



A Comparative Study On Deception And Illusion In The Fortune Teller And The Forty Fortunes: A Tale Of Iran

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Abstract: This paper is a comparative study of the deception and illusion that is said to be brought by fortune-telling in Karel Capek's "The Fortune Teller" and in Aaron Shepard's "The Forty Fortunes: A Tales of Iran." Both stories view how faith in the advancement of prophecy could affect society and psychology; however, they approach the subject matter in culturally different ways and with narrative strategy. A comparison and the analysis of these stories through the lens of a Lacanian model will show us how humans build their realities and how social structures may allow propelling of such illusions.

Madame Meyer, the charlatan fortune teller, who gets her clients to agitate in hope and fear so as to gain most, features in Capek's satirical tale. When analysed talking through the Lacanian lens, the complete belief of these clients in her fabricated prophecies brings to light their reliance on Symbolic order- the world of language, social convention, and external forces that organize their perception and experience it in the world. Ironically, however, Madame Meyer herself is trapped into it when the authorities mistake her really exceptional access to clairvoyance for her assertions. This makes the irony more resonant because it makes the naivety of society manifest even to humankind's various search for meaning outside themselves, glaringly false as those symbols may be. Thus, this story turns satirical at the very foundations upon which societal legitimacy is built.

This tale from Shepard, enriched by Iranian folklore, is the tale of Ahmed's transformation, the poor young man whose identity is prophesied by a fortune teller. Achievements and self-constructions of Ahmad after that reflected the Imaginary of Lacan. His identity construction and action are so deeply rooted in his belief internalized as the prophecy; it demonstrates how seemingly prescriptive fate can generate a self-fulfilling prophecy. Such a cycle therefore invests the contention made by Lacan that man is inevitably caught up in circles of misrecognition, obliterating the line between perceived externalities and internalities.

This research compares and contrasts these two tales to shed light on how deception occurs in different psychological and cultural circumstances. Capek's tale exposes the exploitation of fate through the vehicle of satire, while Shepard's tale goes into exploring how indeed the very powers of belief shape destinies. They each show how deeply belief molds human action, thus creating the conjuncture at which reality and fiction collide. Such a conjuncture of boundaries abides by Lacan theories, where individuals inevitably oscillate between and among the complex interplay among the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real in an effort to know themselves and the world around them.

KEYWORDS: DECEPTION, ILLUSION, IDENTITY, SOCIAL STRUCTURES, PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT, IMAGINARY.

I. INTRODUCTION

Fortune telling has long been an object of intrigue, requiring doubt and belief in cultures. When you think about it, the future war involves a lot of deception and confusion, which of course plays a very big role in how humans consider the world and the decisions made by them. This article discusses a theme for literary, deception and illusion techniques with two different short stories: The Fortune Teller written by Karel Capek and the other, The Forty Fortune: A Tale of Iran written by Aaron Shepard. Although both stories discover the power of prediction, and in the psychological and social results of knowing someone's future, they do so through very different cultural and narrative lenses.

Prominent Czech author Karel Capek, noted for his contributions to satire and science fiction, explores the darker side of fortune-telling in his short story "The Fortune Teller." Capek criticizes humanity's gullibility and naive confidence in outside forces through the character of Madame Meyer, a dishonest fortune teller who ironically falls prey to the very tool she uses. His paintings are deeply rooted in social and philosophical inquiry, often questioning the constructs that govern human notion systems. Alternatively, American author Aaron Shepard, whose expertise is in rewriting folklore from countless cultures, wrote "The Forty Fortunes: A Tale of Iran". The story is about Ahmed, a poor boy whose divination defines his identity and his fate.

On the alternative hand, Aaron Shepard, an American author known for retelling folktales from numerous cultures, brings a different angle in "The Forty Fortunes: A Tale of Iran." This tale follows Ahmed, a terrible young man whose identity and destiny are formed with the aid of a prophecy. Unlike Capek's satirical technique, Shepard's tale embraces the transformative energy of belief, demonstrating how self-perception and fate can come to be intertwined. Drawing from Iranian folklore, Shepard's narrative highlights how a man or woman's acceptance of the future can result in self-fulfilling prophecies.

