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A Comparative Study of Duality in Rupert Birkin and Lelouch vi Britannia

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Abstract

It is said that the world exists in duality, in conflict of two opposing forces, in all aspects of life and living. Rupert Birkin, one of the central characters in D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, and Lelouch vi Britannia, the protagonist of *Code Geass*, both embody a fundamental duality that shapes their philosophical, emotional, and relational conflicts. As figures caught between intellect and instinct, idealism and pragmatism, their struggles encapsulate the tension between individuality and connection, power and vulnerability, creation and destruction. As Lawrence's mouthpiece, Birkin grapples with conflicting ideals, oscillating between a Nietzschean rejection of conventional morality and a mystical yearning for transcendent relationships. Similarly, Lelouch's revolutionary vision and ruthless pursuit of change contrast with his deep emotional attachments and personal guilt. This paper critically examines the dual nature of both characters, drawing comparisons to various philosophical influences, while incorporating critical perspectives on their roles in their respective narratives.

Keywords – Duality, intellect, philosophical influences, pragmatism, relationships

Introduction

The English novel evolved significantly from its early beginnings in the 18th century to the modernist innovations of the 20th century. Early novelists like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson established realism and character-driven narratives, while Henry Fielding introduced a more panoramic and satirical approach. Modernist novels emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a reaction to the rapid social, technological, and intellectual upheavals brought by industrialization, World War I, and shifting philosophical perspectives. Traditional realist narratives, which emphasized linear storytelling and external reality, gave way to experimental techniques that sought to capture the fragmented, subjective experience of modern life. Influenced by thinkers like Freud, Nietzsche, and Bergson, modernist literature explored themes of alienation, identity, and the subconscious, often challenging conventional morality and social structures. Pioneering modernist novelists include Henry James, whose *The Ambassadors* (1903) introduced psychological depth and unreliable narration; Joseph Conrad, who in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) used impressionistic storytelling to depict moral ambiguity; and James Joyce, who revolutionized prose with *Ulysses* (1922) through stream-of-consciousness narration and fragmented structure. Virginia Woolf, in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), employed interior monologues to capture the fluidity of human thought. D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) follows this modernist tradition by rejecting Victorian realism in favour of intense psychological exploration, symbolism, and philosophical inquiry. As a sequel to *The Rainbow* (1915), the novel delves into human relationships in a world disillusioned by war and industrialization. Lawrence employs shifting perspectives, internal monologues, and heightened emotional intensity to explore themes of desire, power, and the conflict between modernity and primal instinct. The novel's fragmented, episodic structure, along with its deep engagement with Freudian and Nietzschean ideas, aligns it with modernist innovations, making it a significant contribution to early 20th-century literature.

The roots of anime trace back to Japan's rich visual storytelling traditions, beginning with Emakimono (illustrated handscrolls) from the 12th century, which depicted sequential narratives. This evolved into ukiyo-e woodblock prints and later kamishibai (paper theatre) in the early 20th century, a form of illustrated street storytelling that laid the groundwork for anime's visual techniques. Japan's first animated works appeared in the 1910s, inspired by Western animation. Early pioneers like Jun'ichi Kōuchi and Seitarō Kitayama experimented with short silent films, but it was Noburō Ōfuji in the 1920s who advanced the medium with

cutout animation. The 1940s saw government-funded propaganda animations, but the post-war era marked a turning point. Osamu Tezuka, often called the "God of Manga and Anime," revolutionized the industry with *Astro Boy* (1963), introducing cinematic storytelling, dynamic motion, and large expressive eyes—hallmarks of anime. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of mecha and space opera genres, with classics like *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979) and *Macross* (1982) influencing sci-fi anime. The cyberpunk and psychological themes of *Akira* (1988) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) pushed anime into global recognition. Meanwhile, Studio Ghibli, co-founded by Hayao Miyazaki, redefined animation with visually rich, thematically profound films like *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988) and *Spirited Away* (2001). By the 2000s, anime diversified into various genres, with series like *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) reshaping mecha and psychological storytelling. *Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion* (2006) emerged as a modern masterpiece, blending mecha action, political intrigue, and psychological depth. With its complex protagonist, Lelouch, and themes of rebellion, morality, and power, Code Geass reflects the evolution of anime—from historical visual storytelling to a globally influential medium known for its artistic and narrative sophistication.

