

# Forum for World Literature Studies

世界文学研究论坛 Vol.10 No.3 September 2018

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# **Forum for World Literature Studies**

Vol.10, No.3, September 2018

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# 世界文学研究论坛

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方子薇

# The Universal Poetry and the Work-Net of Bob Dylan's Oeuvre: With Special Regards to Dylan's *The Brazil Series*

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**Abstract** The article suggests that the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel's concept of "universal poetry" provides an interesting approach to Dylan's songs and artwork. In a famous fragment from 1798, Schlegel asserts that universal poetry unites the forms of art, philosophy and thought with the beautiful sigh and kiss that the creative child "exhales in its artless song." It is hard to claim that Dylan's voice has ever sounded like a child exhaling its artless song, but nevertheless Schlegel's concept opens the way for new approaches to his oeuvre, and it can be combined with the sociologist Bruno Latour's concept of the actors' work-net of social phenomena. Dylan's artwork can be described both as universal poetry in the sense of Schlegel and as a Dylan-work-net with numerous actors in the sense of Bruno Latour. The Copenhagen exhibition of *The Brazil Series* (2010) clarifies the relevance of Schlegel and Latour's concepts to the discussion of the relations of artforms in Dylan's work.

**Key words** Bob Dylan; poetry; actor network theory

**Author** **Anne-Marie Mai**, PhD, Professor of Literature, University of Southern Denmark, PI of the research project, *Uses of Literature*, 2016-2021, has published several monographs on Nordic literature and has edited the anthology, *Hvor dejlige Havfruer svømmer — om Dylans digtning* (Where Lovely Mermaids Flow — On Bob Dylan's poetry), 2012, University of Southern Denmark Publishers, *Bob Dylan — the Poet* 2018, University of Southern Denmark Publishers, and has introduced Danish translation of Bob Dylan's novel *Tarantula*, Gyldendal, 2018. Anne-Marie Mai has organized the international Dylan-conference, "New Approaches to Bob Dylan's Songs," University of Southern Denmark, October 4-5, 2018.<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Bob Dylan is a songwriter, musician, poet, film director, actor, performer, painter and sculptor. His artistic oeuvre includes several genres, and it seems difficult for art critics to understand and appreciate the diversity of his extensive oeuvre. Bob Dylan himself has not made the discussion easier by his statements on his art and his songs. He once called himself a “song and dance man” and characterized himself as a poet, but when he was awarded with the Nobel Prize of Literature, he said that he had never asked himself if his songs were literature. “But, like Shakespeare, I too am often occupied with the pursuit of my creative endeavours and dealing with all aspects of life’s mundane matters. “Who are the best musicians for these songs?” “Am I recording in the right studio?” “Is this song in the right key?” Some things never change, even in 400 years. Not once have I ever had the time to ask myself, “Are my songs literature?” So, I do thank the Swedish Academy, both for taking the time to consider that very question, and ultimately, for providing such a wonderful answer” (Dylan 2016). Dylan is not interested in art categories and genres; he is occupied with practical possibilities that are needed to carry out his artistic ideas and bring his creativity to life. But many scholars prefer a specialization and division of art forms and genres and do not appreciate multi-mediality of contemporary art and literature, although the change of art and literature started a long time ago in 1960ies, when Dylan was a very young man. It seems difficult to some critics to accept Dylan as both a painter, a song writer and a poet. This discussion has been going on for years, and it reappeared in 2010, when Dylan exhibited his paintings in Copenhagen at the The National Gallery. When you read the various discussions of Dylan’s *The Brazil Series*, it is evident that the critique is not equal to its object. It obviously lacks concepts and approaches that can promote an insight into Dylan’s art in its multifaceted use of expressions and genres. I will argue that we can find concepts and approaches to Dylan’s work of art by the ideas of the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and by one of today’s controversial thinkers, the French sociologist Bruno Latour.

### *The Brazil Series*

“If I had been able to express the same things in a song, I had written a song instead,” Bob Dylan said about his paintings in connection with the exhibition, *The Brazil Series*, which he created for The National Gallery in Copenhagen in 2008-2010. It is a series of approximately 50 works, of which 40 Paintings and eight drawings were shown at The National Gallery, Copenhagen. Since then, *The Brazil*

*Series* has been shown by the English Castle Galleries and the Brazil paintings have also been the basis of a series of hand-signed, limited-edition prints. When the board of The National Gallery first contacted Bob Dylan about an exhibition, the curators had no idea that Dylan would embark on a whole new series. The board had seen a catalogue based on Dylan's Drawn Blank Series, which had been shown in Chemnitz in 2007. At this exhibition Dylan first revealed the results of many years of work in drawing and painting on a large scale. Based on the Chemnitz exhibition, the Danish museum hoped that Dylan would exhibit some work from his long production. However, the approach by the National Gallery led Dylan to embark on a whole new series of paintings from Brazil. These were not painted on a journey; they were created in his studio on the basis of sketches from his previous visits to Brazil.

The curator of the exhibition, Kasper Monrad (1952-2018), who was a specialist in Danish Golden Age painting, was of course asked if the highly respected museum would have exhibited the paintings if they were not painted by Bob Dylan: "Some said to us: 'Is it just because it is Bob Dylan's that you show these paintings.'" I would answer them: "Are you more critical, just because these are Bob Dylan's paintings" (Monrad 9).

