

The Architecture of Moral Collapse: A Medical Humanities Analysis of Keigo Higashino's *The Devotion of Suspect X*

Abstract

Keigo Higashino's most acclaimed crime-thriller novel, *The Devotion of Suspect X*, details the architecture of moral collapse by presenting a compelling case study ripe for an analysis through the critical lens of Medical Humanities. The novel compels a shift in investigative methodology—moving from forensic truth to narrative truth by structurally exposing the limitations of pure scientific and logical certainty when confronted with deep human emotion and pathological devotion. This paper analyses Ishigami's engineered crime as a symptom of ontological injury and societal disease, examines his actions through contrasting bioethical frameworks, and ultimately affirms the necessity of narrative competence in resolving crises rooted in human vulnerability. This analysis confirms the critical role of the Medical Humanities framework in diagnosing and interpreting the social and psychological pathologies underlying modern moral crises, emphasizing the enduring necessity of narrative competence in humanistic fields.

Keywords: Medical Humanities, narrative competence, narrative truth, forensic truth, categorical imperative, moral ambiguity

The Architecture of Moral Collapse: A Medical Humanities Analysis of Keigo Higashino's *The Devotion of Suspect X*

Keigo Higashino's most acclaimed crime-thriller novel *The Devotion of Suspect X*, published in 2005, revolves around the geniuses of two college batch mates, one of whom tries to solve a murder along with the police while the other does everything in his power to evade them to save his neighbor whom he is devoted to. Traditionally, crime fiction in Japan was highly influenced by western writers like Arthur Conan Doyle in the classic clue-puzzle manner in which the murderer is to be found using clues. These followed the Honkaku concept of deductive reasoning.¹ Now, social critique, forensic detection and psychological analysis have made their way into the modern crime novels. *The Devotion of Suspect X* skips the mystery of the murderer in the plot and establishes their identity in the initial few chapters itself. The rest of the narrative is essentially about two ideas: why and how will the murderer escape, and the philosophical dilemma about whether a crisis arising from passion can be dealt with and resolved using logic and forensic science alone on affirmative moral grounds? This digression from the typical structure of a Whodunit novel implores a Medical Humanitarian analysis concerning if and why medical or scientific experts are often automatically ceded with authority and whether complete reliance on rationality can solve emotional imperatives.

In the novel, *The Devotion of Suspect X*, the four factors that aid in a successful medical humanitarian analysis of the novel are Ishigami, Yasuko, Yukawa and the dead body.

Tetsuya Ishigami is the protagonist in the novel whose self-imposed isolation converts his existential condition into a case study in Moral Pathology.² He is presented as a portrait of intellectual alienation. He was unable to fulfil his desire to become an academic due to "certain family troubles" and ended up becoming a mathematics teacher in a school.³ This combination of social-isolation and unfulfilled intellectual achievement resulted in causing him an ontological injury— a stab at his ontological security— causing him to perceive himself as a social misfit of sorts.⁴ He was given the nickname "the Buddha" in Imperial University due to his "cold logic".³ On an individual level, this suggests that his social

detachment was more than just a part of his personality. It was a defense against the modern conventions of society and a proper substitute for any actual personal interaction in society. The detection and diagnosis of his abnormally high social alienation and psychological problems by science alone cannot be the cure. The clash between his logical precision and analytical skill to solve problems and human moral ambivalence led him to self-destruction. At a social level, his devotion to intricate mathematical equations in solitude in his flat underscores concerns based on loneliness and suffering in contemporary societies. His methodic anti-forensic premise of a perfect murder highlights the wasted talent and identity crisis in the hands of insidious modernization and individualization when meaningful interaction with other members of society is hampered for a prolonged period of time.⁵

When relief for anxiety and depression are not readily accessed, the mind turns inwards and destructive behaviors follow due to heightened intellectual capacity but a paralyzed moral sense. The lack of therapeutic aid for his mental health did little harm to Ishigami's intellectual acuity but ripped him of his freedom as he constructed an impending self-sacrifice as the only way of any meaningful interaction or engagement with the society, which is represented by Yasuko in the novel.

Ishigami's "unspoken love" is impetus to the novel's tragedy altogether.⁵ He devotes his life to maintain the "quality of life" of his neighbours.⁶ This is a redirection from a real participatory citizenship and human relationships. His actions are guided by a "desperate need for connection and meaning".⁷ His psychological illness prompts him to control Yasuko's life using mathematical frameworks for constructing the perfect lie. His symptoms make him attempt a second murder in the novel and mislead the authorities to systemize and balance the unpredictable variables in the equation. He attempts to build a highly controlled and morally sophisticated atmosphere to bring back happiness in unorthodox ways. This is a good illustration of the way social neglect can translate into ethical breakdown.

73 In terms of bioethics, Ishigami's involvement in Yasuko's ex-husband's murder is his
74 compulsive urge to maintain, if not improve, the "quality of life " of his beloved and her
75 daughter even if it ensured him being penalized for it despite all circumstantial calculus of
76 variables turning favorable. Ishigami's moral architecture of self-sacrifice moves the
77 narrative forward and initiates a debate concerning the justification and moral ambiguity of
78 extraordinary proceedings in times of crises. It was his selfless voluntary moral intervention in
79 the private lives of his neighbours.

80 Ishigami's compulsion to rationalize his extreme actions for a greater good has utilitarian
81 tendencies. The greater good in his eyes is the maximization of security and happiness in
82 Yasuko and her daughter's life because he fails to recognize them as others ("not me")
83 similar to infants who fail to recognize themselves separate from their caregivers.⁸ His deep
84 gratitude made him feel indebted with his life to Yasuko because she interrupted his attempt
85 at suicide and bestowed a new life of sorts, upon him – one with a purpose, in his view. To
86 this cause, he surrenders his freedom and morality and commits a deliberate murder and
87 numerically balances all possibly unfavorable variables for moral authorities to
88 investigate. The females' protection remains as an indispensable intrinsic duty and devotion
89 which makes him use the second victim's body solely as a means to an end and overrides his
90 moral duty to uphold the law. This is objectively unethical, does not pass the test of
91 universalizability and clearly violates the categorical imperative, deviating from the Kantian
92 Deontology.

