

Vulnerable Amalgamation of Loneliness And Spirituality: An Analysis Of 'The Rabbit Hutch' By Tess Gunty

Donny Syofyan^{1*}

English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Andalas University, Indonesia

Abstract

The provocative tale of spiritual freedom from bodily entrapment, as portrayed in Tess Gunty's debut novel, *The Rabbit Hutch*, is a modern masterpiece. Set in the post-industrial context, the decaying city of Vacca Vale city in Indiana is struggling to deal with the impacts of withdrawal of Zorn Automobile Company. The novel presents glimpses of the lives of people residing in an affordable apartment called La Lapinière or, mostly known as the Rabbit Hutch. Gunty uses her versatile narrative technique here through utilising different styles such as the use of epistles, black and white pictures, along with obituary comments to closely knit the stories. The desire of the central protagonist, Blandine Watkins for achieving spiritual freedom through dreaming for a bodily escape shows the intent of the novelist to sketch spirituality as the method of freeing oneself from worldly suffering. The subplots of different situations of people living in different apartments helped in connecting the larger view for changing scenario due to withdrawal of the automobile company. The theme of loneliness and worldly misery is portrayed through the life of Blandine while indicating her belief on the Catholic mystics to escape from this entrapment. The novel beautifully sketches the journey of the characters from loneliness to spirituality based on imaginary prediction while handling the real-life issues and political unrest encountered by the habitants.

Keywords: Loneliness, Spirituality, Rabbit Hutch, Catholic mystics, chronicles revolutionise.

Introduction

Background

The use of effective narrative technique to portray the transformative religious awakening of an individual attracts the readers to go through Tess Gunty's debut novel *The Rabbit Hutch* published in 2022. Owing to the contradiction between the themes of entrapment and freedom, *The Rabbit Hutch* chronicles revolutionise the American fiction by projecting the bodily escape of the central character from harsh reality. The novel starts with the scene, '...in Apartment C4, Blandine Watkins exits her body. She is only eighteen years old, but she has spent most of her life wishing for this to

happen (Gunty 2022). This indicates the detachment of the character from the real world while signifying her struggle to cope with the decaying life and changing perspectives. Gunty uses the narrative background of decaying life in a city that is going through the changes after the withdrawal of Zorn Automobile Company. Moreover, the brilliant usage of language to narrate the struggling journey of a community for rebirth is the core attraction of this novel that bridges the connection between skewed realism and spirituality

Donny Syofyan

English Department, Faculty of Humanities,
Andalas University, Indonesia.

donnysyofyan@hum.unand.ac.id

The story set in a plot of isolation and spiritual harmony tells the journey of four teenagers who have grown up in a foster care centre and are now living in a building named, La Lapinière that is popularly known as the Rabbit Hutch. Here, the Vacca Vale city in Indiana, being deprived of the development incurred by the automobile industry presents the shocking changes in the lives of the habitants. Besides, the run-down apartment building, Rabbit Hutch, quietly bears the image of the dying city, where the different apartments reveal the different aspects of life. For instance, the detached apartment C2 signifies loneliness and isolation, while C8 apartment represents extraordinary fear, and C6 is bearing the aging population (Guntly, 2022). Although the lack of cohesiveness may appear as a hurdle for the readers to connect with the story, the eccentric characterisation of Guntly makes it attractive for the audiences to advocate the journey of an entire community that is thriving for rebirth.

The novel presents diverse characters starting from a television star, school teacher, priest to a mental health blogger, who himself is dealing with mental health issues. However, the central character is Blandine, the 18-year-old high-school dropout, who has strong faith in the verdicts of mystics. Here, her desire to experience a bodily escape following the imaginary prediction of the mystics signifies her desperate attempt of escaping from the reality and reincarnating in the spiritual world. The starting scene of this novel gives the reader a hint of such obsession for the unrealistic beliefs of the character as she felt that her 'soul is being stabbed with light'. Blandine believed that it was the 'Transverberation of Heart or Seraph's Assault' (Guntly 2022). In the very beginning of this novel, through the eyes of this central character Guntly lists the unpleasant events and unfortunate mishaps that shaped the life and views of the young soul, finally making her call herself as "the opposite of nothing".

The novel is a written piece depicting the problems of everyone in different aspects as it is over-crowded with ideas that are generated from the winning impulse of Guntly. Intending to portray the Vacca Vale city as a post-industrial heartland, Guntly has used broad details. This attempt can be compared to the documentary film of Michael Moore, namely *Roger & Me*, published in 1989 (Ditum 2022). The deteriorating condition of Flint, Michigan in the post-withdrawal of General Motors assembles the backdrop of Guntly's novel to project the decaying lives of people living in the aforementioned city after the withdrawal of Zorn automobile company. The apartments in Rabbit Hutch project different aspects of life as the blogger residing in C12 is dealing with the desperate attempt of a man to nakedly perform on webcam for money while C8 narrates the story of a mother who is vulnerable and fearing the violent behaviour of her husband (Guntly, 2022). On the other hand, the sub-plot of four teenagers aged out of a foster home and residing in C4 presents the story of bullying and overpowering a girl that ultimately shattered her emotions and feelings.

Mastering the art of characterisation, Guntly has portrayed the character of a mother of a new-born who is struggling yet realising the beauty of the journey of motherhood. The mother, Hope, questions the education in Catholic school where 'videos of abortions' were shown to experience the pain of mother when 'the fetus in the womb flinch away from doctor's tool' (Guntly, 2022). She experiences the beauty of motherhood by feeling the 'bolts of goddish lightning' when she cares and nurses her baby. However, in front of her husband, she feels powerless as the violent nature of her husband crosses all the limits of her fear. On the contrary, the theme of loneliness is sketched through the scenario of a fork placed beside the jar of maraschino cherries on the nightstand of a lonely woman in C2 apartment. However, the changes in

thoughts of the Blandine based on her life experiences transformed her views and thoughts as 'She prefers her villains complex and nuanced' and "disguised as heroes", which indicate her perception of heroes (Gunty, 2022).