This paper critically examines the dual nature of both characters, drawing comparisons to various philosophical influences, while incorporating critical perspectives on their roles in their respective narratives. By exploring their internal contradictions, the paper aims to elucidate how both Birkin and Lelouch serve as critiques of existential dilemmas, modern anxieties, and the struggle for meaning.

Methodology-

The study utilizes a qualitative descriptive method. The analysis is based on Indian literature and Japanese anime as a medium of representation, as a medium to compare the duality in their characters and it’s complicacies and how different ideologies, beliefs and socio-economic conditions affect the outcome of these narratives. It uses method of content analysis to analyze the visual and textual components found related to the duality. The method involves coding and categorizing the text/anime based on themes or concepts that emerge during the analysis, to formulate the concept of duality in a more general manner.

Literature Review-

Scholars have long debated Birkin's philosophical inclinations and the contradictions that define his character. Leavis (1955) regards Birkin as an embodiment of Lawrence's evolving ideas on human relationships, noting his rejection of societal norms as both progressive and destructive. Yetman asserts that Birkin's failure to reconcile his intellectualized notions of love with his emotional needs marks him as a tragic figure whose contradictions ultimately inhibit his fulfilment. Similarly, anime scholars have examined Lelouch's contradictory nature, noting his Machiavellian strategies contrasted with his deep need for genuine connection. Carl Kimlinger remarks that Lelouch is hard to like due to his narcissism yet finds complexity in his double life, and Ramsey Isler emphasizing that his dual existence drives the narrative by constantly shifting between public and secret identities By placing Birkin and Lelouch in conversation, this paper integrates literary and anime studies to highlight the universality of existential conflicts across different storytelling traditions.

Research Gap-

Despite extensive scholarship on Women in Love, there remains a lack of focused study on how Birkin's duality serves as a structural and thematic anchor within the novel. Previous analyses have either emphasized his function as Lawrence's spokesperson or critiqued his contradictory nature without fully exploring its implications. Similarly, while Lelouch has been widely discussed in anime scholarship, little comparative work has been done linking him to literary figures who embody similar existential struggles. This paper seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining how Birkin's philosophical and emotional conflicts shape his relationships and overall character development, while drawing meaningful parallels to Lelouch's ideological dilemmas. By situating both characters within a broader intellectual and literary context, this paper highlights the ways in which modern narratives, regardless of medium, grapple with the same fundamental tensions of power, love, and existential conflict.

Preliminary Findings

Code Geass: Lelouch of the Rebellion (2006) is a Japanese anime television series produced by Sunrise. It was directed by Goro Taniguchi and written by Ichiro Ōkouchi, with original character designs by Clamp. Set in an alternate timeline, the Holy Britannian Empire has invaded and conquered Japan, renaming it Area 11 and oppressing its people, now called Elevens, while Britannians enjoy privileged lives. Lelouch vi Britannia, the exiled prince of Britannia, harbours deep resentment against his father, Emperor Charles zi Britannia, for allowing the assassination of his mother, Marianne, and for disregarding his sister Nunnally's suffering after she was left blind and paralyzed, a result of the trauma. Sent to Japan as a political hostage, Lelouch swears revenge and, years later, under the alias Lelouch Lamperouge, lives as a student at Ashford Academy while secretly plotting Britannia's downfall. His fate changes when he encounters C.C., a mysterious girl who grants him the power of Geass, allowing him to issue absolute commands that anyone must obey. Using this power, Lelouch becomes the masked revolutionary Zero and leads the Black Knights, a resistance group fighting against Britannian rule. His childhood friend, Suzaku Kururugi, son of Japan's last prime minister, takes the opposite path, believing in reform from within the system. Suzaku, despite being an Eleven, rises in Britannia's military ranks and pilots the advanced Knightmare Frame, Lancelot, eventually becoming a formidable adversary to Zero. Lelouch achieves major victories, exposing corruption and rallying the oppressed, but his rebellion faces a turning point when a tragic accident causes his Geass to go out of control, forcing his half-sister, Princess Euphemia, to massacre the Japanese she intended to liberate. Forced to brand her as a villain, Lelouch escalates the war, leading to the Black Rebellion, which ultimately fails when Suzaku defeats him. His memories are erased by the Emperor, making him believe he is an ordinary student, while Nunnally is taken away. A year later, C.C. restores Lelouch's memories, reigniting his rebellion as he reclaims his role as Zero, gathers new allies, and manipulates global powers, including the Chinese Federation, to strengthen his forces. Discovering that his father's true goal is to merge all human consciousness using Geass, Lelouch rejects this vision, defeats Charles and Marianne in the Thought Elevator, and seizes the throne of Britannia. He abolishes the oppressive aristocracy, but his greatest challenge arises when his half-brother, Schneizel, attempts to enforce peace through fear with the Damocles fortress and F.L.E.I.J.A bombs (Field Limitary Effective Implosion Armament). Lelouch outmanoeuvres him, using Geass to ensure Schneizel's eternal obedience. However, his actions alienate the Black Knights, who see him as a tyrant.

