

Duality of Ernest Burhart in *Killers of the Flower Moon*: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI by David Grann

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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 22 June 2026 Approved 06 July 2026 Published 31 July 2026 Keywords: Cartesian Dualism, Ernest Burkhardt, Moral Collapse, Psychoanalysis, Self-Fragmentation.	This study examines the fragmentation of self and the profound psychological contradictions of Ernest Burkhardt's character in David Grann's novel <i>Killers of the Flower Moon</i> (2017). Filling the gap in previous research that mostly focused on the issues of postcolonialism, systemic exploitation, and racial violence at a macro level, this study specifically dissects the intrapsychic mechanisms of individuals experiencing personality splitting. This is a descriptive qualitative study using a psychoanalytic literary-criticism approach and Cartesian dualism. Data were taken from the main novel text and collected through close reading techniques, and the data were classified to interpret the character's internal contradictions. The results of the study through the lens of Cartesian dualism show a distance between Ernest's mind (<i>Res Cogitans</i>)—which harbors affection, empathy, and genuine emotional dependence on his wife, Mollie—and the actions of his physical body (<i>Res Extensa</i>) that mechanically facilitate the conspiracy of the Osage family massacre. Furthermore, Freudian psychoanalysis diagnoses this mind-body fragmentation as caused by the failure of the Ego's function to mediate the Id's material greed drive and the Superego's demands, distorted by moral submission to William Hale's authority. The Ego's failure to compartmentalize these roles triggers a split in the Ego, so that ethical consciousness loses its executive power, leading to total moral collapse. This research asserts that human emotions and morality will lose their ethical significance if the Ego is completely paralyzed in mediating the clash between internal desires and the pressures of external reality.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence, moral conflict, and psychological instability in literary studies reveal conflicts between emotions, moral values, and individual interests. In literary works, acts of violence not only represent physical aggression but also reflect the inner conflict that arises when characters face conflicting urges, social pressures, and moral choices. Several studies have shown that internal conflict arises when individuals experience tension among emotional states, personal desires, and

moral demands, ultimately leading to unstable behavior and decision-making (Gautheron et al., 2024; Na'amneh et al., 2025; Neupane & Lourdusamy, 2025). Furthermore, contradictions between emotional attachments, bodily experiences, and self-identity can lead to self-fragmentation (Jorba Galdos & Warren, 2022; O'Brien & Linehan, 2019; Pellegrini et al., 2021; Raemen et al., 2023).

In psychology, internal conflict is understood as a condition where various aspects of a person compete to influence thoughts and

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behavior (Kleiman & Enisman, 2018; Krasilnikov, 2025; S.X., 2025). In several studies, Freud explained this conflict through the interaction among the Id, Ego, and Superego. The Id represents instinctive drives and personal desires, the Superego represents moral values and social norms, while the Ego functions as a mediator between the demands of both. Internal conflict arises when the Ego cannot balance the Id's drives and the Superego's demands, giving rise to psychological tension and contradictory behavior (Lestari & Hanifah, 2024; Loway & Nurochman, 2023; Marcelina & Juanda, 2025; Suardi et al., 2026).

The Id, Ego, and Superego perspective is relevant to analyzing the character of Ernest Burkhart in David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2017). In the novel, Ernest is depicted as experiencing a complex psychological contradiction. On the one hand, he displays affection and emotional attachment to Mollie Burkhart. However, on the other hand, he engages in manipulation, exploitation, and actions that contribute to the destruction of his family. This contradiction demonstrates that Ernest's conflict can be understood not only as moral ambiguity but also as a fragmentation between emotional awareness and bodily action. Therefore, the character of Ernest Burkhart is relevant to study through an integration of Cartesian dualism and Freudian psychoanalysis.