Intending to examine the pitfalls of mental illness, loneliness, capitalism and trauma, *The Rabbit Hutch* presents a simultaneously thrilling and disquieting story (Neilson, 2022). Despite possessing a high intelligence level and ethereal beauty, Blandine appears to be a complex character in the novel who dreams of becoming a female mystic. However, the larger plot linked to the obstruction to the Vacca Vale Revitalization Plan that would generate approximately \$4 million tax revenue per year while addressing the unemployment issue seemed loosely connected to the individual story of the dying city (Gunty, 2022). Here, the narrative style of Gunty to sketch the larger plot while introducing these sub-plots seemed unique to connect the implications of a changing city or decaying civilisation on the lives of people. Furthermore, the desperate desire of the central character to become a female mystic readily sketches her wish to hide from the harsh reality and bitter experiences of life. The desire for the bodily escape and transcending into the divine body is also influenced by the Catholic schooling and religious beliefs of this central character.

The novel comprises of glimpses of short stories or lives of people residing in the affordable building, namely *The Rabbit Hutch*, while intriguing the plot of animal sacrifice and the political agenda of obstructing the redevelopment plan. Here, vanquishing the art of characterisation, Gunty has presented the characters and the stories related to their lives. Moreover, the radical changes in thoughts and beliefs of the central character, Blandine helps projecting the influence of Catholic schooling and spirituality to explore one's true self. On the quest of finding and partner or feeling connected, the characters presented in the

novel thrive for rebirth. The novel has beautifully plotted the intriguing stories of the residents while creating the larger plot for the decaying city that is one of the 'Top Ten Dying American Cities' on Newsweek's annual list due to the damage amounting \$3 million by 1000-year flood further aggravated by 500-year floor (Gunty, 2022). Thus, the dying city, on withdrawal of the automobile company, seemed to portray the devastating state of the society as well as individuals that are residing in *Rabbit Hutch* and desperately thriving for rebirth.

Tess Gunty has been awarded with the National Book Award for Fiction in 2022 for her debut novel *The Rabbit Hutch*, that is inspired by the unrelated 'polyphonic' novels. Here, the presentation of glimpses of the lives of the residents struggling to cope with the changing social, economic, and psychological condition rightly compliments the narrative style and story-telling attribute of Gunty. This novel has been a literary weapon for the novelist to create the central character of Blandine and demonstrate the male aggression and gendered distribution of power through highlighting the structurally vulnerable condition of the character (Neilson, 2022). The prejudices in every social and economic sphere that were exacerbated during the crisis of identity loss in Vacca Vale due to the exit of Zorn Automobile Company influenced the lives of all individuals. This has also given way to all the forces or process of identity generation to sneak in as the growing vulnerable condition of the entire social and economic system gives passage to these possibilities.

Owing to the interest of the novelist to read polyphonic fiction, the novel projects the life of a person screening offensive comments while the loneliness of a woman is presented through the imagery of a jar full of maraschino cherries with a small fork being placed beside it. The primary concept of *The Rabbit Hutch* is the result of the social experiment of putting a bunch of humans in a rabbit hutch for recording the

consciousness and journey of discovering and understanding self. The characters and lives presented in the novel continuously points towards the model for problem of individuals where the younger mother is experiencing and understanding motherhood while being terrified by the thought of failure to bond with the baby. The young mother is experiencing body terrors while realising that motherhood is shrouded in a sacred blue veil, macabre details concealed from you, an elaborate conspiracy to trick Catholics into making more Catholics' (Gunty, 2022). Moreover, the male resident who presents himself nakedly on a webcam for money receives nothing but some mean comments, whereas the elderly couple in C6 is stuck at aging and fights over trifle matters.

These short stories and subplots create underpin the subplots and themes of vulnerability, a strong sense of longing, devotion and, above all, loneliness that in different times, reflects through the psychic of the characters. The characters being presented as outcasts at their own levels are thriving for rebirth and waiting for something spiritual to free them from the agonising journey. Isolation of seclusion has become a central idea of this novel as Gunty placed the characters in different problem settings of their lives, although closely connected to the central plot of the decaying city of Vacca Vale, Indiana. The desire for love and longing is visible in all the characters in different senses as the male performing nakedly on webcam thrives to find a love connection (Ditum, 2022). On the other hand, the larger plot of obstruction to the redevelopment of the Vacca Vale city, Indiana, the narrative sheds light on the capitalism view of society and gendered power distribution. This also reflects through the struggle of the central character, Blandine to cope with the unpleasant events, adding to the difficulties posed by her roommates, who also came out of the foster home.

The narrative expertise of Tess Gunty reflects through her focus on combining the

contrasting themes of freedom and entrapment as she, in the very opening scene of her novel, kills the main protagonist Blandine (Greenblatt, 2022). Here, the acknowledged liberty of authors to kill the main protagonists is prevalent in Gunty's novel as she introduces the readers to the 18-year old central character, stating, 'She is only 18 years old, but she has spent most of her life wishing for this to happen...' and this correctly points to the desire for bodily escape for the protagonist (Gunty, 2022). With the help of satire and surrealism, Gunty has portrayed the characters and the subplots in a manner that demonstrates the solitude and desire for escape from this entrapment. Moreover, intending to give a practical insight to life and the suffering, the novelist has narrated the stories of individuals who experienced the emotions with subsequent violent forces (Beaton, 2022). Besides presenting the characters by combing the serious, messy, and other contradicting behaviour the novelist has put forward philosophical and spiritual views.

