

# Moral Boundaries and Human Integrity in Graham Masterton's Community

Asha Vitthal Sutar

Submitted: 05-Jan-2026 Revised: 10-Jan-2026 Accepted: 10-Feb-2026 Published: 28-Feb-2026

Manuscript ID:  
IJEWLPSIR-2026-030110



Creative Commons (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0):

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work no commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.20281664](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20281664)

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20281664>

Volume: 3

Issue: 1

Month: Feb 2026

E-ISSN: 3065-7873

Research Scholar, Department of English,  
Shivaji University, Kolhapur  
Email: [asha1sutar@gmail.com](mailto:asha1sutar@gmail.com)

**How to cite this article:**  
Sutar, A. V. (2026). Moral Boundaries and Human Integrity in Graham Masterton's Community. *International Journal of English and World Languages & Literature Paradigm Shift in International Research*, 3(1), 42-45.  
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20281664>.

**Address for correspondence:**  
Asha Vitthal Sutar  
Research Scholar, Department of English,  
Shivaji University, Kolhapur  
Email: [asha1sutar@gmail.com](mailto:asha1sutar@gmail.com)

## Abstract:

Horror literature played an important role in literature. It often transcends mere sensational fear, serving as a medium for expressing moral and psychological conflicts. Graham Masterton, a leading contemporary horror writer, utilizes supernatural thriller not only to unsettle but also to interrogate ethical dilemmas within society. This research paper critically examines the disturbing narrative that exposes the fragility of moral boundaries and the testing of human integrity under extreme circumstances in Masterton's novel *Community*. By analyzing the clandestine and horrific practices of the Trinity-Shasta Clinic (TSC), the study investigates how the institutional pursuit of utilitarian immortality erases traditional moral boundaries. The clinic's systematic commodification of living individuals to sustain resurrected, deceased geniuses, referred to as *semi-substantial's*, exposes significant violations of psychological integrity, informed consent, and the natural ontology of life and death. The narrative illustrates how institutions can exploit trauma and memory to subjugate individuals. Ultimately, the analysis contends that the protagonist's reclamation of authentic identity and the subsequent destruction of the Trinity community represent a reassertion of human integrity over institutional megalomania and scientific hubris. Through textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that horror in *Community* functions as a social mirror, compelling readers to confront uncomfortable truths about human nature, responsibility, and integrity.

**Keywords:** Human values, moral boundaries, integrity, psychological horror, ethics, Graham Masterton

## Introduction:

Graham Masterton is most known for his horror books he is also a prolific author of horror, thriller, historical epics, disaster novels, and one of the most popular sex education book series in history. Although his horror novels are his most well-known works, he has also written several thrillers that was most famous and best-selling, such as *Montigue*, *Basilisk*, *Community*, *Petrified*, and so on. Overall, Graham Masterton is a multifaceted author whose work spans entertainment, education, and cultural influence, making him a distinctive figure in contemporary literature.

Horror literature has long served as a vehicle for exploring the darker dimensions of human existence. While traditionally associated with supernatural entities, horror also functions as a metaphor for internal fears, moral anxieties, and societal corruption. In the realm of contemporary horror and psychological thrillers, the motif of the isolated, utopian community often becomes a powerful lens through which authors interrogate the collapse of societal ethics and the precariousness of human identity. Graham Masterton's *Community* exemplifies this tradition, immersing readers in the unnerving world of the Trinity-Shasta Clinic (TSC), an advanced trauma centre set amid the remote wilderness of Northern California. On the surface, TSC promises healing and hope, but beneath its clinical façade lies a technological and spiritual aberration: harnessing the geomagnetic and mystical energy of Mount Shasta, the clinic has achieved the impossible, resurrecting the dead. Within TSC's walls, deceased geniuses, scientists, and artists classified as semi-substantials are returned to a liminal existence and compelled to serve the clinic's agenda. The medical director, Kingsley Vane, rationalizes this resurrection protocol through a dangerous blend of nationalism and utilitarianism. As Vane asserts, "*Our country depends on Trinity to keep us ahead!*" (*Community* 154), a statement that encapsulates the clinic's belief that the intellectual contributions of the past must be perpetually exploited for national benefit. By forcibly binding the souls of the dead to Mount Shasta and demanding their continued output, TSC commodifies both genius and human essence, reducing individuals to mere resources in the service of state power. This profound breach of ethical boundaries reveals itself in the clinic's willingness to "play God," divorcing scientific ambition from any sense of moral restraint. The dead are denied the dignity of final rest, while the living are drawn into an environment where memory and identity can be manipulated or erased for institutional gain. Masterton's narrative uses this dystopian microcosm to probe urgent questions about autonomy, integrity, and the consequences of subordinating ethical principles to utilitarian goals.