Art critics' reactions to Bob Dylan's exhibition were an example of how modern art criticism, despite all the experiments and avant-garde border crossings of contemporary art and the changes of the modern art institution, is still based on the idea of a specialization of artforms. The reception of the Dylan exhibition was largely negative — the paintings were called "Sunday painting" and worse. But the negative predicates were often connected with the concept of the excellent singer. Dylan is an excellent singer and songwriter, and therefore he must stay out of visual art. The reception showed that the criticism works with a norm of specialisation — there is a determined field where an artist can be sovereign. The idea that you can work with several art forms or genres at the same time is taken as almost insulting. Some of the critics mention that certain artists succeed in a side-door practice next to their main area. But in principle, an artist must stick to his arena. As one of the critics said, Bob Dylan is one of the music's Picassos:

But now he exhibits at The National Gallery. He doesn't do this because his pictures are good. He does this because he is Bob Dylan. If the person behind the paintings was not called Bob Dylan, he would of course never have been invited. (Weirup 1)

Meanwhile, the idea of the work of art as a source of understanding of the artist's personality was invoked. Film director Christian Braad Thomsen claimed that the paintings could be interpreted as Bob Dylan's personal therapy or a kind of self-revocation: "For an artist who uses himself as a raw material, the paintings become an opportunity to escape the constant preoccupation of himself or herself. A kind of self-revocation" (Henriksen 8). Another art critic, Michael Jeppesen, claimed that Dylan had become his own white cube, ie. his own modern art institution, a modernist art museum, a temple where it is not works of art, but experiences or adventures that are in focus. According to Jeppesen, visitors met the myth Bob Dylan, but in such a way that they found that when Dylan plays "painter," he shows himself as a human being; he exposes himself. He steps outside his own mythology. According to Jeppesen, visitors found that Dylan was inspired, but that the paintings were boring (Jeppesen 4).

When you read the various discussions of Dylan's *The Brazil Series*, it is evident that the critique is not equal to its object. But we need to find new concepts and approaches to Dylan's work of art and we can be inspired by the ideas of the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, and by one of today's controversial thinkers, the French sociologist Bruno Latour.

### **The Universal Poetry**

Friedrich Schlegel's concept of "universal poetry" provides an interesting approach to Dylan's songs and artwork. Schlegel's criticism and thinking were attempts to formulate a cross-cutting alternative to Classicism's fixed and established concepts, where poetry, art and philosophy were kept separate as different genres. In a famous fragment from 1798, Schlegel emphasized that universal poetry unites the forms of art, philosophy and thought with the beautiful sigh and kiss that the creative child "exhales in its artless song." In the fragment, Schlegel only once uses the concept "poet," and, it should be noted, does so only in order to assert this figure's freedom: The "poet" is not be subject to any law, Schlegel says. It is hard to claim that Dylan's voice has ever sounded like a child that exhales its artless song, but never the less Schlegel's concept opens for new approached to his oeuvre. Schlegel described the idea of the universal poetry in this way:

"Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. Its destiny is not merely to reunite all of the different genres and to put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. Romantic poetry wants to and should combine and fuse poetry and prose, genius and criticism, art poetry and nature poetry. It should make poetry

lively and sociable and make life and society poetic. It should poeticize wit and fill all of art's forms with sound material of every kind to form the human soul, to animate it with flights of humor. Romantic poetry embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest art systems, which contain within them still more systems, all the way down to the sigh, the kiss that a poeticizing child breathes out in an artless song. [...] The Romantic form of poetry is still in the process of becoming. Indeed, that is its true essence, that it is always in the process of becoming and can never be completed." (Schlegel 62)

Schlegel's concept of universal poetry is relevant to Dylan's career because Dylan works with different genres and forms of artistic expression and makes art a process of continuous genesis — he breaks out of the modern art institution's isolation of the experience-potential of the different genres. His artistic career has been a journey through a series of art circles and artistic traditions, which he has both used and enriched in his own creative process. He has worked with folk music, literary avant-gardism, gospel music, American pop, Shakespeare's drama, Chaplin's films, Brecht's theater, the poetry of Antiquity, and much more. It can be argued that his poetry, with the many citations and references, is rugged, and when you compare his paintings and his songs he, as he himself emphasizes, does not illustrate his songs. The paintings are an artistic expression of their own. From the planning phase of the Danish exhibition Dylan underlined that he did not want his songs to be played or his albums to be shown in the rooms where the paintings were exhibited. But at the same time, it is obvious that the different artforms are connected by moods and themes. Some argue that what links Dylan's paintings and his songs is the narrative character of his work — stories are narrated in both songs and pictures. According to Monrad, for instance, it is narration that forms the connection (Dylan, *The Brazil Series* 173). The leading American art critic, John Elderfield, a specialist in Henri Matisse, emphasizes that Dylan's paintings work with the human imagination, which is grounded in a strong sense of reality. Using the imagination, the artist focuses on reality, even while reality is absent from the painting. The painting is a painting. In order to express this fact, the paintings are shattered via fragmented references to time and place. Paradoxically, this fragmentation creates a sense of presence, of reality and of a time track. The two different forms of expression, paintings and songs, are connected to each other in an artistic awareness of the absence of reality, and by an expressionist impulse.

In a more direct and simple argument one can also claim that Dylan's work in different genres is linked by recurring themes of art, love, modernity and

melancholy. Several of the paintings have motifs of art and artistic creation, which find parallels in Dylan's songs from "Visions of Johanna" (1966) to "Roll on John" (1967). Melancholy is also an important theme. It is a basic mood in Dylan's entire work, and often relates to thresholds between night and day, between before and after, and between indoors and outdoors. The melancholy of Dylan is not a passive or purely depressive mood. It often springs from love sorrows, but it is a creative melancholy that sharpens the language and sensibility of the artist. The song "Standing in the Doorway" from *Time Out of Mind* (1997) describes the artist at the threshold between the outside and inside: here he has been left by the beloved, weeping, and he cannot take his next step into a new life. He is mentally bound to the doorstep and he cannot get away from this place. Stanza 2 says:

"The light in this place is so bad  
 Making me sick in the head  
 All the laughter is just makin' me sad  
 The stars have turned cherry red  
 I'm strummin' on my gay guitar  
 Smoking a cheap cigar  
 The ghost of our old love has not gone away  
 Don't look it like it will anytime soon  
 You left me standing in the doorway crying  
 Under the midnight moon" (Dylan, *The Lyrics* 561)

In *The Brazil Series* we find the painting, "Chrysanthemums," which pictures a creative, sensitive melancholy. In the painting we see an open window: a threshold between inside and outside. The human character is introverted, holding a sheet of paper with letters or signs in his hands — he looks away from both the open window and the colorful flowers, and is wrapped in brown and gray colors. But both the red colors and the lush greenness are nevertheless linked to the man, and the painting becomes a portrait not only not of a human figure, but of a form of creative melancholy as a state of mind. With Schlegel's concept of universal poetry as an artistic impulse or power that moves through art forms and unites them, we have a conceptual framework that enables us to follow the travels of the themes through Dylan's paintings, songs, performances and films.