The Rabbit Hutch is considered as the stunning debut novel by Tess Gunty, which has been evaluated critically in this study. The storyline is based on four teenagers who have recently aged out of the "State foster care system". The teenagers were Blandine, an 18-year aged girl and Jack, Todd, and Malik, three 19-year-old boys. After leaving the "the state foster-care system", they started to live in an apartment in Vacca Vale, Indiana called "La Lapinière Affordable Housing Complex" (Gunty, 2022). At the beginning of the novel, the writer explains that Jack is "average-yet-intuitive" as a person, whereas Malik was handsome and arrogant. The author evaluated that these two boys were obsessed with Blandine, with these descriptions of the characters.

On the other hand, Todd was a cartoonist and quiet who was obsessed with Malik. The author has precisely discussed how lust and loneliness can enhance vulnerability. Apart from loneliness, devotion, community,

freedom, spirituality and obsession are other themes in this novel.

This particular research study sheds light on two themes of the study which are spirituality and loneliness. The author has described different stories of different apartments and the stories of the teenagers was the story of apartment C4. In addition to that, apartment C2 has been evaluated as lonely and detached, apartment C6 is aging and stuck whereas C4 is described as interesting (Bookbrowse, 2022). In this particular novel, the entire apartment has been presented as lonely as the people of this apartment are looking without employment due to the stoppage of the automobile industry. The author has set up several conflicts between people in the apartment which were happening due to their loneliness. In simple words, the people in the apartment were trying to be alive in a dying city.

Blandine Watkins is one of the most significant characters or the protagonist of the novel. Her real name was Tiffany, whose father ended up in jail and her mother was suffering from an opioid addiction. Due to these reasons, Blandine was brought up with different families in the foster system of the state. Thereafter, it is described by the author that Blandine used to manifest to have contact with some people. In this particular segment loneliness of Blandine has been presented by the author where she has no one as emergency contacts. Apart from that, she was interested in intellectual pursuits and due to that she started to study the Catholic mystics during her college (Theguardian, 2022). A lot of men were obsessed with her due to her beautiful body and skin colour but she was focused towards her path to religious ecstasy. In this portion of the novel, the author has discussed the theme of devotion. At some point in the storyline, Blandine wanted to escape her life as a devotee and that was the presentation of spirituality.

On the other hand, Todd, one of the teenage boys, was also from the foster system of the state with a different sexual inversion. He has also been lonely from his childhood and feels lonely due to his different sexual orientation. Thus, a brief comparison of *The Rabbit Hutch* with other similar novels and comparison between the perspective of different authors on loneliness and spirituality has been discussed in this portion of the study. "The Well of Loneliness" was a fiction novel by Radclyffe Hall which was published in 1928 and this particular novel revolves around a similar story of loneliness of a girl. Stephen Gordon is the main character of this novel who was from an upper-class family and her homosexuality was apparent from her early age (Kara, 2021). Due to this reason, the girl used to feel lonely and that is quite similar to the story of the apartment C4 in *The Rabbit Hutch*. Thus, there are differences between the presentation of the theme of loneliness in both of the novels.

It can be identified that Gunty has evaluated the loneliness of the four teenagers who were actually lonely from their childhood as they did not have their parents and were brought into the foster system of the state. In contrast, Hall has evaluated loneliness of a girl who has everyone in her home but she did not have the support of her family. The ways of presenting loneliness are different in these novels. Furthermore, "A Field Guide to Getting Lost" is another fiction by Rebecca Solnit where the author explored loneliness due to the issues of loss, trust, uncertainty, desire and place. The author stated "the art is not one of forgetting but letting go. And when everything else is gone, you can be rich in loss" (Wang, 2021). As per the statement, letting go of someone is an art but forgetting someone is not, which makes people rich in loss. It helps to understand that the author has evaluated the theme of loneliness that comes after losing someone. The way of presenting loneliness is quite similar in this particular novel and in *The Rabbit Hutch*.

Gunty has evaluated loneliness in two different ways such as she explored that the apartment was lonely due to the stoppage of the automobile industry and unemployment. On the other hand, she presented the loneliness of each of the characters. In Solnit's fiction, loneliness comes due to the detachment of the character with the lover, whereas the teenagers were orphans who were actually lonely in Gunty's novel. Besides, Blandine also had an affair with her "high-school music teacher James Yager" who left her disillusioned (Gunty, 2022). This event made her lonelier and that is quite similar to the situation of "A field guide to getting lost". Gunty has focused more on the mental conditions of the characters of the novel and its impacts on their loneliness. As per the perspective of Gunty, loneliness, capitalism and trauma are the factors that lead to mental illness and that was what happened to the four teenagers in the particular novel.

Apart from that, Gunty shed light on the necessity of human connections for a better mental health of people. Blandine manifested to have human connections during emergencies, which signifies the necessity of human connections in someone's life. The author has evaluated the theme of spirituality through the character of Blandine. She was beautiful and had white skin and hair and due to these most of the men were obsessed with her, but the young woman was hoping to leave her body for something better. Gunty has evaluated spirituality through the character of Blandine. The author stated, "You couldn't go anywhere in this town without bumping into God." through part of religion and trust in God in the life of the people in that apartment has been shown (Gunty, 2022). As per the particular statement, God is everywhere and no one can avoid Him. This particular statement signifies spirituality and devotion among the people in the apartment. In addition to that, Blandine was also a devotee who had an interest in Catholic mystics.

