My report examines the connections of manifestations of evil across texts and what these manifestations say about the society that we live in. The texts that I used were Catch-22, by Joseph Heller, The Merchant of Venice, by William Shakespeare, The Star Wars Saga, conceived by George Lucas and the German short-film Schwarzfahrer, directed by Pepe Danquart. I felt that all the texts had sufficient manifestations of evil to allow for me to pass societal commentary on what these manifestations say about us, and how we interpret these manifestations from the perspective of what we believe to be the societal norm……….
*(paragraph continues)*

Characters are mainly used as the primary form of Evil's portrayal. Across the texts I have covered, evil primarily takes on the form of a character within the texts' overarching story. For example, analysing the novel Catch-22, by Joseph Heller, evil manifests itself as a character named Colonel Cathcart, a status-obsessed and ignorant fool with no regard for his men's safety or their lives, constantly raising the mission cap higher in order to prove how great a commander he is to his superiors. This case of superiors being interpreted as evil is similar across the Star Wars Saga (all six films), conceived by George Lucas. Evil primarily takes on the form of two characters, Darth Sidious and Darth Vader, whose treachery and dishonesty caused a 'good' government known as The Republic to be overthrown through sheer deception, these traits living on into the Empire (the now formed superiors) they formed in the Republic's wake…… (*paragraph continues*)

The play, The Merchant of Venice, by William Shakespeare differs slightly in that it has no system of government that is being seen as evil, but rather a whole race of people: Jews. Evil's manifestation is that of a Jewish usurer named Shylock with deliberately used stereotypical characteristics, such as being greedy, ruthless, having a vengeful nature and having an inability to find joy in things. Shylock manipulates the play's main protagonist,……( *paragraph continues*)

Characters as Manifestations of evil will always have a character opposing them interpreted as 'good'. In what I must say is a rather obvious consequence, evil will always have an opposing character in any given text, for example: Schwarzfahrer, a German short-film directed by Pepe Danquart. It shows us this case of the 'good' character/characters opposing the evil character…… (*paragraph continues*)

The Star Wars Saga is also similar in that it has oppressed individuals opposing evil (albeit in a more overt manner) in open rebellion. The oppressed people of the former Republic we discussed in the previous question have now formed a rebellion against The Galactic Empire as they feel that they have been deceived and unjustly oppressed by this government…..(*paragraph continues*)

Society needs someone or a group to be interpreted as evil for society to assert its morality. Society of today and the societies of the past seemed to always need a group of people or an individual to alienate as an 'enemy' of the societal norm. Today for example…….(*paragraph continues*)

Schwarzfahrer is similar in the sense that the 'enemy' character is alienated as well. The racist views portrayed by the old woman are socially unacceptable in the society of today and can thus be once again interpreted as an 'enemy' to the societal norm of

today, that is of being anti-racist. The manner in which she was alienated in the end of the film as an 'enemy' by having no one show support for her since she portrayed these views shows how morally the people in the tram were asserting their views by not supporting her, but at the same time internally the characters/witnesses would have that feeling of being morally 'above' she whom they had just alienated. And once again this idea of feeling being 'above' the 'enemy' as a result of moral assertion is clear and present in The Star Wars Saga in that the entire principle of the rebellion was to carry out a just cause to overthrow the empire and restore democracy in the form of the Republic. Remember that when the first film was made in 1977 it was during the Cold War and the Galactic Empire (an autocratic government) could have merely been a reference to the government that the USA was in a war of secrecy with: communist Russia. This reference seems to have been deliberate, as both governments operated in very similar ways (governmentally, not economically) by being autocratic and ruthless. At face value the Galactic Empire seems to be evil in itself to an unassuming audience (but remember that it is those who are evil leading governments that make them appear evil) and referring to the Western World's greatest 'enemy' of the time, reinforcing the idea that characters and caricatures in text are used to reinforce society's perceptions of who is the 'enemy' to the societal norm (1) . If people in a society are all swayed into hatred of a common enemy by suggestion from text, it is generally easier for that society to be driven towards a common goal. All of this necessity in society to look down upon views and perceptions that go against the societal norm by morally asserting itself against those with these views and perceptions makes one wonder: isn't it going against morality, doing what is right for the sake of it, to assert morality against those labeled as 'enemies' to feel 'above' them and to make them feel immoral in the end? This very idea needs an 'enemy' of the norm for society to morally assert itself is literally a paradoxical view, and yet it is still common to label 'enemies' of the norm today; terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban, dictators such as Kim Jong II, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and Bashar al-Assad (symbols of oppression) are looked down upon as 'enemies' of the norm. If being morally correct is doing what is right for the sake of it, then why are we constantly labeling these people as 'enemies' who are interpreted as evil, in order to feel just? Have we actually done anything about these 'issues', not 'enemies', in order to actually have the right to feel morally just, by having done what is right? There is another issue with morality: if we do what is right for the sake of it, how do we define what is right in the first place? How do we define what is a societal norm in the first place as well? That is where the actual portrayal of characters in text as manifestations of evil falls flat in that there is no correct way to define what is evil because evil is defined by what is interpreted to be the societal norm at the time (2). An example being the following scenario: if what the society of today interprets to be the caricature of evil is actually the societal norm, whilst what the society of today interprets to be the caricature of good is now the 'enemy' of the societal norm, how does society now morally assert itself?


In the end, what I can undeniably state is that society feels the need to have an 'enemy' of the norm in order to keep that society on track and in some way be headed towards a common goal at some
point, being accomplished by the simple technique of using hatred of a common enemy as a driving force for a society. But the fact that evil is defined as the opposite to the societal norm means that evil has no true definition and is thus merely an interpretation of society. I conclude by stating that these characters represented in texts are merely society's interpretation of what is evil, and thus what is defined as evil may change over time as society heads towards change, but in order for people as members of society to feel better about themselves, they will continuously alienate minority groups and individuals and label them as the 'enemies' of the norm (3).