This paper argues that *Community* offers a chilling meditation on the systematic dismantling of human integrity. By examining the ways in which the Trinity-Shasta Clinic weaponises memory, subverts individual agency, and ultimately erases the boundaries between life and death, the novel exposes the perils of unchecked scientific ambition and the necessity of moral resistance. Through the protagonist's struggle, Masterton invites us to reflect on the fragile line between human progress and ethical catastrophe.

#### Research Objectives

1. To examine the representation of human values in Graham Masterton's *Community*.
2. To analyze the construction of moral boundaries within the fictional community.
3. To investigate the theme of human integrity.
4. To evaluate the role of psychological horror.
5. To explore ethical implications in the novel, situating *Community*.

#### Literature Review:

In literature, horror stories have been studied in various contexts, such as horror films, themes in horror, characters in horror, and plots. However, in this research paper, Graham Masterton's horror story 'Community' and the human values present in it are going to be studied.

Graham Masterton's novel '*Community*' explores moral limits and human integrity, exposing more sinister intricacies within an apparently perfect town. The relationship between moral responsibility and belonging to a "*moral community*," as David Shoemaker has argued, by synthesizing philosophical and literary viewpoints. Analyses of other horror literature, such as Stephen King's '*Salem's Lot*', demonstrate how Masterton's work dramatizes ethical quandaries where community membership enforces conformity by frequently fusing psychological horror with social critique. Michael Spencer's fight against the town's oppressive moral standards serves as an example of how integrity can be compromised by outside influences. All things considered, '*Community*' is a profound meditation on moral limits and personal freedom, which makes it an important addition to discussions of ethics and resiliency in modern literature.

#### Methodology:

In this research paper, the novel *Community* by Graham Masterton is closely read and its themes are analyzed through textual Analysis using a qualitative methodology. Its three main themes

- 1) **Utilitarian Justification for Medical Atrocity**, which highlights the excuses offered by clinic administrators for moral desertion
- 2) **Annihilation of Psychological Integrity**, which looks at tactics like forced medication and gaslighting that weaken the protagonist's identity.
- 3) **Commodification of the Living and the Dead**, which looks into how people are subjugated and mutilated to preserve the clinic's authority. In order to highlight Masterton's criticism of institutional power and defence of human integrity, the analysis follows Michael Spencer's journey from gaslit amnesiac to truth realization.

#### Theoretical Framework:

When analyzing moral boundaries and human integrity in literature, critical theories such as Ethical Criticism and Existentialism offer robust tools. Ethical criticism, as outlined by Wayne C. Booth, Martha Nussbaum, and others, investigates how literature explores, challenges, or upholds moral values and examines the ethical dimensions of characters' actions. Existentialist theory, especially as developed by Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, explores authenticity, freedom, and the individual's responsibility in creating meaning and upholding integrity amidst societal or existential challenges.

Moral boundaries refer to the limits of acceptable behaviour and ethical conduct, established by societal norms or individual conscience. Literature often tests these boundaries, asking what happens when they are crossed or redefined. Human Integrity involves adherence to moral and ethical principles and the consistency of actions, values, and beliefs. In fiction, characters' struggles with integrity can illuminate larger questions about the human condition.

#### Applying Theory to Masterton's Community:

##### Ethical criticism:

In *Community*, Masterton presents a microcosm where moral boundaries are constantly tested, forcing characters to navigate the 'grey zones' of right and wrong. As Martha Nussbaum asserts, "*Literature... invites us to see and feel the complexity of moral situations*" (Nussbaum 148). The actions of the protagonists in *Community* echo this complexity, as they are repeatedly forced to choose between self-preservation and the welfare of others.