In previous studies, the psychoanalytic approach has been frequently used by many researchers because it can assist in literary criticism. Meanwhile, studies on "*Killers of the Flower Moon*" have focused heavily on issues of postcolonialism, systemic exploitation, and racial violence, as explored by Morksa (2022), Ulliya (2024), Meisyanani (2025), and Bimbin (2025). In their research, Ernest Burkhart's character tends to be portrayed as a perpetrator of systemic greed perpetrated by white people against the Osage people. It does not address the psychological fragmentation experienced by Ernest Burkhart. Meanwhile, a separate analysis of Ernest Burkhart's character remains elusive.

This creates a gap in research on Ernest Burkhart's psychological state, particularly regarding his emotional attachment to his wife. At the same time, his physical body actively

contributes to the destruction of his wife's family. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by integrating Cartesian dualism as a bridge to establish the observable separation between mind and body, with Freudian psychoanalysis to explain the failure of the Psychological Ego that causes it (Lestari & Hanifah, 2024; Loway & Nurochman, 2023; Marcelina & Juanda, 2025; Thibaut, 2018). Rather than treating Cartesian dualism and Freudian psychoanalysis as separate or competing perspectives, this study integrates both frameworks to provide a more comprehensive explanation of Ernest Burkhart's psychological conflict. Cartesian dualism offers the philosophical foundation for understanding the structural division between Ernest's inner consciousness (*Res Cogitans*) and his outward actions (*Res Extensa*). This perspective explains how Ernest simultaneously embodies genuine affection for his family while actively participating in acts of deception, violence, and murder.

However, Cartesian dualism alone cannot explain the psychological process by which this internal division manifests as destructive behavior. To address this limitation, Freudian psychoanalysis is employed to examine the dynamic interaction between the id, the Ego, and the Superego within Ernest's consciousness. While the Id drives his desire for wealth and social security, the Superego is shaped not only by conventional moral values but also by the overwhelming authority of William Hale, whose influence distorts Ernest's ethical judgment. Under these opposing pressures, the Ego gradually loses its capacity to mediate between instinctual desire and moral responsibility, resulting in increasingly irrational and destructive decisions.

The integration of these two frameworks enables this study to explain Ernest Burkhart's psychological fragmentation from two complementary perspectives. Cartesian dualism identifies the structural form of his divided self, whereas Freudian psychoanalysis explains the psychological mechanism that sustains and intensifies that division. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that Ernest's moral collapse is not merely the consequence of individual greed or external manipulation, but the result of a persistent conflict between consciousness, bodily action, and unconscious

psychological forces. By combining these philosophical and psychoanalytic perspectives, this study offers a more comprehensive interpretation of Ernest Burkhart's duality than studies relying on a single theoretical approach. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does the self-fragmentation represented in Ernest Burkhart's character?
2. How does the conflict between the Id, Ego, and Superego influence Ernest Burkhart's moral Collapse?

Furthermore, this study aims to analyze how the conflict between Burkhart's mind and body is represented in the narrative and to examine how this divided fragment contributes to Ernest Burkhart's instability.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to examine the psychological and philosophical dimensions of Ernest Burkhart's character (Fadli, 2021; Sugiyono, 2017). The primary data source is David Grann's novel *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2017). The research data consists of textual evidence—specifically dialogue, narrative descriptions, emotional expressions, and physical actions—that demonstrate psychological conflict and moral contradictions. Secondary data were obtained from academic journals and literature relevant to Cartesian dualism and Freudian psychoanalysis.

To answer the research questions, data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques. The quotes were specifically chosen based on manifestations of Ernest Burkhart's internal contradictions. The selection criteria strictly focused on textual evidence that demonstrated his emotional attachment, empathy, and moral guilt, or that highlighted his physical involvement in the violence, deception, and exploitation of the Osage family.

After data selection, the extracted quotes were classified into different analytical categories based on a dual theoretical framework. Textual evidence revealing emotional awareness, compassion, and moral conflict is categorized under the Cartesian realm of mind (*Res Cogitans*) and Freudian moral conscience (Superego)

(Thibaut, 2018). In contrast, textual evidence depicting physical violence, manipulation, and the primitive drive for material wealth is categorized under the Cartesian realm of the physical body (*Res Extensa*) and Freudian instinctual drives (Id).

