

A Comparative Study of Power and Self-discovery in N.K. Jemisin's *The Inheritance Trilogy* and *Thor: Ragnarok*

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Abstract:

This comparative study examines the parallel themes of power and identity in N.K. Jemisin's *The Inheritance Trilogy: The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms (2010), The Broken Kingdoms (2010), The Kingdom of Gods (2011)*, and the blockbuster movie *Thor: Ragnarok (2017)* Directed by Taika Waititi. The article analyses the relationships and conflicts that connect Gods and mortals in both fiction and film. Through a meticulous examination of characters like Yeine Darr and Thor, Nahadoth and Hela, Itempas and Odin, as well as Sieh and Loki, the study unveils the similarities and differences that emerge in their quests for power, struggles with identity, including the disagreement between creation and destruction. With a focus on the thematic nuances, the analysis highlights how these works, despite distinct mediums and settings, intertwine in their exploration of humanity's age-old fascination with divinity, the responsibilities of power, and the enigmatic interplay between the realms of Gods and mortals. This paper explores the travel into the world of Gods and understands how their tales are connected to human lives.

Keywords: Identity, Authority, Self-discovery, God and Mortals, Magic, Superheroine

The origins of cinema can be traced back to literature and culture. The novels and movies are like mirrors have both reflection and formation of human perspectives. The advancement of its narrative technique, which naturally has a close connection with it as well as literary storytelling. Numerous elements of similarities develop in comparative research, particularly when comparing the novel to the movies. Both of these genres play around time and space. A famous film critic Susan Sontag in his essay said that,

Like the novel, the cinema presents us with a view of the action which is absolutely under the control of the director-writer at every movement. Our attention cannot wander about the screen, as it does about the stage. When the camera moves, we move, when it remains still, we are still. Similarly, the novel presents a selection of the thoughts and descriptions that are relevant to the writer's conception, and we must follow these things serially, as the author leads us they are not spread out, as a background for us to contemplate in the order we choose, as in painting or the theatre (*Against Interpretation* 6).

In the realms of literature and cinema, stories of Gods and mortals have long captivated our imagination. From ancient myths to contemporary narratives, the interplay between the divine and the human continues to offer a rich tapestry for exploration. In N.K. Jemisin's *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010), *The Broken Kingdoms* (2010), and *The Kingdom of Gods* (2011), unfold in a world of Gods and mortals, centered around the mortal nineteen-year-old protagonist Yeine Darr. When Yeine is summoned to the city of Sky, she becomes embroiled in a power struggle among the ruling Gods, including Nahadoth (the God of chaos), and Itempas (the God of order). In the blockbuster movie *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), the hero Thor (the God of thunder) was captured and forced to participate in gladiatorial battles on the distant planet 'Sakaar'. The film blends action and humor while digging into issues such as power dynamics, self-discovery, and the delicate balance between chaos and

order. These two distinct works, though separated by medium, converge in their examination of the complex dynamics that govern the divine realm and its interactions with the mortal world.

At the heart of both the novel *The Inheritance Trilogy* and in the movie *Thor: Ragnarok*, the theme of power takes center stage. Here those who are in power either mortals or immortals are often corrupted by it and end up hurting their loved ones. Jemisin's narrative weaves a tale of Gods vying for supremacy, while the Marvel Cinematic Universe's rendition of Thor explores the cost of wielding Godly might. In *The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* (2010) the first book of the trilogy, the protagonist Yeine Darr, after the death of her mother, comes to know about the Arameri, the floating city in the sky. "My mother was an heiress of the Arameri." (*The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* 5) Her mother was an heiress in the floating city. She came to know about that from the letter from her grandfather inviting her to the floating city. This made her forced to ascension to power revealing the intricate layers of authority that Gods hold over mortal lives. Yeine's transformation from an outsider to a divine presence in the royal court underscores power's transformative nature. Yeine's power lies in her identity as a mortal descendant of gods and her connection to her family's divine legacy. She possesses the power to challenge the status quo and disrupt the balance of power among the gods. Her ability to question authority and seek justice showcases her unique power of defiance.

"Choose how your nature shapes you. Embrace it. Find the strength in it." (*The Kingdom of Gods* 22) N K Jemisin showcases that everyone like Yenie should not deny or reject their true nature. Instead, individuals should address their inner selves, grasp their strengths and shortcomings, and use their natural abilities to mold their futures.

Another character in the novel whose power plays an important role in attaining the sky world under his control is The God of Night called Nahadoth. He was not like other immortals so easy to be with instead, he is the man of darkness. “Nahadoth. Now I remember where I’d heard the name. Never whisper it in the dark,” (*The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* 25). When Yenisei comes to know about the gods and their powers, she finds out that the Nightlord is so powerful and merciless.

“I turned to find that Nahadoth stood behind us. In that instant that my mind and body froze, he could have had me.” (*The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms* 28) When Yenisei was talking to the God of childhood, Sieh about the Nightlord, she felt his presence near her which scared both Sieh and Yenisei. His power is rooted in chaos and darkness. His control of the night and his ability to unleash destructive forces reflect his primal and unpredictable nature. His power often represents the uncontrollable and wild aspects of existence. Nahadoth's embodiment of chaos wields immense power, echoing the forces that shape the universe.

In the novel, another immortal character is Itempas (God of Day) who represents order and control. Itempas, representing order, commands Godly authority in the sky but is burdened by the weight of his responsibilities. As a God of Day, his power is tied to the sun and light. His authority is demonstrated through his role as a ruler among the gods. He states

Run away, run away

Or I’ll catch you in a day

I can make you scream and play

Just run, just run, just run (*The Kingdom of Gods* 648)

This shows Itempas threatening other mortals, to not disturb him. While he is in power in day time he would catch and harm them.