To bring true peace, Lelouch enacts the Zero Requiem—staging himself as a despotic ruler so the world unites against him. During a grand public execution, Suzaku, disguised as Zero, assassinates Lelouch, ensuring his legacy as the villain while secretly securing peace. As Lelouch dies, Nunnally realizes his sacrifice was for her and for the world's future. With Suzaku forced to live as Zero and Nunnally leading a new era, Lelouch's ultimate plan succeeds, bringing an end to Britannia's tyranny and uniting humanity.

D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) is a psychological and philosophical novel that explores the complexities of love, human relationships, and the impact of industrialization on emotions and society. A sequel to *The Rainbow* (1915), it follows the lives of the Brangwen sisters, Ursula and Gudrun, as they navigate their romantic relationships and existential crises in early 20th-century England. The novel begins in the Midlands, where Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen are introduced. Ursula, a schoolteacher, and Gudrun, an aspiring artist, are intelligent and independent women who seek love but also question traditional roles and societal expectations. They are drawn to two contrasting men: Rupert Birkin, an intellectual school inspector, and Gerald Crich, a wealthy colliery owner. Rupert Birkin, an idealistic and somewhat cynical man, holds deep philosophical views on love and relationships. He despises conventional marriage and advocates for a more spiritual and intense bond between individuals with the involved parties maintain their separate existence, not mingling into one whole. Ursula, while intrigued by Birkin's ideas, is grounded in a more natural, instinctive approach to love. Their relationship is marked by intellectual debates and emotional struggles as Birkin attempts to convince Ursula that love should be beyond mere passion and convention. Over time, despite Birkin's initial resistance to traditional romance, he and Ursula develop a deep connection. Their relationship, though tumultuous, ultimately finds balance, as Ursula helps Birkin reconcile his philosophical ideals with emotional commitment. Gudrun, the more rebellious and artistic of the two sisters, is drawn to Gerald Crich, the heir to a coal-mining empire. Gerald represents industrial power and emotional detachment. While physically attracted to each other, their relationship is built on control, conflict, and psychological domination rather than love. Gerald's cold, mechanical view of life reflects the dehumanizing effects of industrialization, while Gudrun, with her artistic sensibility, seeks something more intense and liberating. Their relationship spirals into a cycle of attraction and repulsion. One of the novel's early turning points occurs during a water party at the Crich estate, where Diana, Gerald's younger sister, tragically drowns. Her death foreshadows Gerald's own emotional turmoil and the novel's darker