In other words, it can be stated that Gunty has evaluated the life story of Blandine as a spiritual journey who wanted to leave her body for something better. There are other novels on similar concepts of spirituality which have been compared with the rabbit hearts in this portion of the study. Siddhartha is an Indian novel by Hermann Hesse which particularly shades light on the life of a young man who wanted to find the meaning of life and due to that he left his home. In this particular novel The young man made several people on his journey after leaving home who have contributed to enhancing understanding of the man regarding enlightenment and inner peace. The author stated "My real self-wanders elsewhere, far away, wanders on and on invisibly and has nothing to do with my life" (Saira et al. 2021). As per the statement the young man in the novel believed that he is real self-wonders else were and not in his home as well as believed that he had nothing to do with the life he got. In The Rabbit Hutch, Blandine has quite similar thoughts at the age of 18 while he wanted to escape her body for something better as she believes that her soul belongs to somewhere else.

The author evaluated some events before Blandine exits her body which are also some significant parts for presenting spirituality and loneliness. One day while Blandine was walking in Chastity Valley, she found an injured goat and took her home to provide help. Evaluation of this particular event signifies that Blandine was helpful and kind towards everyone including humans and animals because he had experience of loneliness and no human connection during any emergency (Theguardian, 2022). Along with that this particular event also represents spirituality and devotion through the kindness of Blandine towards an animal. As a devotee, Blandine believed that every creature should be respected, so she took the goat home and helped her recover. At the age of 18, Blandine had spiritual knowledge and believed in death. According to her

perspective, death is the vital truth that cannot be changed.

The perspective of the author towards spirituality has been presented through the statement that "Because one day you will die, I promise, and mortality does not care if you believe in it" (Gunty, 2022). This particular statement signifies that everyone is going to die one day whether the individual believes in mortality or not. On the other hand, Blandine believed in God and valued praying to God regarding insecurities. As per her perspective, praying to God is addicting to people which has been designed to make people stay and it explores loneliness and promises friendship and community. For presenting the specific spiritual perspective, the author stated, "It's designed to addict you, to prey on your insecurities and use them to make you stay. It exploits everybody's loneliness and promises us community, approval, friendship" (Gunty, 2022). This particular statement in the novel represents the amalgamation of spirituality and loneliness by Gunty.

Gunty has represented a set of unique characters in this novel which enhances that fraction of the leaders as well as she presented Vacca Vale the American city as an interesting character. It is previously evaluated how the author has presented spirituality and loneliness through the characters of the novel and in this portion, the presentation of a spiritual and lonely city in the novel has been evaluated. The particular city is enlisted in the top 10 among the dying American cities which have been experiencing crime, unemployment and hopelessness (Gunty, 2022). The stoppage of the automobile industry has poorly impacted the lives of the people in that city and their perspective towards life as well. The people in this apartment have been presented as the injured goat that Blandine took home. In this city, everyone is searching for happiness and a reason to be alive. The particular novel represents the character of the city through presenting the lifestyle and lives of the

people in that city.

At the end of the novel, Blandine was murdered by Todd, who was forced by Malik and Jack. In this particular situation, Blandine finally exited her body in that apartment and then was taken care of by Joan. It is evaluated by the author that John was the one who cared for Blandine but never expressed her feelings towards Blandine, although she has appreciated the gesture of optimism and solidarity of Joan. This particular novel by Gunty has been compared with the work of Dennis Johnson who was an American novelist and most of his works are also based on the themes of spirituality and loneliness. *Jesus' Son* is one of the fiction novels by Johnson which represents American culture with lost souls, disordered landscapes, the netherworld and violent landscapes (Sánchez and Sebastián, 2022). This novel also represents spirituality and devotion of people in American cities which is quite similar to *The Rabbit Hutch*.

The central character Blandine has strong belief regarding "fundamental selfishness" of Catholic female mystics as they are controlled by 'individualism' (Gunty, 2022). Moreover, the sense of seclusion among Catholic communities made her believe that while experiencing divine ecstasy, one is able to interact with oneself only. Through the projection of Blandine's views on religious awakening, Gunty accepts solitude as the "divine receptivity" (Gunty, 2022). Here, calling oneself as "ethically self-sacrificial" is one of the central perceptions of Blandine that she derived of her life experiences and spiritual knowledge. However, her desire for dismantling 'systematic injustice' contributed to the vulnerability of this central character that connects her intelligence in line of her 'social impairment'. Besides, the society and people around her have actively harmed her that held a significant impact on the psychosocial behaviour and thoughts of this young mind. This loneliness and experience of being deprived from the happiness and basic requirements of life made her to wish for a mystical escape.

Highlighting the beliefs and values taught in Catholic schools by both Blandine and the young mother, Hope, portrays the religious view of the novel through sketching the individualism and motherhood, respectively. While Hope disregards the videos of abortion showed to them in Catholic schools to spread awareness on the mother's agony and pain due to abortion for stopping abortion, Blandine considers the Catholic beliefs to be selfish (Gunty, 2022). This central character of the novel also concludes that it is due to the individualism in Catholics that often results in the loneliness or solitude of the majority of the believers. However, quick switching from one narrative to another or from the story of a character to another helps to experience a suspenseful reading experience while not lingering too long to any story or character. Gunty has mastered the skill of observation and utilised the same in depicting the struggle of the characters portrayed in the sub-plots (Vlahiotis, 2022). However, presenting the absurdity of human life with a touch of religious beliefs and desire of an entire community to rebirth can be identified as the central phenomenon.