93 In the novel, Japan is presented as a society which has "indifferent interpersonal relationships
94 and alienated family ties" and Yasuko is a product of this societal trend who struggles with
95 her broken marriage with no one to trust with her struggles.⁹ In view of the Ethics of Care,
96 Yasuko's confession seems necessary to balance the asymmetry in the relationship that she
97 shares with her neighbor. Ishigami's unilateral abnegate protection could have cemented a

paternalistic dynamic between the two had she not reciprocated with the sharing of the guilt of the crime while displacing her from being a passive dependent.¹⁰ Her decisive pathological burden sharing establishes mutual responsibility while defusing Ishigami's extreme logic driven self-destructive grenade, while highlighting a humanistic correction taking over all epistemological attempts towards an ethical collapse.

The scientific and forensic seem to be constantly superseded by humanitarian approaches. The author's background in engineering is suggestive on paper in the way the school mathematics teacher tries to maneuver all possible variable in a fully controlled environment to achieve his desired outcome, similar to bioethical engineering. Ishigami's defeat is symbolic of the defeat of a scientific hubris. It sheds light on how complex ethical issues can't be resolved simply computationally, which is central to medical humanities.

The basic appeal of the story is the mathematically constructed maneuvering of the forensic evidence to steer the inquiry away from the suspects but away from the initial identity of the victim. Furthermore, it is not the revelation of the real identity of the second murder that captures the reader but the revelation of the real motive of the killer. The novel challenges the popular notion of infallibility of scientific measures in the search of truth and the corresponding dissipation of justice. Dr. Manabu Yukawa is consulted by the police for complex cases which appear to be heading towards a dead end. This suggests the society's tendency of granting ultimate moral authority to epistemic or intellectual experts in the fields of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) merely for the prestige associated with them. Yukawa's rational demeanor, scientific rigor and empirical approach of using scientific methods based in "physics, chemistry, and mathematical" for his investigations are a futile efforts in the face of an equally, if not more brilliant genius whose impenetrable shield was built on the foundation of deliberate meticulous manipulations delving in a deep-rooted altruistic motivation for constructing an untraceable lie, thus,

rendering this ultimate scientific authority incompetent against exceptional logic coupled with a strong sense of purpose.¹¹

The systematic deconstruction of the proofs adopted by Yukawa only helps take the investigation to the culmination that Ishigami desired. It is only when he replaces his preferred weapons of scientific rigor and logic with incorporation of Narrative Medicine, a core component of medical humanities requiring recognizing, interpreting and honoring the stories of illness, that he is able to uncover the truth of his college batch mate.¹² The mandatory transition from the forensic truth of solving the empirical puzzle of the crime to the narrative truth of Ishigami's pathological projection is his breakthrough in the plot of the novel. His victory hinges upon the humanistic turn of recognizing Ishigami's existential vulnerability with compassion, and still breaking the truth to Yasuko in an equally sensitive manner. This highlights a basic limitation of the scientific method. Forensic science can be manipulated by a mind capable into forming a believable false, yet consistent, narrative. Yukawa's methodology shifts towards narrative competence by shifting his focus from the objective to the subjective by unraveling the emotional context of human vulnerability and personal injury (ontological wound/ disease). Here, effective data analysis in an abstract manner is futile and insufficient.

In multiple instances, forensics seem to be overthrown by humanitarian aspects, but principally in the following: Ishigami's sacrificial calculus proves useless when Yasuko confesses her involvement in the crime due to her guilt—a variable that he did not consider in his calculations and Ishigami's successful construction of a perfect crime and an untraceable lie stands undeterred in the face of the best consultant of the police, Yukawa, until he changes his approach entirely into one with a humanist turn. Finally, the victim's body as physical evidence and a physical artifact is misidentified and repurposed to prove that truth can be

147 successfully covered up without taking deeper disease narrative and moral injury into
148 consideration.

149 The second murder conceals more than just the identity of the victim but also the traumas of
150 the persons involved – Yasuko’s self-defense from his abusive ex-husband and Ishigami’s
151 pathological devotion causing an ethical catastrophe. Essentially, the facts hide the story.
152 Yukawa's dogged pursuit of the absolute truth based on science alone brings him face to face
153 with a stark moral ambiguity projecting how scientific hubris requires a humanistic check at
154 the cost of scientific triumph.

155 In conclusion, *The Devotion of Suspect X* by Keigo Higashino highlights the importance of
156 social and psychological health in maintaining ethical stability using a uniquely complex
157 critique on modernity. The progression of the narrative extrinsically displays the
158 insufficiency of scientific certainty in tackling resolutions involving moral ambiguity.
159 Empirical knowledge needs to step aside for narrative competence for understanding modern
160 moral crises which highlights the necessity and validity of Medical Humanities in the
161 contemporary times. The novel also suggests intrinsically that pathological and moral
162 recovery is impossible in isolation which is the reason why the painful exposure and
163 confession of Ishigami and Yasuko in the end of the novel becomes essential for their
164 respective self- redemptions by releasing the moral burden off of each other and sharing the
165 guilt of the “perfect crime”. The analysis suggests meaningful contributions to bioethics and
166 Medical Humanities in the future with the help of popular contemporary Asian mystery
167 fiction by incorporating studies on psychological consequences of modernization and
168 intellectual suppression using narrative competence.

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