### **Actors' Work-Net**

In addition, we can advantageously combine Schlegel's concept of a universal

poetry with French sociologist Bruno Latour's concept of the actors' work-net of social phenomena.

Bruno Latour, who belongs to Dylan's own generation, is one of the present-day's most significant thinkers. His ideas on a renewal of sociology have gained importance in other disciplines, including art, music and literature. Latour's idea that social phenomena arise in a complex network or work-net, where both people and nonhuman agents influence each other, opens new approaches to the study of literature, art and music. In *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005), Latour discusses how the concept of work-net originates from the Actor-Network method, an approach to social theory that describes both things and human beings as actors in networks, which are always engaged in processes of change and transference.

“With Actor-Network you may describe something that doesn't at all look like a network — an individual state of mind, a piece of machinery, a fictional character; conversely, you may describe a network subways, sewages, telephones — which is not all drawn in an ‘Actor-Networky’ way. You are simply confusing the object with the method. ANT is a method, and mostly a negative one at that; it says nothing about the shape of what is being described with it. [...] Really, we should say ‘worknet’ instead of ‘network’. It's the work and the movement, and the flow, and the changes that should be stressed.” (Latour 142-143)

Latour is interested in empirical studies and descriptions and seeks to avoid closely-knit theoretical constructions in the study of actors and networks; he prefers a radical empiricism — and the Dylan's oeuvre seems perfectly designed for such an empiricism. Using Latour's method Dylan's whole oeuvre can be understood a mobile, rather than a fixed, limited outer object of study that the public and the critics stand outside of or opposite to. With Latour in mind, it becomes possible to see how the art works of Dylan are formed in an exchange, and interwoven with other genres, and how it becomes a collaboration or a concern that circulates among fans, critics, artists and the originator himself.

Dylan's art works can be thought of as actors — things that collaborate in action — and this brings the mode of the interactions into focus as a question. “Actor-network-theory,” according to Latour, is not really a theory, but rather a method of describing phenomena. Latour's discussions of actors, things and concerns provide an inclusive and dynamic way of thinking about Dylan's work.

Just as one can understand the words as actors in the songs' network of meanings, and the songs as actors in the network of Dylan's art work, one can also describe Dylan the artist as a network with several actors that create and fuel the Dylan phenomenon with their contributions.

### **Iron and Steel**

Let me use an example to illustrate this Actor-network approach to Dylan art works. One element often referred to and used in Dylan's songs and paintings is iron or steel. If we with Latour regard iron an actor in the Dylan network, we can notice that iron is present in Dylan's texts on his childhood world: Dylan comes from Duluth and Hibbing, which were centers of American iron mining in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Dylan's memoirs *Chronicles* (2004) Hibbing and Duluth form a kind of substructure in the narrative, like small pieces of taconite that the artist keeps with him. Towards the end of the chapter on his childhood, Dylan describes how as a young, frail, asthmatic boy, he felt the hooting of the iron ships down in Duluth harbour enter his body. The sound gave him a fearful feeling that there was something out there that could swallow him: a kind of an iron monster:

“Duluth, even though it's thousand miles from the nearest ocean, was an international seaport. Ships from South America, Asia and Europe came and went all the time, and the heavy rumble of the foghorns dragged you out of your senses by your neck. Even though you couldn't see the ships through, you knew they were there by the heavy outburst of thunder that blasted like Beethoven's Fifth — two low notes, the first one long and deep like a bassoon. Foghorns sounded like great announcements. The big boats came and went; iron monsters from the deep — ships to wipe out all spectacles” (Dylan, *Chronicles* 273-274).

Iron becomes a chemical element Dylan's art, where iron and steel are also attached to modern machines, railways and bridges and a fundamental experience is freedom. Iron and steel are also agents for expressing both a personal strength and a fear of stiffness, as expressed in the song “Never say Goodbye” (1974)

“My dreams are made of iron and steel  
With a big bouquet  
Of roses hanging down  
From the heavens to the ground” (Dylan, *Chronicles* 325)

Iron and steel are also important actors in Dylan's paintings, and of course in his new wrought iron works of gates. In *The Brazil Series* we see iron and steel in motifs with weapons, knives, utensils and bridges. However, most expressively, iron acts in a large painting of a nude female figure that lifts an iron sword over her head. The title of the painting is "The Bamboo Road." The woman seems strong and confident and smiles as she prepares to chop her way through the bamboo. In conversations with Monrad on *The Brazil Series* Dylan explained his women characters, "Women are powerful figures, and I paint them that way" (Dylan, *The Brazil Series* 187). The Iron sword becomes an actor in this strength, but it is also evident that the iron actor plays an ambiguous role. The iron actor carries both mental strength and fear with it and expresses both the possibilities and the shady sides of modernity.

Iron and steel are the protagonists of the fundamental, productive opposites of Dylan's artwork. In his newest wrought iron works we find both fairytale constructions, critiques of modernity and mythical images.

Dylan's sculptures incorporate found objects including farm equipment, children's toys, wheels, axes, cogs, industrial waste and even antique firearms. These actors revitalize the iron waste of modernity.