By making use of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic model, particularly the principles of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, this paper examines how both tales depict the construction of reality through belief and deception. While Capek's satire exposes the manipulation of human religion, Shepard's folktale illustrates how perception can shape identity and future. This comparative study aims to expose the mental and cultural dimensions of deception and illusion in fortune-telling, demonstrating how narratives across distinct traditions explore the intersection of reality and fiction.

II. DECEPTION AND THE SYMBOLIC ORDER IN THE FORTUNE TELLER

In Karel Capek's *The Fortune Teller*, Madame Meyer is a quack fortune teller who leads her clients on an emotional see-saw among wish and worry. Her swindling isn't just a case of person chicanery, but alternatively a symptom of a broader societal credulity, in which humans chase external affirmation to assist manual them through their doubts. One of her client says, "She told me my husband would recover, and he did! She knew everything, every detail" (Capek 32). This remark indicates how people affirm their beliefs on the basis of personal experience and not empirical observation. The story critiques how people accept fictitious realities without question; it plays off of Jacques Lacan's idea of the Symbolic order, a structure of language, social norms, and conventions that decide how people make feel of things.

Madame Meyer's clients do not require evidence of her powers: They take into account her predictions, and use them to prepare their truth. "She instructed me my husband could recover, and he did! She knew the whole lot, every detail." Their faith isn't always based on a logical premise but rather on their mental want for reality. It is on this experience that Lacan holds, no less than the rabbi, that guys depend upon the Symbolic order to make sure coherence of an in any other case chaotic global. The soothsayer acts as an arbiter of future, restoring order, albeit an order of superstition.

Ironically, Madame Meyer herself will become a victim of the very gadget she manipulates. When local officers query her, they misread her achievement as actual more-sensory belief in place of trickery. "You knew too much, Madame Meyer," the police inspector proclaims. That is your crime," (Capek 45) mentioning the absurdity of perception in constructed meanings on a part of society. In that second the identical systems that hold illusions additionally impose them as oppressive truths.

Capek's narrative, therefore, satirizes the mechanisms of perception that permit deception to take hold. The narrative, by way of depicting the entrapment of both Madame Meyer and her customers within the Symbolic order, in addition supports the first-rate line among phantasm and truth. The social framework we rely upon for know-how may be weaponized in opposition to us, bending reality and reinstalling a fictitious gift as immutable fact.

III. SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY AND THE IMAGINARY ORDER IN THE FORTY FORTUNES

The strongest theme of *The Forty Fortunes* is the self-fulfilling prophecy. Ahmed, who is a common man and does not possess psychic powers, is forced into becoming a fortune teller by his wife, Jamell. Ahmed is not enthusiastic at first and says, "Jamell, are you crazy? What do I know about fortune-telling?" (Shepard 11). Due to coincidence and perception, his pretended role turns real.

Ahmed's unwitting success is reflective of Merton's idea that "a false definition of the situation evoking a new behaviour... makes the original false conception come true" (Merton 204). For example, when Ahmed unintentionally labels the number of thieves by uttering, "That's one" while he eats dates, the guilty thieves get frightened thinking that he has supernatural knowledge (Shepard 27). This is an example of how perception can create reality by itself, one of the major principles of Lacan's Imaginary order (Evans 65).

The King's request to clarify the mystery of the theft in the treasury is the second occasion which makes his reputation, despite the fact that Ahmed himself is conscious of not having any true powers. His announcement that there were "forty thieves" is a guess, but it proves to be true. This again increases faith in his claimed powers in the minds of the people who surround him.

This is in line with the self-fulfilling prophecy theory. Sociologist Robert Merton described self-fulfilling prophecies as when a belief or expectation, true or false, leads to action that inevitably makes it come true. The robbers, listening to Ahmed describing his dates, believe that he realizes that they are there. They are scared and give back the stolen items, thereby validating Ahmed's "prediction.". The imaginary order is an idea made current by philosopher Jacques Lacan, and the film explores the nature of the imaginary order as being the world of illusions and symbolic structures that everyone believes to exist. Ahmed himself knows that his divination is a trickery, but slowly he plays out the role given to him. His words and actions are creating an illusion that is strong enough to dominate the others, exactly like the way roles and structures of society persist through belief, not through what actually exists.

