

Death Note as a Study on Light Yagami through the Elements of omnipotence with Justice and Vigilantism

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ABSTRACT

Omnipotence is considered to be a long cherishing dream of human beings whose will is always obstructed by the limitations of his body and lack of freedom to embrace what he longs. Reason, intellect, logic, power of inquiry and criticism etc. are the powerful components that add to the uniqueness of human race and make them the master race. This paper tries to examine the idea of omnipotence and its role in bringing Justice and vigilantism as reflected in the anime series *Death Note*. It throws light on the core conflicts of the protagonist Light Yagami, who eventually becomes an omnipotent being in his quest for an utopian society and it also examines the consequences of such a decision.

Keywords

Omnipotence, Death Note, Justice, Light Yagami.

INTRODUCTION

Anime refers to the animations made in Japan and is characterized by bright colors, facial expressions with different characteristics. For the Japanese, animation belongs to their heart and culture, it is a form of art and entertainment that is culturally and fairly accepted. It is a blend of multitudes of content that is produced for a broad range of viewers. Anime is made up of all kinds of genres such as action, romance, drama, horror, comedy, historic fiction, etc. The major reasons for the popularity of anime are solely due to its freedom of expression and its masterpiece contents so that the subjects they usually dealt with are more intriguing and makes the audience stick to the story and characters. *Death Note* is a series of manga that is then adapted for anime. The story of *Death Note* revolves around the character named Light Yagami who got this mysterious black notebook called a Death Note, which belonged to the supernatural realm of Shinigami, they are considered to be the Japanese god of death. This minacious power transforms the Light into "Kira", an individual he regards as analogous to God, which leads to new actions in story.

The concept of omnipotence is represented by the supreme power of the Death Note and its Owner. Light Yagami who is a brilliant but bored genius obtaining the power to kill anyone just by writing their names in the Death Note and also by knowing their face. Light who is overwhelmed by this power decides to put it use for the welfare of the society by firmly believing to turn the rotten society into a utopian society by killing those whom he deems immoral and unworthy. Light says, "I would create a new world of earnest, kind humans. Then the world would truly move in the right direction" (Episode 1 - *Rebirth*). The Light thus desired to become the god of a world without crime and violence. Even though this was his initial aim everything went shattered when the Light is hunted down by a detective called L, who forms a special task force only to find out the identity behind Kira. Death Note screenwriter Tsugumi Ohba described Light as a character who is completely destroyed by becoming the victim of the perfidious power of the Death Note. Light constantly wanted to attain the position of God, which is evident in many of his introspection, especially during his conversation with Ryuk, "I may have seriously considered the deal if you offered me wings rather than eyes. Flying around freely in the sky is very godlike" (Episode 4 - *Pursuit*). At first the Light persisted as someone who could understand the suffering and pain of others, which is evident in *Rebirth* the first episode of Death Note, where he says "Day in and day out the same thing over and over again" (Episode 1 – *Rebirth*) this dialogue shows the extent to which the Light is frustrated by the world he even calls 'Rotten'. The connection with Shinigami Ryuk, the owner of Death Note with Light Yagami is presented through the same thought process they happen to have for the world where they both are disturbed and frustrated by its chaotic manifestations and turbulences. The bored Ryuk intentionally dropped the Death Note into the human world where he knows that

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humans can't resist any vices, so it will be readily taken and used by anyone. The irony underlines in the intentions of both Light and Ryuk the turning point of the story that is at first it is immaculately out of good intention for the Light and Ryuk it is out of boredom and curiosity. When the light kills the criminal for the first time, he obtains this satisfaction and trust to create a utopian society and thus form an identity called Kira, who is equal to God. Yagami Light who is eventually blinded by power began to kill any person who proves to be an obstacle in his way, the transformation of the good Light into a ruthless Kira begins with the entrance of L, who happens to be a rival for Light where he has both intelligence and wit as that of Light therefore for Kira L is a perfect rival.