## Conclusion

Dylan's artwork is a universal poetry in the sense of Schlegel, with themes that move in and out of artforms, carried by a fundamental artistic ambition and the expressive power of progress. But his artwork is also a work-net with numerous actors in the sense of Bruno Latour. Using Schlegel, we can highlight thematic contexts, the original use of genres and the unifying and never-ending freedom-seeking tendency in Dylan's work. With Latour we can follow the actors and their branching in Dylan's art and the work's interaction with uncountable other artistic and cultural actors. Both conceptual frameworks thus bring us closer to an understanding of Dylan's epoch-making oeuvre and its many genres.

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# Severo Sarduy and the Big Bang: The Poietic Catastrophe

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**Abstract** By channelling into his poetry the events of the *Big Bang*, Severo Sarduy made his writing break into endless pieces. His critical commentators have tended to conceptualise this fact as a catastrophe which irradiates melancholy into human existence. This article, however, will argue that the *Big Bang* in Sarduy's imaginary works as *poiesis*. Challenging the reasons that have taken Sarduyan criticism to implement such a gloomy outlook on the function of the *Big Bang* in the Cuban's author — mainly the mirroring of the primordial explosion with the other cosmological decentering postulated by Kepler in the 17<sup>th</sup> century—, it will be argued that Severo Sarduy's poetics, in line with Deleuze, looks at the decentering caused by the explosion not as disenchantment of a wholeness lost but as the questioning of the grand narratives of the metaphysical being and the birth in geometrised space of paroxysm and endless metaphoricity.

**Key words** Severo Sarduy; Big Bang; catastrophe; poiesis; body without organs.

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## Introduction

Bang! And everything got started. This is the way the most reputed cosmological theory to date, the Big Bang, explains the origin of cosmos. It portrays a universe that gives birth to itself in a huge explosion: an ideal whole blows into a million pieces setting the resulting signs-fragments, the reality known to us, to forever drift away. Spermatic and nihilistic at the same time, what, ultimately, does it mean to be born in a blast? Is cosmos the biggest catastrophe ever or, on the contrary, the biggest claim to perfection?

In Latin American letters there has been no bigger literary effort to illustrate and understand the onto-epistemological consequences of springing from a catastrophic primordial explosion than those made by Severo Sarduy in some of his best known pieces of literature. The Cuban author, faithful to the maxim that any form of literature finds its inspiration in scientific discourses, especially cosmology due to its all-inclusive nature (*Barroco* 1197), sets up a “Biunivocal Correspondence” (“Correspondencia biunívoca” [*Big Bang*]) between the Big Bang and his poetry to configure a literary imaginary that, by imitating the rhythms of the universe, expands, broken and protean, along the space-time of the piece of paper<sup>1</sup>:

*blowsand*  
*dark light rectangle leathery mercury*  
*Moroccan mirror fossil sun*  
*burnt water*

(‘*arena soplada*  
*luz negra rectángulo azogue tafileteado*  
*espejo marroquí sol fósil*  
*agua quemada*’ [174])

Sarduyan criticism has tended to look at the function of the Big Bang in his poetry from a rather twilight perspective. The most common idea is that the fragmentation and the metamorphosis of the ideal hypermatter resulting from the primordial explosion condemn the world in general, and Sarduy’s *oeuvre* in particular, to exist without a center, forever lost in a haunting void which proliferates without control. In González Echevarría’s words: “In Sarduy there is no continuum; the source is

1 Unless indicated otherwise, all the translations into English hereafter are the authors’ since the works cited have not been translated into English.

always beyond the instant of separation, in a violence which is prior to its duration and which fragmented, in principle hopelessly, the world and its codes ... In Sarduy everything is in shreds" ('En Sarduy no hay continuo; la fuente est  m s all  del instante de separaci n en el tiempo, en una violencia anterior a su duraci n, que fragment , al parecer irremediablemente, el mundo y sus c digos ... En Sarduy hay rotos y jirones' [4]).

In clear contrast with the above-mentioned approach, this study will argue that in his poetry, especially in his book *Big Bang*, Sarduy might have integrated the fragmentation and the metamorphosis inherent in the primordial blast for reasons other than the nihilistic invocation. In the first place, we will suggest that the critical twilight outlook on the functioning of the Big Bang in the Cuban author's imaginary would have come from approaching this paradigm from stances more proper to Baroque cosmology than to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Later, around an updated, rigorously scientific reading of the Big Bang, we will discuss that the fragmentation and the metamorphosis permeating both the universe and the Sarduyan world after the explosion, far from functioning as death drives, reveal themselves as constructive impetuses which start the world, filling both cosmic matter and Sarduy's verses with an immense *poietic* potential, with *joie de vivre*.

Also from a *poietic* view, but this time from the philosophical perspective put forward by Deleuze and Guattari and Scherer and Hocquenghem, we will finally claim that the Cuban author makes use of fragmentation and metamorphosis to orchestrate an alternative onto-epistemology based on otherness and metaphoricity, whose main aim is to challenge the fixities and constraints of the metaphysical tradition.

### **Sarduy and the Big Bang: Critical Perspectives**

The echoes of the Big Bang in Sarduy's poetry have received wide critical attention (Fombona Iribarren; Gil and Iturralde; Rivero-Potter). In what comes out as a summary of all these contributions, Gonz lez Echevarr a argues that all of the forms of exile at work in Sarduy's literature — exile from the mother at birth, his political exile in Paris, and the exile from absolute knowledge brought about by postmodernity — come from a cosmological exile, that Big Bang which fragmented the stability of the primordial hypermatter condemning us for ever to live without a center, subject to endless metamorphosis and fragmentation processes (4).

