ethical corrosion, Oyinkan Braithwaite's [3] psychological novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* presents a more subtle, metaphorical rendering of this theme. Braithwaite delves into the symbiotic relationship between domestic trauma and spreading community contamination. At the story's core lies the symbol of a knife embodying the horrific legacy passed from an abusive father to his psychologically splintered daughters.

As the blade inches into the next generation's hands, it transforms into a specter reflecting the family's recursive cycle of violence and the gradual decay of moral boundaries. The novel immerses readers in the ripple effects of this decadence, exploring how easily victims can morph into villains when psychological wounds warp perceptions of right versus wrong. By anchoring the narrative on this symbolic object, Braithwaite [3]

provokes profound questions around retribution versus forgiveness, complicity versus resistance, and empathy versus condemnation when facing those trapped within traumatic decadence. The recurring knife crystallizes how early exposure to toxic environments risks nourishing a twisted worldview where brutality begets brutality. Through this vivid representation of incremental ethical corrosion on individual and collective levels, *My Sister, the Serial Killer* offers an incisive literary depiction of humanity's turn towards darkness in the absence of healing.

Among literary depictions of societal descent into moral decay, Oyinkan Braithwaite's [3] psychological novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer* stands out for its unflinching illumination of corruption flowering within the assumed sanctuary of family. While the breakdown of ethical boundaries typically provides fodder for communal critiques, Braithwaite [3] spotlights the home as the breeding ground for decadence seeping into wider culture. She delves into the realm of domestic trauma, where cycles of violence and abuse warp vulnerability into a twisted worldview for perpetrators and victims alike. The narrative traces how suffering and compartmentalization deteriorate the moral fiber of the protagonist, Korede as she aids her sister Ayoola in masking gruesome murders. The storyline explicitly confronts the capacity for brutality when stability fractures, with graphic descriptions pulling no punches. Yet the subtle symbol of their father's knife cuts even deeper as embodiment of the pain. Through Ayoola's ritualistic use of this blade, the narrative conveys that unreconciled aggression intergenerational gets subconsciously transmitted until empathy corrodes. The knife forms the secret center around which the family splinters, begging the question of whether by now, the corrosion may be too ingrained to excise. By returning to its metallic gleam between moments of vivid crisis, Braithwaite [3] conveys the incremental nature of moral decay through poetic indirection. She focuses readers on the tipping point rather than the aftermath, spotlighting humanity's frightening fragility when long-buried domestic trauma redirects into the light of day.

While scholars like Ifeyinwa Ogbazi and Ijeoma Emelumadu [4] offer salient analyses of violence and rebellion symbolism in *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, Braithwaite's [3] representation of decadence encompasses added depth through her metaphorical approach. Undoubtedly, explicit acts of brutality by the protagonist's sister, Ayoola provide unambiguous manifestations of moral corruption. However, the repeated motif of the knife passed down from abusive father to damaged daughter gestures to more insidious implications regarding society's role in both fostering cycles of victimization and excusing female aggression stemming from trauma.

Braithwaite [3] exposes how violence wounds and warps its immediate victims. Yet she also indicts entire systems that normalize violence and fail to interrupt its contagion. The patriarchal family structure perpetuating bloodshed across generations symbolizes oppressive societal forces exposing women to victimization from an early age. Through this layered portrayal, Braithwaite [3] prompts broader questions around collective accountability in either fueling or fighting decadence at its roots. Her unflinching narrative refuses quick labels of innocent or evil, confronting audiences with complex human reactions to being surrounded by moral corrosion from childhood. While showcasing alarming manifestations of internalized damage, symbolized through the knife's slash, Braithwaite [3] also leaves room for hope that cycles producing ethical decline may shift upon recognition of their destructive reverberations across communities.

Ultimately, *My Sister the Serial Killer* leverages visceral plot details in tandem with metaphorical resonance to emphasize that passive allowance of violence begets violence. This dual rendering provides a mirror reflecting society's complicity in excusing or ignoring moral corrosion, especially that which bubbles under the surface of power structures and pasts no one dares disturb. They (Ogbazi & Emelumadu [4]) write that,

The author made use of symbolism as a literary device to convey a deeper meaning beyond the literal one. For example, in literature violence often has a profound meaning. Violence and its victims are considered a metaphor for something greater. In the story violence had two shapes, the first was the one committed by the girl's father, which resembles the oppression of women in the Patriarchal society. While the second is represented in the murders committed by Ayoola. It might symbolize women's revolt against the oppression of the patriarchy. (31)

While Oyinkan Braithwaite's [3] *My Sister, the Serial Killer* contains overt depictions of violence through the brutal murders committed by Ayoola, the deeper symbolism of the generational trauma underpinning her acts deserves further analysis. As scholars like Ogbazi and Emelumadu [4] have discussed, the violence permeating the siblings' psyche stems from formative exposure to their father's unyielding patriarchal authority and domestic abuse wielding significant control over the family. However, examinations of the knife as a symbol of masculinity's capacity for destruction do not fully encapsulate the layered representations of trauma's reverberations through the text.