Setting the story in an environmentally devastated backdrop, *The Rabbit Hutch* can be identified as a character-driven debut of the novelist because it pays homage to the industrial towns that are experiencing economic decline (Vlahiotis, 2022). Here, projecting the strong belief of the 18-year old Blandine in female mystics, Gunty knots the unapologetically strange plot of this novel that tells the stories from multiple perspectives, following the choice of the novelist for polyphonic fictions. The use of various mediums, black and white drawings, interview transcripts and newspaper clippings, Gunty applied all modes of communication to be precise with the observation of different characters (Vlahiotis, 2022). Besides, touching the important themes of loneliness, family, mental health and vulnerability, the novelist has used depressing and dark tones. Along with this,

the theme of solitude has correctly been balanced with the flashes of intelligence and humour to keep the readers engaged. Considering the presentation of the fictional characters, the theme of loneliness has been linked to the outcasts of the society. Moreover, struggling to cope with own problem scenarios, the characters are sketched in the contradictory scale of freedom and entrapment.

For instance, the central character or main protagonist, Blandine Watkins is a teenager, who experienced horrific past in terms of being subjected to mental and physical violence. This, in turn, created a space for this character to look for a support, which eventually she finds in the spiritual awakening. In order to complement this theme of loneliness and spiritually blended with sub-themes of family and mental health, Gunty uses mysterious drawings and outwardly language of Blandine to portray the thoughts and beliefs (Partington, 2022). Besides, the loneliness of another character, Moses Robert Blitz is also drawn in the novel who adopts strange way to cope with this situation after the death of his mother, who was a TV star. Moses covers himself in glow stick paint and visits people's houses that seemed to be an escape for him to handle the situation (Vlahiotis, 2022). In addition, coming to the story of main protagonist Blandine, the three boys Todd, Malik and Jack are obsessed with her, which ultimately led to violent outbursts adversely affecting the life of Blandine.

Comprehensive assessment of the sub-plots and characters presented in the novel reveals a closely-knitted connection among guilt, sin and transference (Partington, 2022). The characters are thriving to find a way to escape from this bodily world and find freedom in their own way. Here, the loneliness of the characters is reflected through the glimpses of each narrative as all the characters are struggling to deal with their own problems, adding to the larger plot of a decaying city due to the withdrawal of

the Zorn Automobile Company in Vacca Vale, Indiana. For example, sketching the character of Blandine with relatively high intelligence than the other three roommates with high vulnerability is the deliberate attempt of the novelist to plant disturbing idea in the novel. Besides, the desperation of this protagonist to feel safe and secure almost heightened her desire for leaving the body in the first scene as she calls herself as "the opposite of nothing" (Guntty, 2022). In this context, the strong belief of Blandine regarding the existence of mystics and her wish for experiencing something magical that is explained by the Catholic female mystics rightly projected the indulgence of this teenager with the imaginary world.

Another important theme that is closely connected to the central characters is the spiritual beliefs that are directly connected to the desperation for rebirth. Residing in the dying city of Vacca Vale, the residents of Rabbit Hutch are desperately fighting their own battles for creating identity and coping with the subsequent challenges. However, the young mother fighting to understand the motherhood and dealing with body terrors discovers pregnancy, postpartum recovery and birth as 'three acts of horror film no one lets you watch before you live it' (Guntty, 2022). The young mother is afraid so much so that she fears looking at her baby, punishing him for the offense he had not committed. The fear of failing to create a bond with the baby and the pertaining risk of not being able to become a 'good mother' abandoned her to feel connected with the baby. Here, the theme of loneliness is lingered with spirituality as the young mother raises question on the Catholic approach of showing the videos of abortion and the pain of the mothers rather than conveying the beauty and divinity of motherhood.

On the other hand, introducing the novel with the opening scene of Blandine Watkins exiting 'her body', Guntty improvises her story-telling techniques by introducing this central character slowly and unfolding the

story behind the strong desire of this teenager for bodily escape (Ditum, 2022). The theme of loneliness becomes evident when Blandine wishes for the help from the Catholic female mystics to escape from this entrapment of physical world. Besides, the communication between Joan and Blandine where, at the initial look, Blandine considered Joan's 'solitude' to be as evident as "the cross around her neck" provides a religious perspective to the novel (Guntty, 2022). Both the characters got engaged in the discussion on faith and belief, which finally led Blandine to comprehend that Catholics are predominantly influenced by 'individualism'. Moreover, this belief of individualism has been identified as the sole reason that leads to the solitude and lonely life of Catholics, as believed by Blandine (Guntty, 2022).

Besides, being raised in a foster home, the central protagonist has experienced several unpleasant incidents that forced her to realise that 'Her body contains goods and services, and people will try to extract those goods and services without her permission' (Ditum, 2022). Now, the desire to stand against this and find a way to escape, Blandine thrived for freedom with help of the spiritual escape. Here, the themes of loneliness and spirituality are closely knitted through finding a bodily escape in the religious world. The vulnerable condition, triggered by an unexpected act of violence, forced Blandine to exit 'her body' which is symbolic in terms of indicating the religious awakening of the soul. The novel follows a thrilling angle centering on the chronological revelation of Blandine's story while revealing the reason behind the involvement of a middle-aged man in this story and other human lives (Ditum, 2022). Here, the multi-vocal performance of Guntty played a crucial role in maintaining the chronological presentation of the story of the main protagonist by utilising deeply-researched information and perceptions in creating the main plot and sub-plots.