Sarduy's exegetes have understood his literature precisely as an attempt to recover the ideal perfection that the universe had before the big explosions in his biography happened, especially that of cosmos. To quote Gonz lez Echevarr a:

“Sarduy’s texts, looked at both independently or as a whole, seek to get back to a stable origin; they transmit a great anxiety to get back to a razed plenitude that can only be recovered through common sense” (‘Los textos de Sarduy, ya sea independientemente o vistos en su conjunto, sufren de la nostalgia del origen; ansiedad de regreso a una plenitud asolada, a un conocimiento perdido que se recupera al cobrar el tino’ [3]). But, what does Sarduy’s alleged intention to go back to common sense result in? The critical opinion in this respect is unanimous: all the routes the Cuban would open to go back to the state of perfection prior to the original blast are soaked in accented pessimism (Aponte; Burgos; González Echevarría; López; Méndez Ródenas; Solotorevsky; Valdesueiro). It seems, then, Sarduy could not meet his objective to “go back to common sense,” to overcome the debacle of the origin, since the never ending fragmentation and metamorphosis caused by the Big Bang always transform his anxiety to totality into frustration. These two forces would reveal themselves as death drives: “Leaving behind just the flickering trace of their own absence, the only solution is death—or its equivalent, the disintegration of the object, and hence, of the character chasing after the object” (‘Dejando sólo tras de sí la huella titilante de su ausencia, la única salida es la muerte — o su equivalente, la desintegración — del objeto y, por ende, de los personajes que persiguen al objeto’ [López 93]). In sum, for these critics, Sarduy’s project, on being full of fragmentation and metamorphosis coming from the big explosion, can just portray the ineffability of the world. It would prove that after the Big Bang both mankind and reality cannot be imagined, represented any more, unless as a collection of fragments or dissolution in nothingness.

What comes as a surprise about this critical way of conceiving the onto-epistemological decentering brought about by the Big Bang is its similarity with the other major cosmological decentering Kepler systematized in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Hereafter, it will be our contention that, despite the temporal and conceptual difference separating both models, most of Sarduy’s exegetes have equated the functions of the two paradigms, controversially investing Sarduyan fragmentation and metamorphosis with the same melancholy and existential anguish these two forces had in 17<sup>th</sup> century cosmology. This hypothesis is not negligible, since on proving true, it would provoke a radical change in the understanding of the function of the Big Bang in the Sarduyan imaginary.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century is the first time in Western history in which mankind does not exist around the idea of the center. Kepler discovers that the universe, the measurement of all that happens on Earth, works around the ellipse and not the only center. As highlighted by Sarduy, the quake is a big one:

The world of certainties granted by an idea of the universe centered around the earth, or even — Copernicus — ordered around the sun, suddenly swings. There were not perfect platonic orbits around the sun anymore, circles dissolved: everything elongated, everything got deformed as if following the elasticity of an anamorphosis so as to comply with the monstrous course of the ellipse — or with the course of its rhetorical double, the ellipsis that was giving way to illegible alembicated poems ... Early Baroque men are witnesses to a world that vacillates: for them, Kepler’s model of the universe seems to portray an aberrant, unstable, uselessly decentered reality.

(‘El mundo de certezas que le hab a garantizado la imagen de un universo centrado en la tierra, o aun —Cop rnico— ordenado alrededor del Sol, de pronto bascula. Terminaban las  rbitas plat nicas perfectas alrededor del Sol, se deshac an los c rculos: todo se alargaba, se deformaba como siguiendo la elasticidad de una anamorfosis, para conformarse con el trazado monstruoso de la elipse — o con el de su doble ret rico, la elipsis, que engendraba poemas ilegibles, alambicados ... El hombre del primer barroco es el testigo de un mundo que vacila: el modelo kepleriano del universo le parece dibujar una escena aberrante, inestable, in tilmente descentrada’ [*Nueva inestabilidad* [1371]).

As Francisco Jarauta highlights, one of the ways Baroque men have to deal with the sense of disorientation brought about by the loss of the fixed center is to put matter into movement, either by fragmenting it or by making it proliferate without control. In historic Baroque, then, fragmentation and metamorphosis are desperate attempts to fill in the *horror vacui* into which a suddenly off-center human existence had fallen (70). In historic Baroque, therefore, fragmentation and metamorphosis would enact a failure — the impossibility of recovering the lost center and the immense feeling of existential void that would trigger. The similarities between what baroque men felt after Kepler’s turn, at least as Jarauta and Sarduy himself put it, and the way Sarduyan criticism interpreted the function of the Big Bang in his literary imaginary share such a similar sense of nihilistic disorientation that it seems there has been a transposition of functions that obviates, as will be suggested next, the divergent specificity of both systems.

It is Sarduy himself who in two of his best essays, *Barroco* and *Nueva Inestabilidad*, warns about the danger of setting up too superficial analogies

between the cosmological decentering of baroque times and that caused by the Big Bang, which he calls neobaroque. The latter is revolutionary and does not regret losing the center. On the contrary, it is cause for celebration: “Neobaroque: necessarily crushed-to-pieces reflection of a knowledge which is aware of not being placidly folded onto itself. Art of the overthrowing and the challenge” (‘Neobarroco: reflejo necesariamente pulverizado de un saber que se sabe que ya no está apaciblemente cerrado sobre sí mismo. Arte del destronamiento y la discusión’ [*Barroco* [1253]). The neobaroque ethos, as pointed out later by the Cuban author, is quite special: “Baroque that on swinging, on falling, on implementing a flowery language that sometimes is strident and chaotic, metaphorizes the impugnation of the logocentric entity which until that time structured us from its distant position and authority; Baroque that challenges any form of founding, which metaphorizes the discussed order, the judged God, the transgressed law. Baroque of the revolution” (‘Barroco que en su acción de bascular, en su caída, en su lenguaje pinturero, a veces estridente, abigarrado y caótico, metaforiza la impugnación de la entidad logocéntrica que hasta entonces lo y nos estructuraba desde su lejanía y su autoridad; barroco que recusa toda instauración, que metaforiza al orden discutido, al dios juzgado, a la ley transgredida. Barroco de la Revolución’ [*Barroco* [1253]).