Beneath the surface, Braithwaite portrays the sisters as inheriting personality disorders from trauma's impact on their psychosexual and moral development. Ayoola exhibits markers of antisocial personality disorder through her superficial charm masking lack of empathy, remorseless violence, and manipulation of others.

Meanwhile, Korede's obsessive tendencies and repressed emotions suggest undertones of obsessive compulsive tendencies exacerbated by childhood helplessness. Braithwaite [3] hints that such maladaptive coping resembles similar literary depictions of trauma's effects on moral clarity in texts like Isidore Okpewho's [5] *The Last Duty*.

Therefore, while the knife represents the origins of the sisters' unhealed pain in their father's abuses, their distorted psyches and systems of justifying murder symbolize trauma's insidious manifestations when left to fester internally across years. Broader questions of accountability arise regarding the line between damage and personal choice once escaping the immediate environment precipitating harm during fragility. Thus, deeper analyses of *My Sister, the Serial Killer* must balance condemnation with empathy to appreciate Braithwaite's [3] complex illustration of decadence flourishing from unaddressed affliction.

Ouled Ben Messaouda [6] states that "the knife in the story might symbolize the violence that is inherited by the patriarchy or it might regard as a way to revolt against oppression. Ayoola used a knife that she took from his possessions before his body was cold in the ground ... It made sense that she would take it, it was the thing he was most proud of" (19). Ayoola's act of retrieving the knife from her father's lifeless body serves as a potent act of rebellion against his patriarchal dominance, persisting even in death. This knife, emblematic of the control he wielded over their lives, becomes a chilling tool as Ayoola embarks on a spree of murders, specifically targeting men who attempt to exert dominance over her. It becomes apparent that the traumas inflicted by her father have impelled her to revolt against such men, who are drawn to her but seek to establish control. In a disturbing twist of self-preservation, Ayoola employs the very symbol of her father's power to reclaim her autonomy and resist the oppressive forces attempting to subjugate her.

Hitherto, existing studies have not aligned with the primary focus of this paper. The majority of research on the text predominantly revolves around themes of patriarchy and feminism, neglecting the exploration of the moral decadence present in the narrative. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a thorough analysis of the text, placing specific emphasis on the symbolism interwoven with the progression of decadence throughout the story. By delving into the intricacies of the symbolism used in the text, we aim to illuminate the nuanced portrayal of moral decline and its evolution within the narrative.

Symbol, Symbolism and Symbolic Representations of Decadence:

Symbols and symbolism are prevalent and significant literary devices frequently employed in literary texts. They serve to reinforce essential points within the narrative and often carry deeper meanings beyond their surface appearances. By utilizing symbols, authors can add layers of detail to the events described in the text, enriching the overall reading experience. However, grasping the full extent and implications of these symbols typically requires the discerning eye of a critical reader who can delve into their hidden depths and unravel their profound significance.

A Glossary of Literary Terms [7] defines symbol as "something that represents or stands for something else; in literature, a concrete image can express an emotion or abstract idea because of symbolism" (5). As an influential literary critic Northrop Frye [8] established, symbols within narratives represent something else through association, resemblance, or convention, carrying layered meaning beyond superficial impressions. In Oyinkan Braithwaite's [3] psychologically incisive novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, the bloody knife passed down from abusive patriarch to traumatized daughter serves as a visceral yet poetic symbol. Beyond its overt connections to sequential murders, the blade invites multifaceted interpretations of violence's origins and societal culpability in its normalization across relationships and generations.