themes of destruction. Meanwhile, Birkin's relationship with Hermione Roddice, an aristocratic and intellectual woman, reaches a violent breaking point when she attacks him with a paperweight in a fit of jealousy. Birkin walks away, symbolizing his final rejection of her and his shift toward Ursula. Their relationship is marked by intense philosophical discussions—Birkin believes love should transcend passion and marriage, while Ursula, though drawn to him, struggles with his abstract ideals. Eventually, despite their conflicts, they find a deep emotional connection. Gudrun and Gerald's relationship follows a more destructive path. Gudrun, fascinated by Gerald's cold and mechanical personality, engages in a tumultuous affair with him. Gerald, who becomes emotionally hardened after taking over his family's coal mines following his father's death, is drawn to Gudrun's artistic independence but struggles with his need for dominance. Their relationship is defined by power struggles, passion, and violence. A pivotal moment in the novel occurs when Birkin and Gerald engage in a physical wrestling match—an intense, almost homoerotic scene that underscores Birkin's longing for a deep male friendship, which Gerald cannot fully reciprocate. The four characters travel to the Alps, where their relationships reach their breaking points. In the harsh, snow-covered landscape, Gudrun becomes increasingly drawn to Herr Loerke, a cynical German sculptor who represents artistic decadence and emotional detachment. Gerald, feeling humiliated and powerless, grows more unstable. In a moment of rage, he attempts to strangle Gudrun but stops himself. Overcome with despair, he wanders into the freezing mountains and allows himself to die in the snow, symbolizing the ultimate failure of his struggle for control and emotional fulfilment. Back in England, Ursula and Birkin discuss Gerald's death. Birkin expresses his belief in a deep, non-sexual male bond, something he wished he could have had with Gerald. Ursula, unable to understand this need, dismisses it. The novel ends on an ambiguous note, leaving readers to ponder Lawrence's exploration of love, human connection, and the existential struggles of modern life. *Women in Love* is a profound and complex novel that critiques traditional relationships, industrialization, and the limitations of human desire, ultimately questioning what it truly means to love and be fulfilled.

Comaparative Study of Duality in Rupert Birkin and Lelouch vi Britannia

The philosophical dichotomy is presented in the perspective of both characters in the form of conflict between intellectualism and instinct. Birkin embodies this conflict,

consistently oscillating between a deep rejection of intellectualism and an inability to fully embrace a life of instinct. His disdain for industrial and the mechanized world stems from his belief that over-intellectualization has stripped humanity of it's vitality and natural essence; he believes people are like insects scurrying in filth, so that a collier can have a piano forte in his house and a mine owner can have a butler and a motor car. However, rather than seeking an instinctual existence, Birkin often retreats into intellectual musings, debating his own ideals. Lelouch vi Britannia mirrors Birkin's struggle, but instead of being paralyzed by intellectual conflict, he attempts to dominate and control the world through sheer intellect. A brilliant strategist, his foresight allows him to manipulate politics, military tactics and human psychology to his advantage. However, his deepest failures stem from his inability to separate his emotions from his logical calculations. Unlike Birkin, whose dilemma is internal, Lelouch's intellectualism manifests in his role as Zero, where he must constantly suppress his personal emotions to achieve his revolutionary goals. This conflict is most evident in the Shirley Fennette tragedy and Euphemia's Geass-induced massacre which result in unintended chaos, proving that no amount of intellectual control can suppress the unpredictable nature of human emotion. Nunnally is his only focus; when it comes to her, Lelouch can and has abandoned everything in the middle of an important battle when Nunnally was kidnapped by V.V.

Birkin's perception of love is complex and contradictory which make unable to sustain deep emotional bonds. He wants the separateness of lovers to be perpetuated. He looks down upon marriage as a social institute but hates promiscuous sexual relations even more. In his eyes every relationship, even that of friendship, has something final and irrevocable in it. As he points out to Ursula again and again, much to her annoyance, marriage with her would still leave him incomplete and in need of some abiding male relationship. The lovers should be in harmony and yet remain apart, like two planets that are bound together by the forces of gravitation yet preserve their separate orbits. He believes the male to be naturally superior and expects the female to accept his superiority submissively. According to W.W. Robson,

> "He wants to try to live by a religion of love. This 'love' is not to be interpreted in a romantic or Christian sense. It is to be a relationship between 'fulfilled' individuals, who remain individuals (Birkin shrinks in horror from any kind of 'merging', loss of individuality in the union of love) but who each achieve through the othersome contact with a hitherto unknown, non-human and transhuman power. One lover is to

> be the ‘door’ of the other to this unknown power, the life-source to which Christianity (as Birkin-Lawrence understands it), and still more modern humanitarianism and democracy, have no access.” (Varshney, 183)