Adding to the mastery in characterisation, Gunty has applied diverse narrative techniques, including epistles and obituary comments that helped in keeping the audiences engaged (Catan, 2022). The growing rate of crimes with high employment rate in Vacca Vale helped it to be listed among Top Ten Dying American Cities. Here, the sense of loneliness is evident in Blandine's observation as she finds Vacca Vale as "a void, not a city" (Gunty, 2022). The 'empty factories, empty neighbourhoods, empty promises, empty faces' are the representation of solitude that has become the prime feature of this decaying city. She also believes that this emptiness is affecting every inhabitant, that is periodically revealed throughout the novel. Aging out of a foster house, Blandine has well experience of emotional trauma that reflects through her desperate urge of living a normal adulthood, which, ultimately, is a representation of the bodily escape of Blandine 'as she descends into greenery' (Gunty, 2022). Besides, struggling to feel the human connection around them, all of the four residents in the C4 apartment are living in solitude of their own perceptions.

The emotional trauma of the foster children and their desperate attempt for the need of transition to normal adulthood is one of the major sub-themes in Gunty's writing that shaped the storyline for the central protagonist. In this regard, the attempt of the novelist to combine comic experimentalism with vivid realism is rightly portrayed in this award-winning American fiction while setting the benchmark with help of the multitude of styles of the novelist (Collins, 2022). Referring to the tendency of Blandine to handle any situation of life with the help of theological perspectives, she is thriving to adopt a normal adulthood after getting of the foster house as well as the affair with a teacher (Price, 2022). The novel unfolds the mystery behind the violent attack on Blandine, a hint of which is given in the very first scenario by mentioning that Blandine 'exits her body'. The residents in the

La Lapinière housing complex are struggling to deal with their own problems by connecting to someone else. In some cases, especially in case of the central protagonist, Blandine, the spiritual awakening or spirituality is the escape mechanism for the teenager from the worldly sufferings and emotional trauma experienced by her (Gunty, 2022).

The multiple characters introduced in the novel are dealing with their own problem patterns such as Joan, who works for Restinpeace.com for scanning obituaries to identify derogatory comments, is struggling to address the issue of misophonia while Hope, the young mother, has 'a phobia of her baby's eyes' (Gunty, 2022; Catan, 2022). The hopelessness due to the decaying condition of the Vacca Vale City has contributed to the loneliness of people in this city as this city of absence is affecting the lives of people. In case of the central character Blandine, the spiritual belief and desperate will to encounter a bodily escape guided the character to belief in the Catholic female mystics. Her desire to transcend to a normal adulthood while coping with the past emotional traumas paved the path for her spiritual journey to avoid loneliness. Here, Gunty's attempt to integrate loneliness and spirituality is seen when she characterises Blandine as the main protagonist desiring for the bodily escape following the religious belief on Catholic values and spirituality.

The Rabbit Hutch combining the elements of humour, mysticism, horror and beauty is the spectacular piece of work by Gunty that sketches the journey of a fictional heartland in America in the post-industrial setting. With help of experimental language and multi-vocal narrative styles, the novelist has created a setting that attracts the readers to build connections with the characters. Being set in the bigger plot of the decaying condition of Vacca Vale City, Indiana, the novelist has intrigued short sub-plots in form of looking at the lives of the people residing in the affordable housing complex the Rabbit

Hutch (Gunty, 2022). The urge of the novelist to highlight the gendered power distribution and subsequent impacts due to this is clearly portrayed in the violent act. Here, the use of black and white drawings served as a narrative element for Gunty to indulge the readers in filling up the horrific blanks on their own (Piehl, 2022). Furthermore, the population of Vacca Vale, especially people residing in the affordable housing complex are experiencing the fear and risk of being entrapped.

Owing to the long-standing feeling of considering this city as their 'homes', a significant number of people in the housing apartments have not set foot outside the city. This, in turn, makes them believe that leaving this city is equivalent to leaving their own home and identity that ultimately guided them to be convinced that the fate of the city and their fate are connected and dependent on each other (Piehl, 2022). However, despite the disturbing tales indicated throughout the novel raises question on humanity and the acceptability of the social structure, the story ends in a beautiful note where human connections and kindness blossomed irrespective of adverse circumstances. This, as a result, bears the true expertise of the novelist in establishing religious harmony in light of the solitude or loneliness that makes it difficult for an individual as well as a community to thrive. Moreover, emphasis on aligning the concept of loneliness and spirituality while indulging the readers to experience the journey of the central characters in achieving mental satisfaction is one of the main concerns of this novel.

However, following the in-depth discussion on the themes of loneliness and spirituality while evaluating the narrative style of the novelist, it can be mentioned that starting the novel with the epigraph from Moore's 1989 documentary film *Roger & Me*, Gunty introduces the opening scene with the bodily escape of the main protagonist (Ditum, 2022). Here, the struggle of Blandine

to adjust to a normal adulthood after aging out from foster home and experiencing emotional trauma has been directly linked to her escape mechanism of finding peace following mystic process. The novel aiming to portray the journey of the characters during this dying condition of the city presents contradictory views on the two themes of entrapment and freedom. The characters involve in the subplot are suffering at their own level that represents the themes of loneliness and entrapment while their desire for living a healthy live and finding a solution to the existing issues signifies the journey for achieving freedom. Besides, the high intelligence level along with higher vulnerability shaped the character of Blandine, who is fascinated about the Catholic female mystics, especially Hildegard of Bingen (Piehl, 2022).