Throughout this Transformation the main theme of manga reflects the corruption of the soul and power. The Light that deems itself to be the God decides to punish and kill L, Lindl. L. Taylor where he encounters L as the greatest challenge to his divine power. His strategy of killing FBI inspector Raye Penber and his fiancée Naomi Misora is so heartless this is the exemplification of how the Light becomes more menacing and ruthless. The following events reveal the true psyche of Light where we will come to the realization that Light is not meant to create the world into a utopian society. The subtle growth of the Light into a despotic being is evident in the conversation between law enforcement officers. "He may even be trying to become a God. He's probably driven by his idealistic sense of justice" (Episode 3 – *Dealings*). The characters Misa Amane and Teru Mikami are the two individuals who were mainly used by the Light in the name of Kira and his divine existence. Misa following the death of her parents who are on the brink of psychological trauma began to blindly embrace Kira's principles and later, it even becomes an obsession and a complete surrender to L that she considers her lover but she gets fake love in return for modelling for Kira. As the story progresses, it shows that Kira's disciples are his stupidest decisions because both are not stable and mentally right and these very people lead to the fall of the Light and eventually leads to his death. His hypothesis of an omnipotent being is fashioned by his two sets of spirit which subsist the complex of the Messiah and the complex of God. The former is connected with the belief of wanting a new god for the world and he sees himself as the chosen one for it. The latter comes from the power of the Death Note in which the Light is permitted to be Equal to God. Light Yagami is a demonic character as Ohba himself says because of that, we cannot blame Death Note for everything.

The term vigilante defines the application of the law undertaken without lawful authorization by a group of self-proclaimed persons. Justice is a concept of ethics and law that means that people behave in a manner that is fair, equal and balanced for all. The idea of justice is represented in the *Death Note* primarily through the personages of the Light and L. When the perpetrators die shortly after the experience of using the death note, Light quickly realizes how devastating the force that fell into his hands was. Through this divine power, the Light decides to eliminate all criminals to build a new world. In conversation with Ryuk, Light says that "I want to create an ideal, new world free from criminals" (Episode 4 – *Pursuit*). Throughout the series justice is a central theme and it is also mirrored through the internal monologues of Light where he continuously says that "I'm justice". But as the series progresses, the audience becomes more and more skeptical because of the changing nature of the Light. He does not think twice before implementing his killing scheme. A person's perception of justice may differ depending on his or her morality, which in turn depends on his or her cultural or sociological upbringing. However, this is the root of the problem of justice in the *Death Note*. The common perception of justice is that it should be carried out in a cause-and-effect manner almost like natural law that deals with punishment or consequences commensurate with the severity of the crime. In the majority of fictions and media, the good always win. But the *Death Note* takes this concept and excites it with what it presents in this story. The characters believe that righteousness will gain in the end, that good will come out on high, and that moral evil will lose. Here, there is the large group of supporters of Kira, who praise his position and there is a group of people, particularly on the Japanese working group that are on L's side. Clearly, there is no complete or absolute objective standard for what is fair, but when it comes to justice in society, ideally there has to be some common ground.

In the *Death Note*, due to the emergence of Kira, certain ideas are put forward such as what is justice? Is this being a voluntary punishment? Is it wrong to kill or is it necessary? In one of the episodes, an FBI agent says that "If Kira gets caught, that makes him evil; but if he wins and rules the world, then I guess he is justice" (Episode 5 – *Tactics*). In the *Death Note*, the idea of justice can split people into such polar opposing ideas, thereby showcasing justice is nothing but a word used to justify actions and a title given to those on top as used for posturing. In *Death Note* L

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says that “It’s not a sense of justice. Figuring out difficult cases is my hobby. If you measured good and evil deeds by current laws, I would be responsible for many crimes. The same way you all like to solve mysteries and riddles, or clear video games more quickly. For me too, it’s simply prolonging something I enjoy doing. That’s why I only take on cases that pique my interest. It’s not justice at all. And if it means being able to clear a case, I don’t play fair, I’m a dishonest, cheating human being who hates losing.” (Episodes 6 – *Unraveling*). L and Light are two figureheads for one or another argument, each representing justice for their respective parts. Light through Kira seeks righteousness through punishment and vengeance. While L seeks through by capturing Kira. Both have their decriers and both have their defenders, based on what these people view as justice, but the thing is justice has become a farce for the two men as well.