Data analysis is conducted by sequentially integrating Cartesian dualism and Freudian psychoanalysis to build a comprehensive understanding of Ernest's character. First, Cartesian dualism is applied to map the self-fragmentation, analyzing the disconnect between Ernest's mind (*Res Cogitans*) and his physical actions (*Res Extensa*) (Thibaut, 2018). Second, Freudian psychoanalysis is integrated to diagnose the internal root causes of this split. This analysis evaluates the Id, Superego, and, specifically, the Ego, to explain how the Ego's psychological failure to mediate moral and material drives directly leads to philosophical mind-body fragmentation (Loway & Nurochman, 2023; Marcelina & Juanda, 2025; Suardi et al., 2026). Finally, the findings from both frameworks are synthesized to explain how self-fragmentation led to Ernest Burkhart's moral collapse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self-Fragmentation through Cartesian Dualism *Res Cogitans*

Within the philosophical framework of Cartesian dualism, the *Res Cogitans* is understood as a thinking substance that is immaterial, incorporeal, and ontologically separate from the body's physical matter (Thibaut, 2018). This realm encompasses the entire spectrum of human consciousness, the deepest emotions, and affective capacities that constitute the true essence of an individual's selfhood (Camargo, 2025; Thibaut, 2018). In the character of Ernest Burkhart, this dimension of *Res Cogitans* plays a crucial role because it demonstrates that his mind possesses a layer of humanity and a vibrant emotional dependence on his wife, Mollie Burkhart, which is radically at odds with his destructive physical shell (Thibaut, 2018).

The inherent affective capacity in Ernest's *Res Cogitans* has been reflected from the beginning of the narrative. The novel explicitly reveals this inner dimension "...but beneath his roughness there seemed to be a tenderness and a trace of

insecurity, and Mollie fell in love with him.” (Grann, 2017, p. 13). The quote demonstrates that, psychologically, Ernest’s mind possesses human tenderness and fragility, confirming that his affective dimension is a valid mental representation rather than merely a manipulative mask (Thornton & Tamir, 2020).

The emotional attachment in Ernest’s mind is not merely passive but manifests as a profound emotional dependence. Upon hearing that another man has feelings for Mollie, Ernest’s inner outburst is expressed “After he heard that another man had affections for her, he muttered that he could’n’t live without her.” (Grann, 2017; P.13). This extreme fear of loss proves that Ernest’s *Res Cogitans* possesses an organic affective attachment (Schweitzer et al., 2018). The mind’s activity focused on Mollie’s physical well-being also manifests in the form of genuine care when facing his wife’s illness “She suffered from diabetes, and he cared for her when her joints ached and her stomach burned with hunger.” (Grann, 2017; P.13). Ernest’s conscious action to care for Mollie demonstrates the active function of cognitive empathy, confirming that the moral instrument in his consciousness is capable of responding to the suffering of others (Galletta et al., 2021).

Finally, in the final seconds before his physical identity is completely confined by imprisonment, Ernest’s mind sends a final affection signal “Before being led away in irons... Burkhart turned and smiled wanly at Mollie.” (Grann, 2017; P.200). This wilted smile is the last physical manifestation purely driven by the consciousness of love in his *Res Cogitans*. Through these four textual evidences, it can be concluded that Ernest’s mind continues to maintain its capacity for love and empathy until the end. Ernest’s existential tragedy lies in the fact that all the affective richness in his mind is cut off and lacks the executive power to control the actions of his physical body (*Res Extensa*) (Thibaut, 2018)

Res Extensa

In contrast to the immaterial dimension of the mind, Descartes defines *Res Extensa* as a material substance that exists in space and time, manifesting in the body’s behavior and physical movements that can be directly observed (Jiménez & Arenas, 2024; Thibaut, 2018). In the realm of

literary psychology, this separation explains the phenomenon of behavioral dissociation, where a character’s behavioral output (outward actions) can be completely disconnected from their internal moral consciousness (Dahham & Suliman, 2026). In the character of Ernest Burkhart, the dominance of *Res Extensa* is evident in how his physical shell operates mechanically as an extension of William Hale’s conspiracy and brutal violence, completely ignoring the love he feels.