Specifically, tracking the ancestral weapon's trajectory from cherished fatherly gift to an obsessive accessory in Ayoola's ritualistic killings spotlights the horrific metamorphosis of trauma when left to fester internally over years. Its narrative arc suggests that early childhood suffering can inadvertently nurture moral corrosion when left to metastasize in secret, reflected through Ayoola's chilling adoption of her father's violent objectification and disposal of humans in the very site (home) where such vulnerability should elicit greatest care. Here, Braithwaite's [3] deft use of symbols probes the permeable barriers between damage and accountability, empathy and enablement. The knife epitomizes Carolyn Burdett's [11] conceptualization of decadence as intense refinement of baser instincts once nurtured by intimate wounds. Much as iconic symbols in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [12] and *The Great Gatsby* [13] etched the mounting societal and civilizational costs of imbalanced indulgence, the ancestral blade spotlights the precariousness of ethical governance when individuals and systems implicitly permit cycles allowing brutality's contamination of sacred spaces.

However while exposing an unsettling reflection of cultural and familial corruption through Ayoola's vacuity, Braithwaite also channels symbols' transcendent power. For "contemplating these symbols" may illuminate pathways back from darkness through context's empathetic illumination. As the knife traces the terrible inheritance of normalizing violence, it also insists that staring at communal shadows need not preclude individual and collective transcendence. Where others condemn Ayoola as a monster, Braithwaite [3] refuses such simplification, instead allowing glimmers of humanity and the possibility of resurrection if cycles giving

rise to ethical corrosion face disruption. Like flashes permeating murky waters, these lucid symbols still beckon hidden stairways to salvation through unflinching inner sight.

The Symbolic Depiction of Decadence in Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer*

Oyinkan Braithwaite's acclaimed novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* stands apart for its unconventionally dark plunge into family dysfunction and female criminality, and analyses have primarily fixated on diagnosing characters or framing patriarchal conditions motivating violence. However, Braithwaite's rich symbolic language around the central image of the knife deserves equal scrutiny for the complexity it adds to the text's moral questions. As both violent heirloom and sole vestige of fatherly care between Kehinde and his daughters, the blade distills how innocence becomes forfeit when affection fuses with violation during formative years.

Yet the knife's early presence auguring Ayoola's murders frames decadence not as an anomaly but an inherited cycle both sisters adopt from male predecessors surrounding them. While other critics emphasize event-level diagnostics of Antisocial Personality Disorder or sociocultural gender dynamics, such restrictive lenses obscure Braithwaite's layered social commentary through metaphor. The erratic melody of the knife skipping across victims unfurls the deeper exploration of moral deterioration as trauma handed cyclically down familial lines.

Thus, this paper presents a symbolic analysis of the generational decadence embodied in the knife's narrative arc. Tracking its descent from patriarchal tool bred in brutality toward Ayoola's obsessive transformation into an instrument of her unraveling psyche, new insights on ethical corruption's contagion emerge. The knife etches both intimately personal and politically resonant questions about the nature of morality once tainted by early traumatic events. Ultimately, Braithwaite's tragic symbolism leaves room for the hope that recognition of damage may inspire change before the knife's edge cuts terminal wounds across communities. (But why was she carrying the knife?) ... She killed him on the first strike, a jab straight to the heart" (6). The quoted words from the text highlight the recurring significance of the knife in Ayoola's actions. This knife remains a constant presence in her life, a haunting reminder of her traumatic past. This is in line with Nietzsche's assessment as cited by Hurrel, [10] who described decadence as a physiological condition with psychological consequences that inclines those who suffer from it to be against life. Symbolically, the knife represents the weight of her history, pushing her to react impulsively whenever she feels threatened or offended. Ayoola frequently rationalizes her killings as acts of self-defense, aligning with Nietzsche's perspective, as cited by Nicholas More, [14] that decadence encompasses any condition deceptively perceived as good, yet restricts potential for growth. The text highlights several incidents revolving around their father's knife, which deeply impacts Ayoola and Korede's memories. As previously mentioned, the knife holds great significance for their father, becoming his most cherished possession. Its symbolic weight accentuates the profound influence it holds over the sisters and their choices. Korede recalls how much their father admired the knife as

Ayoola inherited the knife from him. It made sense that she would take it—it was the thing he was most proud of. He kept it sheathed and locked in a drawer, but he would bring it out whenever we had guests to show it off to. He would hold the nine-inch curved blade between his fingers, drawing the viewer's attention to the black comma-like markings carved and printed in the pale bone hilt. The presentation usually came with a story. (33)

Korede goes on to state that she had never seen her father hold or treat anything with the tenderness that he treated the knife. He never let it go away from his sight. He didn't allow anyone to touch it or use it. Once, when Ayoola had gone to his room to check it out and leave stains on it, she was dealt with. Korede's father loved the knife so much that he made up different versions of stories surrounding the knife. According to the narrator, he would pick the story that best suited the personality of the person listening whenever he had a visitor. This knife is an indirect representation of his male authority. This male authority has been best described as patriarchy by some scholars.