Lelouch’s relationship mirrors Birkin’s struggle, but his isolation is driven not by philosophy but by necessity. He deeply cares for those around him—Nunnally, Shirley, C.C., and Suzaku—yet his mission demands that he sever personal ties. Lelouch deliberately distances himself to prevent his attachments from becoming weaknesses. His relationship with C.C. is particularly reflective of his internal conflict; she serves as both a confidante and an enigma, someone who understands his burdens yet remains emotionally detached. Similarly, his inability to reconcile with Suzaku after Euphemia’s death highlights how his revolutionary path forces him into emotional solitude. Shirley is probably the closest thing to a love interest that Lelouch has but circumstances are partly responsible for her death as she is murdered by Rolo, the substitute sibling planted by V.V. He also values his friends at Ashford Academy. The Zero Requiem—where he arranges his own assassination—is the ultimate manifestation of his isolation. His façade as Zero requires him to sever personal ties, culminating in tragic events such as Shirley’s death and Suzaku’s betrayal.

Both Birkin and Lelouch seek radical change but grapple with its consequences. Birkin envisions a new form of human relationship, one beyond the constraints of societal norms, a world free from modern corruption but lacks the drive to actively change it. His frequent remarks about “sweeping humanity away” (D.H. Lawrence, p. 246) suggesting a destructive impulse, yet he remains inactive. He criticizes existing societal structures but offers no concrete alternative, making his philosophy one of negation rather than creation as evident in his conversation with Gerald in the party after marriage and during their journey to London. Birkin sees destruction as necessary for renewal, yet his lack of concrete action renders his vision hollow. This passivity contrasts sharply with Lelouch, whose revolutionary actions reshape an entire empire. He actively dismantles oppressive structures through direct intervention, pursuing radical transformation. His creation of the Black Knights and subsequent dismantling of Britannia embody the Nietzschean Übermensch, who seeks to transcend existing moral structures. However, his methods—deception, violence, political manipulation—raise ethical concerns, mirroring Birkin’s belief that destruction is a prerequisite for renewal. The Zero Requiem serves as the ultimate expression of this belief, where Lelouch’s self-destruction becomes the catalyst for peace. Unlike Birkin, who

theorizes about obliteration but never enacts it, Lelouch fully embraces destruction as a necessary step toward creation.

While Birkin does not physically die, his philosophical journey leads to a symbolic death of certainty—he remains in an unresolved liminal state, unable to fully reconcile his ideals with lived reality. His closest parallel to Lelouch's fate is found in his relationship with Gerald Crich, a character whose descent into existential despair echoes Birkin's philosophical musings but reaches a more definitive and tragic end. The industrial heir to a coal empire, he is drawn to Birkin's ideas of transcendence but cannot fully grasp or implement them, much like Birkin himself. His eventual death in the snow is the ultimate symbol of his inability to reconcile the contradictions of modernity, masculinity, and emotional repression. After an initial reaction of revulsion towards the cold, dead body of friend, Birkin broke down and wept with profound grief at Gerald's death. He admits to Ursula that having Gerald would have completed him even though he loved her like any man would love a woman. Gerald's death reflects Lawrence's critique of intellectual nihilism—if one merely deconstructs society and relationships without offering a true alternative, the only logical resolution is existential despair. Unlike Lelouch, who actively orchestrates his own death as a means of renewal, Birkin simply watches death happen around him, seeing it as proof of his own cynical worldview rather than as a force for transformation. Lelouch, however, embraces literal death as a means to solidify his ideals. Lelouch's death in *Code Geass* is an entirely different resolution—rather than escaping existence, he embraces death as the final act of his mission. His decision to orchestrate the Zero Requiem, where he allows Suzaku to publicly assassinate him, transforms his death into a moment of meaning rather than futility. Lelouch recognizes that the world he has helped create is built on suffering, deception, and war. However, unlike Birkin, who simply laments the failures of human civilization, Lelouch takes action to correct them. His death is not a passive acceptance of fate but an active sacrifice designed to bring peace. By allowing himself to become the universal villain, he ensures that his death will unify the world, ending conflict and allowing for a new future. One of the most striking aspects of Lelouch's final moments is his calm acceptance. His final words, "Yes, I... destroy worlds... and create them" (Code Geass, Sunrise, 2008, Season 2, episode 25) demonstrate his belief that death is not simply an end, but a necessary transformation. Philosophically, Lelouch's death aligns with Nietzsche's concept of the eternal recurrence, where an individual fully embraces their fate in life affirming will.