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: SATIRE VS TRANSFORMATION

One of the greatest differences between *The Fortune Teller* and *The Forty Fortunes* is the way the two stories use deception in their satirical and transformative themes. Čapek's tale uses satire to mock the naivety of society and the deceitfulness of so-called fortune tellers, but *The Forty Fortunes* celebrates deception as a redemptive process by which a common man can be elevated to greatness as a result of a series of misunderstandings.

Čapek's *The Fortune Teller* uses satire to reveal both the deceptiveness of fortune telling and the gullibility of those who engage in it. Miss Myers herself is portrayed as a woman who gains financially from lying, but her customers are also guilty of deceiving themselves. Judge Kelly's sarcasm is used to emphasize this criticism: "There's no getting out of it, Mrs. Myers: reading the cards like that is a swindle" (Čapek 52). This criticism is consistent with Michael D. Gordin's thesis that "pseudoscience thrives not because of its empirical merit, but due to the societal need for certainty" (Gordin 127).

The whole process of justice in the tale itself becomes an ironic representation of justice. Although the judge is acting according to law by punishing Miss Myers, his justification is not derived from any objective legal order but from his own familiarity with methods of fortune-telling. By pointing out this fact, Čapek reveals the absurdity of human nature and of the judicial system.

Inspector McCleary's resolve to pursue Myers is also overdrawn for the purpose of emphasizing the paranoia about petty offenses while more serious crimes are ignored. The absurdity of Myers' punishment being expelled instead of charged with an actual offense contributes to the satirical tone. Čapek critiques, through this, both the social institutions that provide fertile ground for deceit to flourish and the illogic of the individuals who consult fortune tellers.

Conversely, *The Forty Fortunes* offers deception not as a deceitful act to be deplored but as a tool of transformation. Ahmed, who starts out as a common labourer, is propelled into a new life through a misinterpretation. Instead of rectifying it, he accommodates, demonstrating the potency of perception in creating reality. Shepard's story implies that belief as a mode of power is possible, resonating with Ingrid Rowland's claim that "fortune-telling reflects not just superstition, but the human desire to create meaning from randomness" (Rowland 89).

Unlike Miss Myers, Ahmed does not knowingly lie for gain; he accidentally finds himself in situations in which his speech is taken to be prophetic. When he unwittingly predicts the thieves by saying "That's one" while he was eating dates, the thieves themselves fulfil the prophecy: "He knew right where we were!" (*The Forty Fortunes*). This is a classic example of a self-fulfilling prophecy an notion that belief alone can change things.

The emancipatory nature of deception within this story lies beyond the private achievement of Ahmed. His "magic" secures the recuperation of the King's lost treasure, asserting the narrative line that deception rather than punishment might achieve justice. In contrast with Čapek's satire to condemn deception, *The Forty Fortunes* regards deception as a functional skill for facilitating social mobility and survival.

V. DECEPTION AS CRITIQUE VERSUS CELEBRATION

The most notable distinction between the two tales is the way deception is presented:

In *The Forty Fortunes*, deception is presented as a route to success, where mistaken identity is used as a means of mobility.

In the Western tradition, deception is often linked to trickery, leading to punishment, as seen with Miss Myers. In Middle Eastern folklore, however, intelligence and adaptability demonstrated through Ahmed's ability to maintain his act are valued traits. While Miss Myers' deception leads to her disgrace, Ahmed's leads to his reward.

VI. CONCLUSION

Both *The Fortune Teller* and *The Forty Fortunes* feature deception and illusion, but their goals are quite different. Čapek employs satire to condemn the stupidity of the deceiver as well as the deceived, pointing out the illogic of uncritical belief in fortune tellers. *The Forty Fortunes*, on the other hand, employs deception as a redemptive process, demonstrating how perception constructs reality. The most fundamental difference is how deception is being addressed—one as a social criticism, the other as an adaptational ability. These two versions of the tale underscore larger cultural sentiments about lying, affirming that trickery can be vice or virtue depending on circumstances.

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