In *Nueva inestabilidad* Sarduy argues that “The mission of nowadays’ curious people, the mission of the spectator of the baroque ethos, is to detect in art the *retombée* or the reflection of a cosmology for which the origin is almost a certainty but the forms which followed it are an unconceivable hiatus” (‘La misión del curioso de hoy, la del espectador del barroco, es detectar en el arte la *retombée* o el reflejo de una cosmología para la cual el origen es casi una certeza pero las formas que lo sucedieron un hiato inconcebible’ [1370]). Later he suggests being can exist without a fixed origin, without a center, always projecting itself towards metaphoricity: “the fortuitous gathering of a set of small variants was necessary for a spectacular result to happen: the origin known to us has always been *about not to happen*, always about to swing” (‘la reunión fortuita de toda una serie de pequeñas variantes fue necesaria para que un resultado espectacular se produjera: el origen que conocemos ha estado siempre *a punto de no producirse*, siempre a punto de bascular’ [1370]).

### **The Big Bang as Paroxysm**

In light of the arguments put forward in the previous section, it seems Sarduy advises not undertaking a twilight reading of the Big Bang in his poetics. Why does he, then, invoke the primordial explosion into his verses? What alternative reading

to the nihilistic stance can be undertaken and what is it based on? Post Big Bang fragmentation and metamorphosis, this study will claim, have two main productive functions in Sarduy’s poetics: on the one hand, the impulse of both paroxysm and the material sensuality of reality, and, on the other, the challenge of the form of being promoted by the metaphysical tradition, aspects that cannot be studied if the Big Bang and its results are interpreted from 17<sup>th</sup> century cosmological principles. For these two ideas to defy the customary way the Big Bang has been understood in Sarduy, for the *poietic* turn to happen, first it will be necessary to go straight to the very center of the explosion from a scientific-philosophical perspective.

In order to truly understand the functions of fragmentation and metamorphosis in the orchestration of cosmos as portrayed by the Big Bang, it is necessary first to reflect upon the slippery, almost inapprehensible, nature of its and our origin. As Hawking and Mlodinov, Livio, Longhair or Singh point out, cosmos has not always been as human beings experience it now — a flow of bodies-planets. It stems, however, from another state which is much more difficult to conceptualize. Provided that in the universe everything runs away from everything else, in a prior state, the galaxies needed to be closer to each other than now and at a much higher temperature. The more remote in time, the greater the proximity and the heat would be, to the point it is easy to imagine an instant when all the galaxies would be concentrated in a very small and extremely hot volume. In this sort of ubiquitous cosmic “jam” matter, space, and time would be so comprised and at such high temperature that the universe would be a point of infinite density and, therefore, extremely difficult to imagine. Given its special characteristics, that first moment of cosmos could not be but ideal and impossible, a sheer paradox. The mathematician Alexander Friedmann, whom Malcom Longhair quotes in his book *Origins of the Universe*, describes it as a “singularity of infinite density and physically paradoxical” (‘singularidad de densidad infinita y f sicamente parad jica’ [7]). Ineffable and inapprehensible, the best way to define the primordial dimension of the origin is through the literary metaphor: what are Friedmann’s words and the concept of mathematical singularity it leads to but one of those jewel-like metaphors so abundant in Baroque literature?

Sarduy, a master in metaphors, is not far behind Friedmann and also uses this trope to imagine such a dimension. In the manner of G ngora, he writes that “in the beginning —   *ceci pr s*: that there is no beginning — it was the white color: slow and milky spiral, knot of snowed dwarfs, helix of semen” (‘al principio —   *ceci pr s*: que no hay principio — era el blanco: lenta espiral l ctea, nudo de enanos nevados, h lice de semen’ [*Autorretratos* [19])). This symbolic stage of the origin

metaphorically comprised all of the imaginable realizations of what later would become the attributes of cosmos: space, time, and matter, even in its realizations to come, since the universe is still expanding and most of the energy that was liberated in the blast is still to incarnate in new spaces, times, and matters. But at this stage it was impossible to talk about matter, time and space, since these concepts were not themselves yet. Instead, they were potentially inscribed in an energetic medium that, did not look like a thing at all: it was just sheer signification devoid of representation, as Sarduy himself admits, borrowing an idea by Ernst Cassirer (*Barroco* 1243).

Let it be, therefore, a universe that finds its origin in an ideal state, a sheer paradox. How does the universe evolve from its paradoxical state of ideality to its real stage? How does the universe that human beings experience spring? Because of a Big Bang that sets in motion, that actualizes, the potentiality inherent in the ideal state making the universe. Sarduy imagines the process as follows:

Galaxies seem to move away from each other at a considerable speed.  
 The most distant ones run away at two hundred three thousand kilometers per second, nearly the speed of light.  
 The universe swells.  
 We are witness to the result of a great explosion.

(‘Las galaxias parecen alejarse unas de otras a velocidades considerables. Las más lejanas huyen con la aceleración de doscientos treinta mil kilómetros por segundo, próxima a la de la luz.  
 El universo se hincha.  
 Asistimos al resultado de una gigantesca explosión’ [*Big Bang* [165]).

The ideal dimension of cosmos that until that moment has sweetly been dormant in the stability of its infinite potentiality blows into a million pieces. It becomes aware of itself in the great explosion-expansion of the origin, the result being cosmos, that is not anything else but the actualization of part of the infinite potentiality it contained. In Sarduy’s own words, the universe is “another metaphor of the energy, what abruptly unfolds from the breaking of the primordial egg, *ylem* or potentiality state” (‘una metáfora más de la energía, lo que abruptamente se despliega en la ruptura del huevo primitivo, *ylem* o estado puntual’ [*Barroco* [243]).