Similarly, in *Thor: Ragnarok*, Thor's vulnerability reflects on his hammer. The journey of Thor in the movie made him realize that power is not tied with his hammer but the power is within one's self. "Thor: Ragnarok" follows the evolution of Thor, a God whose power is tied to his iconic hammer, Mjolnir. When Thor is fighting to save the world, Odin (God of War) questions him; "Are you Thor, the God of Hammers? That hammer was to help you control your power, to focus it. It was never your source of strength." (*Thor: Ragnarok 01:23.25*) Odin's words to Thor emphasize that true power doesn't come from external objects, like Mjölfnir. This dialogue reflects Thor's journey of discovering his innate strength beyond his godly tools. His loss of Mjolnir propels him into a journey of rediscovering his inner strength. This showcases the theme of power for superheroes It's not always from the weapons or tools they carry to save the world rather it's beyond external symbols, that is to search within themselves.

The character Hela, the antagonist in the movie, embodies a darker facet of power as she hungers for dominion, demonstrating the perilous allure of unchecked authority. "I'm not a queen or a monster. I'm the Goddess of Death. What were you the God of, again?" (*Thor: Ragnarok 00:44.25*) Hela's assertion of her identity and power as the Goddess of Death highlights her ambition for dominance. In the middle of the battle between Thor and Hela, she catches his hammer and shatters it into pieces. Her attitude questions Thor to challenge his understanding of power in him.

Both works explore the complexities of power dynamics. The exploration of power in *The Inheritance Trilogy* (2010-2011) and *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) showcases how characters navigate its intricacies, from personal transformation to the allure of authority. These

narratives remind us -that power's true nature lies not solely in its external trappings, but in its influence on characters' choices and the world around them. Through this fiction and film comparison, both mortals and immortals understand to contemplate the role and impact of power in shaping destinies and driving narratives forward.

Journeying alongside themes of power are questions of identity. Charles Taylor remarked in his work *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1996), “To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand.... It is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand” (*Taylor II*) to elaborate the quote, identity can be regarded as the recognition of the existence of oneself or at least one characteristic that connects an individual to his or her group, class, ethnicity, religion, or nation. It involves being aware of one's acts in society or outside of society.

Yeine in the novel and Thor in the movie find themselves grappling with the expectations placed upon them due to their divine lineage. Yeine faces a big challenge because she belongs to two very different groups. On one side, she comes from a rugged and less advanced place called the barbarian north. “Whether you live or die is irrelevant. You are Arameri, and like all of us, you will serve.” (*The Hundred Thousand Kingdoms 9*) On the other side, she's connected to the powerful and God-like family that rules the magnificent city of Sky. Here the identity crisis is that the nineteen-year-old girl was forced at the beginning to serve her floating city people. Later, indeed she takes that as her duty and fights with other immortals. It's as if she has one foot in a world of tough, down-to-earth people, and the other foot in a world of powerful, godly beings. These two worlds clash because they have different customs, values, and expectations.

In like manner, Thor's voyage in the movie *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) where his identity is stripped away, forces him to confront the essence of his being beyond his role as a God.

Thor says, "I'm not a hero. I'm a high-functioning alcoholic with anger issues." (*Thor: Ragnarok 01:20:45*) This dialogue serves to humanize Thor, making him a more relatable character. It shows that even someone as powerful as Thor has doubts about his identity and the roles society expects him to play. It's a moment of vulnerability that adds depth to his character and sets the tone for his personal growth throughout the film. Thor's journey involves rediscovering his true identity beyond the titles as he confronts his identity beyond the title of the God of Thunder, realizing that his true strength emanates from within.

Loki, the Trickster in the movie, who also a shape-shifter, which means he can change his physical appearance at will. He shifts his identity for several reasons like tricking Thor, into a battle with Odin (God of Gods). Loki, disguised as Odin, says, "Odin is not on Asgard, and I'm not Odin." (*Thor: Ragnarok 01:09:24*) This dialogue emphasizes Loki's ever-changing identity and his willingness to assume different roles.

Thor states "Loki, I thought the world of you. I thought we were going to fight side by side forever. But at the end of the day, you're you and I'm me." Where Loki replies "Maybe we're not so different. You're a hero, and I'm a trickster. I have to do the unexpected, I'm predictable." (*Thor: Ragnarok 01:15:15*) This exchange of Dialogues highlights Loki's struggle with his identity. He acknowledges that he and Thor are fundamentally different, with Thor being a hero and himself being a trickster. Loki's sense of unpredictability and his inclination to do the unexpected are his ways of dealing with his identity crisis. Loki's identity crisis is a recurring theme in his character arc, making him one of the most complex and compelling figures in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Both narratives underline the malleable nature of identity. The trilogy showcases the duality of identity through the characters' complex relationships with chaos and order, where

the movie demonstrates the transformative power of self-realization, with Thor and Loki embracing new aspects of themselves.

In conclusion, the themes of identity and exploration of Power in *The Inheritance Trilogy (2010-2011)* and *Thor: Ragnarok (2017)* show that characters in both film and fiction share striking parallels. Yeine's journey from mortal to divine resonates with Thor's evolution from a brash warrior to a wise leader. Nahadoth's embodiment of chaos finds an echo in Hela's thirst for destruction. Through the lens of literature and film which gained insights into the human condition, these stories offer windows into human desires, struggles, and aspirations amidst the realm of the divine.

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