Ernest’s involvement in *Res Extensa* begins with his physical presence at the crime scenes. The narrative notes that in conspiracy meetings, Ernest’s body is present as a passive component “When he [Pike] met with Hale and Bryan, Pike said, there was sometimes another person present [Ernest Burkhart].” (Grann, 2017; P.129). This spatial presence proves that Ernest’s material shell has become an integral part of the criminal ecosystem, in which his body is used to nurture the conspiracy’s dark secrets.

Furthermore, Ernest’s body actively facilitates the murder through mechanical verbal acts. He uses his speech organs to recruit the executioner and voice the deadly proposal “Burt, I have a proposition I want to make to you... I want you to blow up and kill Bill Smith and his wife.” (Grann, 2017; P.172). His limbs also serve as logistical intermediaries, conveying the instructions for physical destruction “Burkhart now read a statement admitting that he’d delivered a message from Hale to Ramsey, saying to let Kirby know it was time to blow up the Smith house.” (Grann, 2017; P.199). These two actions confirm that Ernest’s body was moved purely as an instrument of destruction, facilitating the loss of life without any denial of his motor functions (Chirkova, 2021).

The culmination of this *Res Extensa* betrayal manifests in his physical acquiescence as Mollie’s poisoning proceeds right before him: “The Shoun brothers were brought in... One of the prosecutors... asked James Shoun, ‘Weren’t you giving her [Mollie] insulin?’ ‘I may have been,’ he said.” (Grann, 2017, p.183) The absence of any protective action or muscular intervention from Ernest’s body to stop the injection demonstrates the absolute incommunicability of the Cartesian substance (Camargo, 2025). His physical body has completely submitted to the network of terror,

allowing the destruction to occur in real space despite his inner screams.

Self-Fragmentation

The radical contradiction between Res Cogitans and Res Extensa in Ernest Burkhart reveals a stark gap between his emotional awareness and his physical reality. In the perspective of literary psychology, when essential aspects of identity—such as affective emotions, moral beliefs, and bodily actions—fail to be maintained in a coherent structure, the individual will experience severe self-fragmentation (Zepinic, 2016). This symptom of fragmentation is characterized by a sharp disconnection and absolute incommunicability between what is perceived in the mind and what is enacted in the material world (Faggioli et al., 2024).

A synthesis of previous findings proves this paradox: Ernest consciously admits that he cannot live without Mollie (Res Cogitans), but at the same time, his body mechanically facilitates the recruitment of assassins and the sending of messages to blow up his wife's family (Res Extensa). This inability to translate affective values into consistent and protective physical actions is a clear manifestation of the Cartesian ontological split (Thibaut, 2018). His affections were locked tightly inside a mind devoid of executive power, while William Hale's violent conspiracy hijacked his physical body. , where Ernest's selfhood is split into two entities that betray each other (Camargo, 2025; Thibaut, 2018).

It is important to note that this mind-body fragmentation is not simply a passive phenomenon or hypocrisy, but rather a symptom of a functional failure in deeper mental structures (Goldberg, 2020). This split, observable to the naked eye through the lens of Descartes' dualism, ultimately became the foundation for diagnosing the root cause of Ernest's psychological conflict. This physical-mental fragmentation is a direct result of internal structural warfare, which will be further dissected through the mechanisms of the Id, Superego, and Ego in Freudian psychoanalysis (Helmita & Ano, 2025; Zainasti et al., 2025).

Freudian Psychoanalysis

Id

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Id is the most primitive, unconscious domain of personality, operating entirely on the pleasure principle (Loway & Nurochman, 2023; Zainasti et al., 2025). This structure is driven by libidinal energy and basic instincts that demand the immediate gratification of personal desires and the active rejection of any pain or discomfort, regardless of moral codes or social reality (Sulistyaningrum et al., 2025). In the character of Ernest Burkhart, the dominance of the Id manifests destructively through two primary drives: aggressive financial greed and a selfish instinct to escape psychological suffering.