Now, the central protagonist with the desire for experiencing the mystical escape at least once in a life wishes for the heavenly pain as she explains, 'The agony is sweet, as the mystics promised. It's like your soul is being stabbed with light...' and this shows her belief on the spiritual world and heavenly bodies (Gunty, 2022). Being highly vulnerable due to emotional trauma and ongoing events in life Blandine has identified the solitude in every inch of the city that, in turn, was affecting its inhabitants. Besides, the theme of loneliness is reflected in the lives of other habitants as well including the man who performs on webcam for money and failed to build any connection. However, religious awakening is essential in guiding one to discover oneself and building a connection with the divine body. This has also been identified as the method of self-exploration and self-identification. Here, following Gunty's writing, intelligence and vulnerability contributed to the loneliness of Blandine that led to her entrapment in worldly concerns. It projects the struggle for an individual to break through the hurdles and identifying oneself to understand spirituality.

However, the redevelopment plan for the Valley where she once wished to see greenery added to the vulnerability of Blandine as she feared the thought of her beloved valley turning into a real-estate development project for building more affordable housing complexes (Piehl, 2022). Here, the spiritual awakening took place in Blandine when she decided to undertake the eco-terrorism campaign against the redevelopment plan. Now, spirituality being directly connected to the journey of discovering oneself can be explained as a major theme. Following the journey of Blandine, the constant effort to live a normal adulthood and overcome the emotional distress seemed to be addressed through religious awakening by discovering herself. Similarly, feeling detached and alienated around people, despite living in the society spirituality that is visible in case of 4 characters including Blandine living in C4 apartment. The four teenagers aging out of the foster home struggles to adopt the normal adulthood due to stereotyping perception of the society (Gunty, 2022). The novel represents the oppressive behaviour and journey of the four teenagers including the central character, Blandine, to create an identity.

The Rabbit Hutch depicts the short stories set in a larger plot or backdrop of decaying city of Vacca Vale in Indiana. With help of skilful narrative technique and use of symbolisms, Gunty has combined vivid reality with comic experiments as she tactfully utilised black and white drawings while leaving a scope for the readers to fill the imagery (Collins, 2022). The use of overlapping subplots representing the lives of people residing in the Rabbit Hutch helped the narrator to move swiftly from perspective to perspective regardless of the chaotic differences. The story representing the life sketches of people in different setting leads the readers to a breath-taking and suspenseful finale. Here, the narrative expertise of Gunty requires appraisal as she very tactfully showcased her preference for

the polyphonic fictions through her writing style and story setup. However, the use of startled imagery helps the novelist to project the environmental trauma that ultimately engaged Blandine to own up an eco-terrorism campaign as a protest against the redevelopment plan for the valley (Piehl, 2022).

The debut novel of Tess Gunty strongly represents her views and opinion regarding gendered distribution of power and the unequal treatment of the male-dominant society (Neilson, 2022). Hence, the projection of the journey of the characters from loneliness to spirituality in the novel helps to justify the contradictory concepts of entrapment and freedom. Blandine, identifying the city of Vacca Vale as the symbolic presentation of loneliness identified that this negativity is likely to influence the lives of the habitants including her (Gunty, 2022). This can further be explained through her loneliness due to emotional trauma in foster home and subsequent miseries of life that hold a significant impact on the mind and spirit of the teenager. However, the religious awakening of the protagonist through experiencing the freedom from the entrapment as she 'exits her body' signifies the fulfilment of the desperation of rebirth (Gunty, 2022). Spirituality, here, stands for the people's urge for rebirth in Vacca Vale city as they considered the city as their home and they believe that this dying condition of the city denotes their future.

Now, this desperation for rebirth has created the opportunity to unfold the suspenseful events through religious awakening for identifying and exploring one's true self. Gunty, in her novel, intended to highlight the changing economic and social scenario due to rampant consumerism that ultimately incurs challenges to environment. Moreover, representation of sexual power dynamics, mental health and mysticism are also essential aspect of this novel that helped in achieving spiritual insights while developing an understanding on the social

class and structure. Intention to explore the spiritual distress of the characters and aligning those with the loneliness or solitude is one of the prime concerns of Gunty that is prevalent in the characteristics of the people living in La Lapinière. The teenagers living in C4 apartment are unwilling to discuss their past or the memory of foster families as in Blandine's words, 'She is no one. She is Katy the Portuguese water dog' that consoled her by licking her face when both of them are banished 'in the snow' by the foster family for trifle reasons (Gunty, 2022).

The characters presented in the novel are struggling to handle their problems in terms of dealing with psychological issues as well as social distress. Here, in order to explore the full spectrum of being a human, Gunty has used striking narrative style while changing the tense and format of narration for sketching the lives of the characters. Besides, being highly influenced by the medieval mystic characters, Blandine is desirable by the people around her that sometimes makes her feel to leave her body as she thinks it "contains goods and services" which people are likely to take advantage of without her permission (Ditum, 2022). This feeling is a symbolic outcome from the past experience of hers as she was molested at the age of 14 (Gunty, 2022). Now, the sense of solitude that surrounded all the people including this central character has been addressed by the mystical references for soothing the pain and agony of an individual through religious awakening. Besides, developing a feeling regarding her body to be objective, Blandine wishes repeatedly to exit her body following the methods of Catholic female mystics (Murray, 2022).

Finding a way out of the worldly suffering, loneliness and agony though wanting a bodily escape has highlighted the desperation of the character for rebirth. Now, the dying city of Vacca Vale in Indiana being deprived of the industrialisation due to the withdrawal of the automobile company also thrives to rebuild. The plan for redevelopment is symbolic here

to suggest the spiritual journey while, on the other hand, the interest of the central characters to find an escape from the suffering and misery creates opportunities to explore spiritual insights (Gunty, 2022). Furthermore, mental illness and loneliness are the two aspects of human behaviour that can be addressed by understanding the spiritual connectedness. In case of Blandine the spiritual awakening through leaving the body like the Catholic female mystics has been symbolic for her to complete the journey of self-exploration and self-identification. This is also representation of her desire to be free from worldly bondages and responsibilities that contributed to her religious awakening.