In the context of this discussion, the knife is a symbolic depiction of decadence. Since this knife is what presents the male authority of Korede's father in their household, it is the representative of all the traumas the family experience in his hand. Any time the daughters are treated badly, they tend to remember the knife first. This image of the knife is so much a tragedy that the narrator presents a situation where Ayoola refuses to let go of the knife. The narrator writes that we lock eyes for a brief moment, and then she lets out a sigh, lowering her arms. "The knife means a lot to me, Korede. It's all I have left of him," she says. If these words were directed at anyone else, they might carry some weight of sentimentality, but she can't deceive me.

Despite Ayoola's sincere claim that the knife holds immense significance to her and is deeply connected to her memories of their father, Korede remains skeptical. She struggles to grasp the true extent of the knife's importance to her sister. At this point, Korede cannot fully comprehend the profound symbolism the knife carries for Ayoola. It serves as a representation of the decadence displayed by their father, a legacy he passed down to his daughters. The presence of the knife pushes Ayoola to mirror the same heartlessness her

father exhibited. An example of this is when she murders Femi and then proceeds to post about his disappearance on social media without any apparent guilt. This act mirrors the callousness her father displayed in the past, leading many readers to perceive her as akin to a beast, reminiscent of her father's behaviour. The knife becomes a potent force driving Ayoola to exhibit the same level of cruelty and lack of remorse as their father did. The narrator puts it as

#FemiDurandIsMissing has gone viral. One post in particular is drawing a lot of attention—Ayoola's. She has posted a picture of them together, announcing herself as the last person to have seen him alive, with a message begging anyone, *anyone*, to come forward if they know anything that can be of help.

(23)

To avoid suspicion, Ayoola recognizes the need to make a post about her missing boyfriend. She cleverly includes that she was the last person to see him alive. Her strategy takes into account societal biases based on gender and size, assuming that people would not readily consider her capable of being the culprit due to her small stature compared to Femi's. As a result, she effortlessly covers her tracks, with the knife serving as her secret support.

When growing up, Ayoola witnessed the atrocities committed by her father, and sadly, she not only learned from them but also perfected the art of violence and deceit. Having personally experienced the impact of her father's wickedness and anger, she absorbed the cold and hateful demeanor he displayed. One of the most severe instances was when her father brazenly brought his lover into their matrimonial home, leading to a heated confrontation that turned into a bloody and devastating situation. Ayoola's exposure to her father's violent actions contributed to her development as a ruthless individual, wielding the knife as her instrument of harm with deadly precision. The narrator writes,

È gbà mí o! Š'o fẹ b'alé mi jẹ? Š'o fẹyi mi lóri ni? Olúwa k'ọjú sí mi! She wasn't even screaming at her husband—it was the interloper whom she was mad at ... I remember thinking how silly she looked, so worked up as he stood tall and impassive before her. "If you don't shut up now, I will deal with you," he informed her firmly. Moments later he pulled our mother off her feet by her hair and slammed her against the wall. Then he struck her face ... The "woman" laughed. (86)

Given Ayoola's upbringing under the tyranny of her father's narcissistic rage, her own adoption of his violent objectification of humans as disposable things elicits tragic inevitability rather than shock. Ayoola's compulsive murders symbolize the transmission of generational trauma when past suffering corrodes empathy in its wake. Despite their mother's efforts to shield her daughters from the worst of the abuse, Ayoola internalized the signaling that brute force and female charm provide means for power and control when opposed directly. Wielding the ancestral knife against callous men, Ayoola enacts a logical if horrific response to childhood helplessness and violation.

Yet where Ayoola hardened in defiance, Korede froze in dutiful accommodation, binding sister to warped sister despite her own unspoken fears. Through these divergent expressions of damage, Braithwaite gestures to broader questions around the limitations of individual accountability after formative identity construction occurs under a matrix of violence and silenced protest. The text challenges comfortable condemnation, asking whether we inadvertently pass on the emotional shrapnel embedded since childhood when cycles remain unexamined for too long. Thus, more than frightening, Ayoola's vacant rebellion symbolizes the cost of maturity forged not in warmth and trust, but in blood and echoes of blade meeting bone. On one occasion, just after killing Femi, Ayoola dances in her room to Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance with Somebody," seemingly indifferent to the gravity of her actions. Ayoola's nonchalant dancing after claiming the latest murder was "self-defense" chillingly crystallizes her vacancy of conscience and lack of awareness around the severity of her crimes' impact. As she gleefully sways, dissociating from the bloody scene, Ayoola epitomizes the insidious potential for trauma to hollow out empathy when survival instinct overrides moral calculus in the aftermath of violation. Having witnessed her father's reckless wielding of female lives, Ayoola mirrors this sociopathic sense of entitlement to take through masculine strength without consequence.