The universe after the great explosion incarnates in matter: “May it be a material radiation, the archaeological trace of its initial blast, beginning of the

expansion of signs, a phonetic vibration which is constant and isotropic, murmur of language: steady friction of consonants, open undulation of vowels” (“Sea una radiaci3n material, el vestigio arqueol3gico de su estallido inicial, comienzo de la expansi3n de signos, vibraci3n fon3tica constante e isotr3pica, rumor de lengua de fondo: frote uniforme de consonantes, ondulaci3n abierta de vocales” [*Nueva inestabilidad* [1246])). But the expansion of cosmic *physis* in itself cannot explain the structuring of reality which obviously does not just show as a continuous flow of matter projecting towards infinity, but also as discrete units — protons to quasars have a body.

It seems, thus, that cosmic matter simultaneously comprises opposing drives: its tendency to expand beyond itself co-exists with its opposite, its self, whose most dramatic form would be the breaking, the fragmentation, of the material continuum. Shaped after the great explosion as a dance between fragmentation and metamorphosis, it can be stated that these two impetuses are the clearest proof that reality has started its journey. Here it is the main function of fragmentation and metamorphosis in the Big Bang: they inaugurate reality and, in doing so, they move cosmos away from the realm of the paradox by locating human beings before the vast and metaphorical horizon of being.

Would it be improper to imagine Sarduy approaching the fragmentation and the metamorphosis of his poetics from the onto-epistemological richness these two drives have in the above-referred cosmological context, or, on the contrary, are they nihilistic forces filling Sarduy’s imaginary with indecibility as suggested by that critical line which interprets the facts of the Big Bang from the pessimism of 17<sup>th</sup> century Kepler’s decentering? If, as discussed earlier on, Sarduy already warned in his essayistic work about the dangers of implementing this second exegetic path, in his poetry this aim is even clearer. Let his texts speak.

Sarduy designs most of his poetics as a mini-cosmos where texts seek to set parallels between cosmic facts like dark holes, nebulas, red giants or blue dwarfs — that he represents in italics in his texts — and terrestrial bodies, most of the times parts of the human anatomy. In “Crab” (“Cangrejo” [*Big Bang*]), for instance, Sarduy links the energy emitted by the homonymous nebula, scientifically explained in the first part of the poem, with the sparkles of the jewels that ornate the body of desire in the second part of the poem. There is a complete transfer of attributes and, in the end, the body and its jewels are portrayed as if they were the Crab nebula:

*The astronomer [Friedmann] discovered that nine percent of the X flow was emitted in the form of pulsations. The energy of each pulsation is equivalent to*

*what the whole of our civilisation could produce, in the form of electricity, in ten million years.*

Walls of amulets, lit lamps: slow ellipsis.

Through the parallel glasses open up, covered in bangles, among brutal stones, prised green bands, silver of a cloth.

A turban, burnt untidy hair; before his eyes two gold rings: the smoke from a cup of tea steams them.

*(‘El astrónomo [Friedmann] encontró que un nueve por ciento del flujo X de la nebulosa se emitía en forma de pulsaciones. La energía de cada pulsación es equivalente a la que nuestra civilización pudiera producir, en forma de electricidad, durante diez millones de años.*

Muros de amuletos, lámparas encendidas: elipses lentas.

A través de los cristales paralelos, cubiertos de pulseras, entre piedras brutales, Se abren prismadas franjas verdes, plata de un paño.

Turbante, greñas quemadas; ante los ojos dos aros de oro: el humo del té los empaña’ [168])

In a similar way, in “Fossil Light” (“Luz fósil” [*Big Bang*]) Sarduy finds the replica of the cosmic microwave background radiation in earthly objects. Its reflections can be measured “in the edge of a fish, / in the eye of fireflies, / in the sura of a date’s shadow” (“en la arista de un pez, / en el ojo del cocuyo, / en la sura de la sombra del dátil” [174]). This is the same pattern Sarduy uses in “Sun” (“Sol” [*Big Bang*]), a poem in which he reciprocates qualities of this star and aspects of the material reality: the power of the sun lives in the “white pheasant,” in the “lemon” in the “dry saffron dust.” Its reflection “inside out” can be found in “the bare feet” which “the water” projects onto the “wall.” The shape of the sun is the measurement and the origin of all “circle,” and the energy of its radiation of all “buzz.” As the poem’s layout seems to suggest, reality stems from and goes back to the sun, it is inscribed between the “sun” which opens the poem and the “sun” which closes it:

SUN

lemon	white pheasant	
bare feet		dry saffron dust
in the water	inside out	the wall
	buzz	



nature that the Big Bang gives Sarduyan verses has been eviscerated — to which Sarduy's warning against mirroring Big Bang and Baroque cosmologies should be added — the conclusion to draw is that the nihilistic approach implemented by Sarduyan criticism regarding the function of the original blast in his imaginary comes from an anachronistic reading of this event, at least in the light of how contemporary science explains it. The consequences of this omission are significant, since analyzing the function of the primordial blast from the gloominess of the baroque reading, does not only close the door to a paroxystic and foundational view of it, but it also impedes the exploration of its most important philosophical consequence: what the Big Bang blows into a million pieces is the rigidity of the metaphysical being, a turn that, as discussed in the next section, Sarduy does also imbricate into his poetic imaginary.

### **The Big Bang and the Crisis of the Metaphysical Being**

Throughout its history Western philosophy, which Derrida refers to as metaphysical, has claimed that the meaning and truth of things and beings happen from a luring center exterior to being itself. Being, therefore, would always stem from an original presence determined by the capacity to reason and its forms—especially language. From this paradigm, the mind, thinking, and language are prior to being itself and control it to suit from its transcendent position. For Derrida, in the end, the modality of being which the metaphysical tradition promotes goes against the idea of being as free play, a free play that “has always being neutralized, reduced by means of a conscious interest in anchoring it down onto a center, in referring it to a point of presence, to a fixed origin” (321). If, from a cosmological point of view, the Big Bang with its processes of fragmentation and metamorphosis revealed itself as a foundational and paroxystic drive, from a philosophical point of view, rather than in order to signify existential uneasiness, Sarduy uses it to question grand narratives, the monolithic certainties inherent in the metaphysical being.