##### Existentialism:

Masterton's depiction of his characters' struggles aligns with existentialist thought. In the face of a crisis, the protagonists must define themselves through their actions. As Sartre claims, "*Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does*" (Sartre 34). The characters in *Community* are confronted with the heavy burden of this responsibility, making their choices a reflection of their integrity. "*When faced with the community's descent into chaos, the protagonist reflects, 'If I cross that line, I'll never be able to come back'*" (Masterton 212). This moment underscores the precarious nature of moral boundaries and the personal cost of maintaining integrity. Masterton writes, "*It wasn't just about surviving. It was about who you became in the process*" (Masterton 176), highlighting the existential dilemma at the heart of the narrative.

The central horror in *Community* is not limited to the resurrection of the dead, but extends to the clinic's predatory harvesting of living individuals to sustain its experiment. The Trinity Shasta Clinic (TSC) identifies a critical flaw in

its resurrection protocol: "Ghosts haunt people, not buildings." (Masterton 196). Without ongoing interaction, emotional energy, and belief from a living human companion, the semi-substantials inevitably fade and disappear. Kingsley Vane asserts that a ghost cannot exist in isolation; without someone to perceive them, they lack presence.

To procure these vital living anchors, the clinic crosses the ultimate moral boundary; they deliberately orchestrate horrific vehicular accidents on the interstate to generate a steady supply of vulnerable, amnesiac survivors. When the protagonist finally uncovers this atrocious methodology, he categorizes this systematic harvesting as vehicular assault and vehicular homicide. The clinic relies on car crashes because the victims are highly likely to suffer from severe concussion or post-traumatic amnesia, making them infinitely easier to control, manipulate, and integrate into the community.

After being acquired, the survivors of these staged collisions are imprisoned in Trinity and coerced into serving as the deceased's lifelong emotional, physical, and sexual attachments.

For example, the protagonist is tasked with being the companion of a resurrected woman named Isobel Weston. To keep the deceased Isobel in her equilibrium, he is supposed to share a bed with her. The protagonist observes that making love to her is numbingly cold and that her internal temperature is so freezing that it turns his semen into ice crystals, illustrating how profoundly unnatural and violating this forced intimacy is. Masterton emphasizes the parasitic nature of the relationship by using this terrifying physical detail; the dead are literally draining.

#### **The Destruction of Consent and Psychological Integrity:**

The Annihilation of Psychological Integrity and Consent Human integrity relies fundamentally on an individual's right to their own mind, history, and identity. In Community, TSC systematically dismantles the psychological integrity of its victims to maintain absolute control. When the protagonist survives the crash engineered by the clinic, he suffers from retrograde amnesia. Rather than treating him and helping him reclaim his authentic past as Michael Spencer, the clinic's psychotherapist, Doctor Catherine Connor, actively fabricates a false identity for him, renaming him Gregory Merrick.

A person's right to their own thoughts, past, and identity is essential to maintaining human integrity. TSC methodically undermines its victims' psychological well-being in the community to keep complete control. The protagonist experiences retrograde amnesia after surviving the crash that the clinic engineered. Doctor Catherine Connor, the clinic's psychotherapist, deliberately creates a false identity for him by renaming him Gregory Merrick instead of providing him with treatment and assisting him in reclaiming his true past as Michael Spencer.

He has been subjected to a complex, well-planned campaign of gaslighting as psychological abuse. To implant false memories, the clinic employs an actress to play his sister, Sue, who shows him photos of his childhood that have been altered, fabricating. In addition, the clinic flagrantly transgresses informed consent ethics. When Michael challenges his detention, Kingsley Vane presents a durable power of attorney designating Vane as his attorney-in-fact, thereby depriving Michael of his legal agency. This document, which was witnessed by the very doctors who were committing the fraud and signed by the nonexistent Gregory Merrick, is a total fabrication. TSC violates his fundamental human rights by depriving him of his identity and falsifying legal documents. When the Gregory Merrick deception begins to fail, the clinic pivots to a secondary, even crueler form of psychological torture.