However, where he experienced no lasting qualms, Ayoola's unprocessed pain manifests through her body's cheerful betrayal of the mind's overwhelming knowledge each time the knife meets flesh. The lurking, nameless grief behind the facade hints at fate's cruel joke, that she knows not what was lost to become so lost. Still, through her nonchalant dance away from freshly spilled blood, Ayoola embodies the narcissist's conception of other people as expendable props, as well as trauma's temptation toward disconnection and suppression until emotions register as mere ghosts. Ultimately, the choreography traces trauma's theft of human recognition so absolute that even one's own reflection shows a stranger wearing a painted smile.

I want to have a shower, to rinse the smell of the hospital's disinfectant off my skin, but instead I open the door. She doesn't sense my presence—she has her back to me and is thrusting her hips from side to side, her bare feet stroking the white fur rug as she steps this way and that. Her movements are in no way rhythmical;

they are the movements of someone who has no audience and no self-consciousness to shackle them. Days ago, we gave a man to the sea, but here she is, dancing. (31)

While Korede views her sister Ayoola as the active agent sinking into violence, she perceives the inherited knife as the conduit for their father's corrupt worldview to infect Ayoola's psyche insidiously. Korede's reflection on her sister's transformation evokes thought-provoking questions around the interplay between personal agency and formative influences in shaping criminal propensity. She ponders whether the knife carries an almost supernatural curse, binding its owners to play out former patriarchs' distorted agendas through its murderous history. However, Braithwaite suggests a more complex dynamic through Ayoola's simmering hatred toward her abusive father, despite adopting his vicious traits subconsciously.

Ayoola's calculated defiance wearing his hated purple to the funeral epitomizes her conflicted attempts at independence, even while trauma chains her to internalized versions of her oppressor. Yet, this superficial rebellion against patriarchal dominance proves no match for the knife's deeper psychic pull toward completing her father's cold-blooded legacy with each new male victim. Ayoola continues seeking surrogate targets for her anger, but the idea of directly confronting past demons holds too much residual pain in light of her unprocessed wounds. Ultimately, Braithwaite provokes nature versus nurture questions around retaliation's limits once original abuse preys upon a susceptible host. Though the knife serves as an obvious culprit, the text incriminates systemic ills allowing children to inherit generational damage from elders guarding the mechanisms of power, punishment and fragility's exploitation. Through Ayoola's paradoxical honoring and hating of her father's memory, the novel suggests that trauma creates dissonance with no simple causal strands. Yet refusal to simplify need not preclude closure. For instance, when she kills one of her lovers in Dubai, she casually dismisses it, saying, "It was fine...except...he died." (95). The shock of this revelation causes me to lose my grip on the juice glass, which shatters on the kitchen floor. Ayoola has only been home for ten minutes, yet it feels as if my entire world is being turned upside down.

Whenever Ayoola commits these crimes or plots to commit one, Korede is left burdened with the weight of guilt for the entire ordeal. Tade plays a central role in the story, with Ayoola weaving her web of deceit around him, making him a significant figure in the narrative. Despite her father's actions, Korede's morality remains relatively intact, but her familial bond with Ayoola compels her to assist her sister. As she tries to protect Tade from Ayoola's schemes, he becomes blinded by love and manipulation, unable to see the truth that Korede is desperately attempting to reveal to him. In the end, Tade, in trouble, reveals that "She tried to kill me! You can't..." He blinks at me, as though seeing me for the first time. "You're worse than she is." "Excuse me?" "There's something wrong with her...but you? What's your excuse?" He walks away from me then in disgust (148)

Though Korede considers herself morally superior to sister Ayoola's violence, Tade highlights Korede's gradual ethical erosion through her ongoing complicity concealing Ayoola's murders. Each recurring scene of Korede disposing bloodied weapons and victims to protect her sibling further tightens the web of deceit entrapping them both. As Tade suggests, the symbol of the knife passed from their abusive father slices deeper psychic wounds within Korede than she acknowledges.