The most fundamental manifestation of the Id is rooted in the material instinct (greed) to control the Osage tribe's wealth. This unconscious drive places economic gain above all else, as reflected in his financial control "the bulk of the family's headrights had been funneled to Mollie Burkhart, whose wealth was controlled by Ernest." (Grann, 2017; P.153). From a psychoanalytic perspective, the concentration of Mollie's wealth under Ernest's control demonstrates how the Id exploits domestic relationships to satisfy a selfish desire for material accumulation, making it a primary drive that overrides ethical considerations (Schweitzer et al., 2018).

The Id's aggressive drive for material gratification then drives extreme criminal acts. When this financial desire is blocked, Ernest's Id drives him to launch an act of soliciting murder without moral constraint "Burt, I have a proposition I want to make to you... I want you to blow up and kill Bill Smith and his wife." (Grann, 2017; P.172). Psychological conflict often escalates when primitive drives prioritize personal financial gain over basic human values (Marcelina & Juanda, 2025). Furthermore, the satisfaction of this instinctual drive is manifested through actual material facilitation (an act of facilitating crime), in which he surrenders his personal assets to facilitate the crime "Did you tell me the truth when you told me Ernest gave you an automobile as part payment for that job?" "Yes, sir." (Grann, 2017; P.180). These logistical sacrifices demonstrate that Ernest's Id energy is so dominant that he is willing to cross legal boundaries to secure his economic satisfaction.

On the other hand, the Id's characteristic of always seeking to avoid pain (pain avoidance) manifests itself paradoxically at the end of Ernest's criminal escapades. When the pressures of reality build up to create unbearable psychological tension, Ernest's Id demands immediate release (a desire to escape psychological pain) "I'm sick and tired of all this.... I want to admit exactly what I did." (Grann, 2017; P.199). From a psychoanalytic perspective, this "sick and tired" statement confirms that his decision to confess was not purely a noble moral resolution, but rather a selfish impulse of the Id to end his inner torment and restore his own psychological well-being as quickly as possible.

Superego

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the Superego is a personality structure that represents the moral values, conscience, and social norms internalized by an individual from their environment and authority figures since infancy (Taufan & Tawami, 2024). The Superego's primary function is to act as an internal judge, controlling the primitive impulses of the Id, imposing social restrictions, and punishing individuals by inducing guilt when their actions violate the accepted moral law (Tri Wedawati et al., 2022). However, in the context of a corrupt and manipulative environment, the Superego can experience structural distortion, in which the values of destructive external authority figures are fully adopted as the highest moral law, replacing universal ethics (Ornstein, 2020). In Ernest Burkhart's character, this Superego dynamic operates in complex ways through his extreme submission to William Hale's authority before his moral conscience finally attempts to reawaken.

The internalization of the uncle figure as the primary source of moral legitimacy (obedience to authority) is a concrete manifestation of Ernest's distorted Superego formation. This is explicitly reflected when he tries to rationalize his criminal involvement before the law, "I feel in my heart that I did it because I was requested to do it by Hale, who is my uncle." (Grann, 2017; P.199). The statement "feel in my heart" indicates that Hale's orders were no longer perceived as ordinary external pressure but had penetrated the deepest layers of Ernest's psyche and operated as a

legitimate moral law in his heart. As a result, blind obedience to family or patriarchal figures became an ethical obligation that suppressed his common sense (Liu, 2017).

This moral distortion then transformed Ernest's Superego into a justification for acting purely under command. He viewed himself as merely a mechanical intermediary who bore no moral responsibility for the destruction he caused "Burkhart now read a statement admitting that he'd delivered a message from Hale to Ramsey, saying to let Kirby know it was time to blow up the Smith house." (Grann, 2017; P.199). From a psychoanalytic perspective, when an individual places an authority figure in control of their Superego, they experience a dissociation of ethical responsibility, where carrying out orders is seen as a form of "virtue" of obedience that overrides the cruelty of the act itself (King & Schmid Noerr, 2020).