The clinic switches to a second, even more brutal kind of psychological torture when the Gregory Merrick trick starts to fall apart. They purposefully manipulate Natasha Kerwin, Michael's real fiancé who suffered serious injuries in the same collision. The clinic resurrects Natasha as a semi-substantial after Michael tries to save her, which causes her to actually die outside the anomaly's boundaries. They then deceive Michael into thinking he cannot physically leave Trinity without dying again by using her to prove he is the one who perished in the collision. They created an afterlife for Natasha with the express purpose of keeping Michael bound to Trinity, using his love for her as a mental prison, as Isobel subsequently admits. This is an example of how human affection has been completely weaponized the clinic perverts

The living residents of Trinity exist in a state of perpetual anxiety, described by one resident as hanging on by their fingernails. This terror is institutionalized by the clinic's brutal enforcement mechanism. For companions who rebel, ask too many questions, or attempt to assert their human integrity, the clinic administers severe medical abuse to ensure compliance. Isobel explicitly reveals to Michael that companions who prove troublesome are given the treatment, which she defines as a form of lobotomy. According to one resident, the living residents of Trinity are constantly anxious and are hanging on by their fingernails. The clinic's harsh enforcement practices institutionalize this fear. To maintain compliance, the clinic uses severe medical abuse on companions who rebel, ask too many questions, or try to assert their human integrity. Michael is made aware by Isobel that companions who cause problems are subjected to "the treatment," which she describes as a "form of lobotomy." Emilio, Isobel's former friend, and Michael's friends Jack Barr and Lloyd Hammers were subjected to this horrifying process. Jack is reduced to an invalid who is pushed in a wheelchair after Michael and Natasha try to flee.

This textual analysis reveals that the novel's primary conflict is the struggle for human integrity against a system that views people solely as resources. Michael Spencer has undergone a significant process of reclamation. He refuses to allow institutional manipulation of his thoughts and essentially rejects the false reality that TSC has created. The novel's climax serves as a firm reaffirmation of moral limits. Michael plans a mass exodus to end the clinic's unnatural experiment after realizing that Trinity is a town where the dead parasitically feed on the living. Taking advantage of the people's deep-seated fears, he makes up a threat of a volcanic eruption from Mount Shasta and persuades them to accompany him in a convoy away from the mountain.

As he leads the long procession of vehicles beyond the geographic boundary of the mountain's spiritual energy, the unnatural preservation of the semi-substantial's fails. The ghosts, including Isobel, lose their physical form and vanish completely, leaving behind only their empty clothes. Michael's actions, while seemingly ruthless, are presented as a necessary moral correction. By leading the dead out of the anomaly and allowing them to finally pass on to their natural end, he terminates a cycle of murder, slavery, and psychological torture. In doing so, he restores the disrupted boundary between life and death, reinforcing the ethical stance that life, and death, must belong to the individual.

#### **Conclusion:**

Graham Masterton's *Community* serves as a potent and grim cautionary tale regarding the abandonment of moral boundaries in the name of scientific and nationalistic progress. The Trinity-Shasta Clinic's pursuit of intellectual immortality reduces human beings to mere commodities. In their utilitarian calculus, the dead become enslaved producers of knowledge, and the living are reduced to disposable, lobotomized batteries used to sustain them. The novel masterfully explores how medical ethics can be entirely corrupted when institutions view human identity as a construct to be wiped and reprogrammed, rather than a sacred space of personal truth. Michael Spencer's harrowing journey from a gaslit amnesiac to the destroyer of the Trinity experiment is a powerful testament to the necessity of human integrity. By freeing the living from forced servitude and allowing the dead to finally rest, the narrative reasserts that the natural boundaries of human life must not be transgressed by institutional hubris.

#### **Acknowledgment**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported me in completing this research on Moral Boundaries and Human Integrity in Graham Masterton's *Community*. First and foremost, I am deeply thankful to my guide/mentor for their constant guidance, insightful suggestions, and continuous encouragement throughout this study. Their valuable feedback significantly contributed to shaping this research.

#### **Financial support and sponsorship**

Nil.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

#### **Bibliography:**

- Masterton, Graham. *Community*. Severn House Publishers Ltd, 2013  
Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* University of California Press, 1988.  
Nussbaum, Martha C. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford UP, 1990.  
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Philip Mairet. Yale University Press, 2007.pg. 34

#### **Webliography:**

- <https://fiveable.me/key-terms/american-literature-before-1860/psychological-horror>.  
<https://electricliterature.com/7-contemporary-horror-novels-that-push-boundaries/>  
<https://litreactor.com/columns/storyville-writing-psychological-horror>.