The *Death Note* is very important, and it has the potential to continue to be the subject of much debate and philosophical significance years after its inception. It is a psychological thriller, and many of its moral issues and ideological points are still relevant. *DeathNote* is a comprehensive interpretation of the subtleties of justice, the cyclical nature of power struggles, the appearance and rewriting of history, and are just as dark indications of a much simpler and more intimate display. One thing we can find from the beginning of mankind: the physical need of mankind to ascend to the ranks of power and to establish dominion over opposition. This theme is everywhere in *Death Note*. L clearly admits in this that he is not literally settling cases, but he hates defeat and wants success. All the major issues in the fight between Light and L are prime examples of this, which was initially shaped as a struggle between two different views on justice and ultimately divided into a struggle for pride between two people. In the Light’s case, he finally got the authority to do whatever he wants and the audience sees how this “power” swallows him. He traps Naomi into believing he was an investigator on the same case, he gets her real name. He follows her all the way and fantasize about how she would end her life. This situation demonstrates how Light has lost one’s fundamental sense of humanity and is now enjoying his cruelty. Light always wanted to prove that he is the best. His deep exasperation is his inability to put himself on top of the hierarchy of power compared to the competition. However, this idea is completely summarized through Light’s character and also the most striking illustration of it in his biggest moment of triumph, captured within the *Death Note* anime. This is absolutely telling from the light – the moment when he can finally claim victory and shoves it in L’s face and literally mock his grave. This idea of being on top of the hierarchy, the head of the order, compared to what you are opposed to, is skillfully used through the concept of justice.

The dichotomy between right and wrong is a continuous analogy highlighted by the *DeathNote* and each character attempts to link their actions also through this difference. Kira's followers believe goodness lies to their side and they rationalize their actions by adhering to their moral norms that is evident through the dialogue of Mikami Teru, the follower and replacement of Kira, “In this world, there is only Good and Evil. That was the first Universal Truth I grasped from observing the world around me when I was a child. Every human being without exception ends up falling into one category or the other.” (Episode 32 – *Selection*). The concept of Vigilante arises in the Light due to his disappointment with the world and the ongoing chaos and suffering never find a solution in the so-called legal rules and principles. This made Light to desire for a world of his own and this notion of Light is not justifiable because society is grounded under certain Laws and principles and it is the responsibility of every citizen to be abided by those laws. This ideology is accepted by the followers of L and this is mirrored in the dialogue of Soichiro Yagami, who is the father of Light and a devoted Police officer, “Laws aren’t perfect, because humans who created laws aren’t perfect. However, the laws are evidence of the human struggle to be Righteous.” (Episode 2 – *Confrontation*).

CONCLUSION

Death Note is one of the most fascinating anime series that explores the complexities of the human psyche. Besides its supernatural content, *Death Note* interrogates the position of morals shaped by the world through different perceptions. Light Yagami, who is bright and intelligent blinded by the menacing power of the death note and

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superiority complex subsequently leading him to be completely engrossed in a power play. Light will not have any second thoughts for toying with people's lives and emotions for his own sake moreover, he is not at all conflicted by any moral dilemma when he subsists seriously into those innocent killings. The element of Omnipotence is inflated through the gradual transformation of Light into the god complex where his moral sense, grounded by eliminating the bad people from the society and thereby turning this world into a utopian society but his psyche grounded by his justice and vigilantism gradually shapes him into a person who is corrupted by this godly power.

The consciousness of the Light henceforth becomes that of an unforgiving and merciless murderer. The *Death Note* underpins the corruption of power in our world in the name of the egotistical needs of the individual. Power renders human beings inhuman and insensitive resulting in the exploitation of innocents and inferiorities. In the *Death Note*, the meaning of justice is something which is swallowed up by the pride and ego of the two characters Light and L however, their pursuit of justice is a meaningless game of winning and losing. Therefore, there is no justice served at the end other than the death of these two characters. Justice and morality are the life blood of society and they must be administered fairly but what happens when it is entirely dependent on a particular individual then it becomes tyrannical.

Human beings have a different sense of justice in terms of their different perceptions, but we must fight for justice that will serve the overall well-being of the Society. *Death Note* is a demonstration of the struggle for achieving a utopian society and it is succeeded in portraying the trivial journey of the characters Light and L and their ultimate downfall. *Death Note* questions about the existence of morality and justice through the psyche of these two characters. Power can corrupt one's soul in that respect by erasing their humanity and sensibility. *Death Note* solely explicates the conflict of Light who tries to seek justice through vigilantism however, his sadistic notions and Superiority Complex leads to his death. Justice is defined through various mind-sets so we must responsible to construct a justice on the foundation of not just morals and high-mindedness but also on the basis of humanity, compassion and selflessness.

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