Despite Korede's self-perception as the untainted foil to Ayoola's sociopathy, Tade exposes Korede's repression and denial around her own corruption through continually hiding atrocity. By severing her conscience from reality, Korede undermines her internal integrity, increasingly adopting their father's manipulative tactics herself. Ultimately, this descent into moral compromise challenges binaries Korede clings to, that she can remain untainted by merely witnessing sin without intervention. Through Tade's dissent, Braithwaite [3] highlights that trauma often spreads insidiously through subtle enablement of harm, not solely overt acts. By binding the sisters through cyclical violence, the text reveals how escaping abuse's legacy requires challenging collective complicity and willful blindness, not claims of superior morality when surrounded by unceasing decadence behind closed doors.

II. CONCLUSION

In Oyinkan Braithwaite's [3] psychologically complex *My Sister, The Serial Killer*, the symbol of a knife distills how trauma's legacy can inexorably corrupt into moral decay when left unaddressed across generations. Braithwaite spotlights sisters Ayoola and Korede, whose childhood suffering under their father's abusive domineering principalities sowed the seeds for fractured senses of self and intimacy. The patriarch's blade, passing to Ayoola upon his death, comes to epitomize his merciless worldview lingering as a haunting specter over the splintered family. Empowered by this instrument of violation turned ritualistic totem, Ayoola enacts a chilling descent into sociopathy, serially murdering boyfriends to avenge past harm. Though revolted,

nurse Korede cannot abandon her sister, instead sacrificing her conscience through continual complicity in hiding the bodies.

Through this visually-resonant symbol of the knife cycling from father to daughter, Braithwaite exposes the ripple effects of trauma into wider cultural contamination—with unprocessed pain rarely halting at its initial victims. The text probes broader questions around the line dividing damage from accountability once repression gives way to decadence. Braithwaite's lens challenges facile binaries of monstrosity versus innocence; though shaped by abusive forces, Ayoola's state also jeopardizes others. Poignantly, only Korede's steadfast care for her sister displays hope of interrupting this inheritance of violence. Still, *My Sister, The Serial Killer* refuses uncomplicated perspectives, instead sitting with the discomfort of understanding cycles which normalize brutality even within intimate relationships. Unflinching yet empathetic, Braithwaite's allegorical work dares audiences to witness unhealed familial trauma metastasizing into societal symptoms. Through this haunting tale, the knife etches that acknowledgement constitutes the first cut—and responsibility—toward change.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Armah, Ayi Kwei. *The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born*. Heinemann African Writers. 1969.
- [2]. Agary, Kaine Yellow Yellow. *Dtalkshop*, 2006.
- [3]. Braithwaite, Oyinkan. *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. Double Day, 2018.
- [4]. Ogbazi, Ifeyinwa. J & Ijeoma. Chioma. Emelumadu (2022). "Beneath the Mask: Personality Disorders in The Female Characters of Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, The Serial Killer*." *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies*, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, vol. 8, no. 1, 2022, pp. 2-8
- [5]. Isidore Okpewho. *The Last Duty*. Longman, 1976.
- [6]. Messaouda, Ouled. Ben. Said. *Patriarchy in Oyinkan Braithwaite's My Sister, the Serial Killer: A Psychological Reading*. African University Ahmed Draria- Adrar, Master's Thesis, 2019. <http://dspace.uni.adrar.ed.d27>. Accessed 15 Oct. 2023.
- [7]. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. BCCC ASC Rev. 3. PDF. 2019. <https://www.bucks.edu/Accessed>. Accessed 14 Sept. 2023.
- [8]. Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton University Press, 1957.
- [9]. *Writing Rocks*. Stone Writing Center, Dermar College, 2020.
- [10]. Hurrell, David. *An Analysis of Nietzsche's Conception of Decadence*. Unpublished Master Dissertation. Open University, 2019.
- [11]. Burdett, Carolyn. *Aestheticism and Decadence*. British Library, 15 May 2014. <https://www.b/uk/>articles>aestheticism> and *decadence*. Accessed 23 Sept. 2023.
- [12]. Wilde, Oscar. "The Picture of Dorian Gray". *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. 1890.
- [13]. Fitzgerald, Scott. F. *The Great Gatsby*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
- [14]. More, Nicholas D. "The Philosophy of Decadence," *Decadence and Literature*, edited by J. Desmarais & D. Weir, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 184 – 199.