The strength of this authority's grip on Ernest's moral structure is also emphasized by his vulnerability to direct psychological domination (domination and moral pressure) "...after he was allowed to see Hale and once more be placed under his domination, there was no hope of his testifying." (Grann, 2017; P.193). Constant physical and psychological contact with Hale instantly reinforces the tyrannical Superego structure that has colonized Ernest's consciousness, completely paralyzing his courage to assert the truth independently.

However, the Superego's original function as a defense of ethical conscience does not completely die out; instead, it re-emerges when the illusion of manipulation collapses at the end of the narrative. This authentic moral awareness compels Ernest to abandon his entire legal charade "The honest and honorable thing for me to do was to stop the trial and acknowledge the truth." (Grann, 2017; P.199). This quote marks a crucial moment when Ernest's Superego attempts psychological reintegration to reclaim its moral autonomy from William Hale's domination. The use of the words "honest and honorable" demonstrates that the ethical evaluation instruments within Ernest's consciousness have finally succeeded in distinguishing true virtue from destructive obedience. However, this moral awakening is too

late to prevent the physical tragedy that has occurred in the real world.

Ego

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, the ego functions as the executive system of the personality, operating on the reality principle (Suardi et al., 2026; Taufan & Tawami, 2024). Its primary role is to act as a rational mediator, balancing the primitive instinctual demands of the id, the moral constraints of the Superego, and the logical constraints of the external world. An individual's psychological stability and self-integrity depend heavily on the Ego's capacity to integrate these conflicting drives into a unified, adaptive, and harmonious action (Eagle, 2021). However, in Ernest Burkhart's character, the Ego experiences functional paralysis and a catastrophic failure of its mediating function (role conflict), causing him to fail to maintain his autonomy and to oscillate between unstable moral positions.

This failure of the Ego's integration function first manifests as extreme compartmentalization mechanisms to maintain its dual roles. This is vividly illustrated by the Ego's failure to mediate its domestic and criminal roles "It demanded that Ernest share a bed with Mollie and raise children with her, all while plotting and scheming against her family." (Grann, 2017, p. 153). From a psychodynamic perspective, the Ego's inability to reconcile Ernest's role as a loving family man with his role as a murder conspirator demonstrates a split in the Ego (Eagle, 2021). Rather than finding a rational, ethical compromise, Ernest's Ego allows these two opposing psychological domains to coexist without intervening, demonstrating a severe lack of executive control in maintaining the integrity of his personal identity.

Ernest's Ego paralysis is further exacerbated by his overwhelming fear of the threat posed by his uncle (Ego paralysis), which completely disables his capacity for rational mediation. When on the verge of deciding to uphold the truth, his Ego defenses crumbled under the anxiety of reality "Moments before, Burkhart had confided to a prosecutor that if he testified, 'they'll kill me,' and as Burkhart sat in the witness chair, it was evident that whatever strength he had mustered to reach this point was fading." (Grann, 2017, p. 193)

The objective fear of physical destruction ("they'll kill me") overrode Ernest's autonomous Ego function, leaving him paralyzed and unable to take independent action beyond William Hale's domination. This psychological instability and executive panic then triggered reactive behavioral oscillations (vacillation/instability), evident in his impulsive changes in legal strategy in the courtroom "I wish to discharge the defense attorneys. Mr. Moss will now represent me." (Grann, 2017, p. 198)

The abrupt dismissal of his lawyer confirms that Ernest's Ego is in a highly fragile, anxious, and inconsistent state, where his rational functioning fails to quell internal conflicts, resulting in unstable decisions.