The Rabbit Hutch chronicles weaving the diverse stories revolving around the main protagonist Blandine can be identified as the tale of shifting perspectives (Neilson, 2022). This is a journey of the central character from chaos to spirituality as the mental trauma of aging out of the foster home and experiencing unfortunate incidents in past influenced her mind. Similarly, the loneliness in terms of seeing the decaying city and deteriorating lifestyle and civilisation along with growing unemployment and rampant crime rate required attention of the authorities in designing a redevelopment plan for the city. However, solitude being a part of life of the people residing in the affordable housing complex also experiences the journey from loneliness to spirituality due to the intertwined lives of the residents (Neilson, 2022). Besides, wracked by economic and environmental woes, Vacca Vale presents the larger plot for projecting solitude while serving as the appropriate ground for creating an identity through religious awakening.

In addition, mastering the art of characterisation supported Gunty in sketching the characters in light on their personal struggles and identifying a pattern in the problem model. Moreover, linking the large plot knitted on the backdrop of the

withdrawal of Zorn Automobile Company and the obstruction on development in Vacca Vale in Indiana compliments the narrative technique of Gunty to use epistles and obituary comments along with black and white drawings to present the vivid explanation of a situation. Here, the story revolves around journey of Blandine to achieve the ultimate target of leaving her body and entering the spiritual world. The

philosophical questions always instigate the fantastical thoughts of the lone teenager and this makes her unique from the other teenage girls of her age (Beaton, 2022). However, the short-stories depicting different aspects of lives of the residents seemed more attractive and appealing to the readers that accepts and praises the versatility of the writing style of Gunty.

References

- /blog/the-opposite-of-solipsism-a-review-of-the-rabbit-hutch-by-tess-gunty
- [1] Beltrán Sánchez, Juan Sebastián. "Looking for a place in the world: fuckhead's existential quest in Denis Johnson's Jesus' son." Univalle, 2022.
- [2] Bibi, Saira, Muhamsmad Ramzan, Naseer Muhammad, and Nijat Ullah Khan. "A Transcendentalist Critique of Herman Hesse's Siddhartha." *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government* Vol 27, no. 5 2021.
- [3] Bookbrowse, "The Rabbit Hutch A novel by Tess Gunty", Bookbrowse, August 3, 2022, https://www.bookbrowse.com/bb_briefs/detail/index.cfm/ezine_preview_number/16902/the-rabbit-hutch
- [4] Cybanski, Kara. "Reshaping Womanhood: Lesbian Realities in The Well of Loneliness by Radclyffe Hall." Ottawa, 2021.
- [5] Eleni Vlahiotis, " 'THE RABBIT HUTCH' IS A TRIUMPHANT, CHARACTER-DRIVEN DEBUT", *Pop Matters*, August 30, 2022, <https://www.popmatters.com/tess-gunty-rabbit-hutch-2022>
- [6] Emily Price, "The Rabbit Hutch Is a Frenetic Debut About Alienation", *Paste*, August 15, 2022, <https://www.pastemagazine.com/books/tess-gunty/the-rabbit-hutch-review-tess-gunty>
- [7] Heather Scott Partington, "The Apartment", *Alta*, August 8, 2022, <https://www.altasonline.com/books/fiction/a40773029/tess-gunty-rabbit-hutch-book-review/s>
- [8] Jay Innis Murray "The Opposite of Solipsism - A Review of The Rabbit Hutch by Tess Gunty", *Talking Big*, September 29, 2022, <https://www.thevisionarycompany.net>
- [9] Kirby Beaton, "Tess Gunty's Debut Sends Readers Down the Rabbit Hole", *Oprah Daily*, August 5, 2022, <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/books/a40815544/tess-gunty-rabbit-hutch-review/>
- [10] Leah Greenblatt, "One Apartment Building, Many Lives", *The New York Times*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/02/books/review/tess-gunty-rabbit-hutch.html>
- [11] LiQiang, Wang. "A field guide to angle-independent structural color." *Physics Today* 74 2021: 1-62.
- [12] Norah Piehl, "Review The Rabbit Hutch by Tess Gunty", *Book Reporter*, August 5, 2022, <https://www.bookreporter.com/reviews/the-rabbit-hutch>
- [13] Robert Collins, "The Rabbit Hutch by Tess Gunty review: a firecracker debut", *The Times*, July 17, 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-rabbit-hutch-by-tess-gunty-review-a-firecracker-debut-h0njbvdtc>
- [14] Sarah Ditung, "The Rabbit Hutch by Tess Gunty review – a riveting debut about love and cruelty," *The Guardian*, August 3, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/aug/03/the-rabbit-hutch-by-tess-gunty-review-a-riveting-debut-about-love-and-cruelty>
- [15] Sarah Neilson, "Tess Gunty's 'The Rabbit Hutch' Examines the Pitfalls of Religious Zeal, Mysticism, and More", *Shondaland*, August 10, 2022, <https://www.shondaland.com/inspire/books/a40850810/tess-guntys-the-rabbit-hutch-examines-the-pitfalls-of-religious-zeal-mysticism-and-more/>

[16] Tess Gunty, *The Rabbit Hutch*, New York City, US: Knopf, 2022.
[17] Wayne Catan, "THE RABBIT HUTCH

by Tess Gunty", *Harvard Review Online*. November 4, 2022, <https://www.harvardreview.org/book-review/the-rabbit-hutch/>