Birkin exists in a moral grey area, where he rejects societal norms but offers no practical framework for an alternative way of living. He critiques the institution of marriage, arguing that love should transcend possessiveness and social expectations. He desires both union and separation, engagement and detachment, which renders his moral position unstable. While he claims to despise conventional morality, he does not take decisive steps to abandon it entirely. This contradiction is evident in his relationship with Ursula, where he insists that their love should not be tainted by traditional expectations, yet he still proposes marriage—a structure he supposedly detests. In contrast, Lelouch fully embraces moral ambiguity as a necessary tool for achieving his goals. Unlike Birkin, who is paralyzed by indecision, Lelouch actively enacts his vision, even when it requires extreme measures. He employs deception, betrayal, and mass killings in pursuit of a world without tyranny, justifying them as necessary sacrifices. His most infamous act, the massacre of the Geass Order, highlights this moral paradox—he kills innocent individuals, including children, because he believes their existence poses a future threat to his mission. This ruthless pragmatism is reminiscent of Machiavelli's idea that it is better to be feared than loved.

Birkin's rebellion is largely theoretical. He despises the industrialized world, viewing it as a force that destroys individualism and true human connection. He declares, "I abhor humanity. I wish it was swept away" (Lawrence, p. 246), indicating his desire for radical change. However, his rebellion remains passive—he does not attempt to bring about the destruction he envisions. Unlike true revolutionaries, Birkin withdraws from society rather than engaging with it, preferring abstract criticism over tangible action. His rejection of societal structures, including marriage and economic ambition, leads him into isolation rather than transformation. Lelouch, on the other hand, directly challenges the oppressive empire of Britannia. While Birkin theorizes about an alternative way of life, Lelouch actively builds one through the Black Knights. His rebellion is not just ideological; it is a structured military and political movement. Unlike Birkin, whose rejection of society isolates him, Lelouch's rebellion draws others into his cause, granting him both power and responsibility. However, like Birkin, Lelouch grapples with the question of whether genuine change is possible. While Birkin ultimately fails to manifest his ideals, Lelouch succeeds—but at an immense cost, including his own life. This contrast highlights how philosophical rejection (Birkin) and active rebellion (Lelouch) lead to vastly different outcomes in their respective narratives.

Birkin's struggles arise from his internal dissatisfaction with the world rather than external pressures. His discontent is shaped by the industrial age's erosion of human

connection, but his crisis is primarily existential rather than circumstantial. He is not forced into rebellion by oppression; rather, he rejects society because he finds it hollow. His struggles, therefore, are self-imposed—his inability to form lasting relationships, his rejection of conventional life, and his philosophical contradictions stem from his internal dilemmas rather than direct societal persecution. This makes his conflict deeply personal, though at times, frustratingly passive. Lelouch, by contrast, is thrown into a conflict that demands action. He does not have the luxury of merely contemplating rebellion—his role as an exiled prince, his mother's assassination, and Nunnally's vulnerability force him to engage with the world rather than retreat from it. Unlike Birkin, whose struggles are largely philosophical, Lelouch's dilemmas are immediate and life-threatening. His decisions carry consequences beyond himself, affecting entire nations and shaping history. This external pressure makes his character arc more dynamic, as he must continuously adapt his ideals in response to real-world challenges, whereas Birkin's struggles remain largely internalized.

Conclusion

Birkin and Lelouch's duality is not simply a matter of passivity vs. action—it reflects the broader struggle of how to exist meaningfully in an absurd world. Birkin represents the individual who sees the world's flaws but remains frozen in intellectual contemplation. Lelouch represents the individual who takes decisive action, regardless of the cost. Thus, the contrast between these two characters serves as an exploration of two possible responses to the dilemmas of existence. Whether one aligns with Birkin's detached critique or Lelouch's ruthless action ultimately depends on how one perceives the nature of transformation: the world exists not in duality but in multiplicity where every action or circumstance, wilfully done or forced, affects (and is also acted upon by various influences) the outcome of the grand narrative of life.

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