Ultimately, the complete collapse of the Ego's defense structure (Ego breakdown under pressure) occurs when a pile of traumatic realities hits his psychic limits in a relentless manner "The death of his daughter, the haunting face of his wife each day at the trial, the realization that the evidence against him was piling up—it was too much to withstand." (Grann, 2017, p. 198)

The death of his child, the moral weight of Mollie's gaze, and the irrefutable legal evidence constitute a reality too massive for Ernest's Ego to bear. The confession he finally made in court was not a product of the Superego's noble moral victory, but rather a form of psychic capitulation due to the breaking of the Ego's defenses, which were no longer able to mediate the clash between the Id's greed, the Superego's punishment of guilt, and the threat of real destruction in the outside world. Thus, Ernest represents a figure of absolute failed integration, in which the paralysis of the Ego directly triggers the fragmentation of identity that leads to his downfall (Lepoutre et al., 2020).

Moral Collapse

Moral collapse, in the study of literary psychology, occurs when an individual maintains a full awareness of ethical values. However, their Ego consistently fails to translate that awareness into a consistent rejection of evil (Arminio, 2022). This condition is a direct consequence of the psyche's structural instability, in which moral values lose their executive drive due to the paralysis of the personality's mediating function. In the character of Ernest Burkhart,

moral collapse is not marked by the loss of the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, but rather by his fatal impotence in upholding those ethical values when faced with external pressures and material incentives.

The primary indication that Ernest is experiencing moral collapse—not emptiness—is seen in his awareness of the crimes he has been covering up. At trial, his manipulative defense finally crumbles when he declares, “I’m through lying, judge. I don’t want to go on with this trial any longer” (Grann, 2017; p. 198). This awareness of the need to stop lying proves that his ethical instrument is not completely dead. However, this realization emerges as a form of despair, demonstrating that his morality has proven powerless and too slow to prevent a series of physical violence facilitated by his own body.

This collapse of moral autonomy reaches its lowest point when Ernest voluntarily relinquishes psychological control to the source of his own destruction, his uncle. Although rationally under the control of the state legal system, his Ego still fails to break the chains of domination of the old authority “He’s not my attorney...but I’m willing to talk to him.” (Grann, 2017; p. 193). This willingness to re-engage in dialogue with William Hale confirms that Ernest’s inner belief system has completely submitted to external tyrannical forces.

Thus, Ernest Burkhart’s moral collapse is not an instantaneous loss of conscience, but rather the result of a fatal psychological domino effect. Starting from the splitting of the mind (*Res Cogitans*), which is full of affection from the destructive physical action (*Res Extensa*), the dominance of the greed instinct (*Id*), and the paralysis of the integration function (*Ego*), all of these structural failures lead to the destruction of the integrity of the character’s identity.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the character of Ernest Burkhart in the novel “Killers of the Flower Moon” represents extreme self-fragmentation in the psychology of literature. Through the lens of Cartesian dualism, it is found that Ernest’s mental dimension (*Res Cogitans*), filled with compassion, empathy, and genuine

emotional dependence on Mollie Burkhart, is radically separated from his physical dimension (*Res Extensa*). His physical dimension operates mechanically as a logistical instrument and active participant in the conspiracy network surrounding the Osage family’s mass murder. This fragmentation demonstrates that an individual’s identity can be ontologically fragmented when emotional consciousness loses executive control over the material actions of one’s own body in the real world. This radical contradiction confirms that Ernest represents a figure with failed self-integration, where the affective richness of his mind is completely isolated and unable to stem the destruction wrought by his physical actions.

More deeply, Freudian psychoanalysis successfully diagnoses that this mind-body fragmentation is a direct result of ego failure. When Ernest’s *Id* drives dominate through the instinct of material greed and the selfish need to avoid psychic pain, and his *Superego* is distorted by moral submission to William Hale’s external authority, the *Ego* is proven to fail in its role as a rational mediator. Instead of reconciling the structural conflict, Ernest’s *Ego* carries out an extreme compartmentalization of roles that triggers a split in the *Ego* structure itself (split in the *ego*). Moral collapse ultimately becomes the final logical consequence of this structural instability, where the ethical consciousness and guilt possessed by the *Superego* lose their executive power to direct behavior under the principle of reality. As a theoretical implication, this study asserts that human emotions and morality will lose their ethical significance if the *Ego* function experiences total paralysis in mediating the clash between internal desires and the pressures of environmental reality.

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