The philosophical possibilities of the Big Bang have been widely addressed by French ontological materialist thinkers such as Deleuze and Guattari and Scherer and Hocquenghem. These thinkers, just like Sarduy, conceive of the Big Bang as a platform of ontological openness aimed at challenging the fixities of the metaphysical being. These four philosophers, the former two in *One Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and the latter two in *The Atomic Heart: Defining the Aesthetics of the Nuclear Age (L'Âme atomique: Pour une esthétique d'ère nucléaire)* conclude that, if after the Big Bang and the resulting fragmentation and metamorphosis processes, contemporary reality stops being thought of as

ordered and integral to manifest itself as multidimensional and ever changing, this is not, by any means, a symptom of melancholy. On the contrary, as Hocquenghem and Scherer point out, after the primordial blast our soul might find itself trapped in a vortex that aims to dissolve it, but, instead of being scared, it fully opens, restless and vital (17-18). For these two philosophers, the fragmentary and ever changing nature of our reality as portrayed by the Big Bang reveals itself as “appetitus,” “tireless tensions, which living in the absence of rest, affirm the creation of the world in all its points” (‘infatigables tensions, vivant dans l’absence de repos affirmant la cr ation du monde en tous ses points’ [72]). This “appetitus,” they continue later, “affirms existence against the negative simplicity of nothingness. The circle of cosmos is broken, there is no center anymore, it [‘appetitus’] dares divinity appear everywhere as everything is decentered, and for it any appearance is divine. ‘Here’, centers of proliferation, are everywhere: such is modern divinity” (‘affirme le plus de l’existence contre la simplicit  n gative du rien. Il cercle du cosmos est bris , qu’il n’y a plus de centre, il d fie le divin d’appara tre en tout lieu, puisque tout est d centr , et du coup traite toute apparition comme divine. Partout des «ici», des centres de prolif ration: tel est le divin moderne’ [72]).

It is easy to find in Sarduy’s poems this restless and vital onto-epistemology, this modern form of divinity, around which Scherer and Hocquenghem understand a post Big Bang world. “Farruca” will suffice to illustrate my claim. The poem manifests itself as a textual reflection of cosmos’ longing for otherness which, ultimately, aims to break that hypothetical filial doubt that being would have with a presence extrinsic to itself, with an original center around which being would hierarchically organize its existence:

WITHIN A WHITE CUBE	the body is a volume
SUPERIMPOSED EDGES	
THE BODY	opaque dimensions
ANAMORPHOSIS OF SPACE	
IT DISPLAYS ITS BOXES	the body is a system
THE BODY IS A MACHINE	
THE BODY IS A VOLUME	fixed by a scaffold
VOLUMES OF OCHRE	
OPAQUE DIMENSIONS	the body is a machine
GREY SURFACES	
THE BODY IS A SYSTEM	within a white cube
WITHIN A WHITE CUBE	

FIXED BY A SCAFFOLD	superimposed edges
THE BODY	
THE BODY IS A MACHINE	anamorphosis of space
IT DISPLAYS ITS BOXES	
WITHIN A WHITE CUBE	volumes of ochre
A FICTICIOUS VOLUME	
THE PAGE IS A CUBE	grey surfaces
THE LOOK IS ITS ACCOMPLICE	
ANY BODY IS A CUBE	within a white cube
VOLUMES OF OCHER	
ANY CUBE A SPHERE	the body
GREY SURFACES	
ANY BODY TRANSFORMS	within a white cube
WITHIN A WHITE CUBE	
ITS EDGES INTO ANOTHER BODY	the body displays its boxes
(‘DENTRO DE UN CUBO BLANCO	el cuerpo es un volumen
ARISTAS SUPERPUESTAS	
EL CUERPO	dimensiones opacas
ANAMORFOSIS DEL ESPACIO	
ENARBOLA SUS CAJAS	el cuerpo es un sistema
EL CUERPO ES UNA MÁQUINA	
EL CUERPO ES UN VOLUMEN	que un andamiaje fija
VOLÚMENES DE OCRE	
DIMENSIONES OPACAS	el cuerpo es una máquina
SUPERFÍCIES GRISÁCEAS	
EL CUERPO ES UN SISTEMA	dentro de un cubo blanco
DENTRO DE UN CUBO BLANCO	
QUE UN ANDAMIAJE FIJA	aristas superpuestas
EL CUERPO	
EL CUERPO ES UNA MÁQUINA	anamorfosis del espacio
ENARBOLA SUS CAJAS	
DENTRO DE UN CUBO BLANCO	volúmenes de ocre
UN VOLUMEN FICTICIO	
LA PÁGINA ES UN CUBO	superficies grisáceas
CÓMPLICE LA MIRADA	

TODO CUERPO ES UN CUBO	dentro de un cubo blanco
VOL3MENES DE OCRE	
TODO CUBO UNA ESFERA	el cuerpo
SUPERFICIES GRIS3CEAS	
TODO CUERPO CONVIERTE	dentro de un cubo blanco
DENTRO DE UN CUBO BLANCO	
SUS ARISTAS EN OTRO el cuerpo	el cuerpo
enarbola sus cajas' [ <i>Big Bang</i> [145])	

“Farruca” shows as a collaboration between the drives that come after the primordial blast: fragmentation —understood as a tendency to shape, as the interruption of the material flux in bodies, may they be “a machine,” “grey surfaces,” “a system” or “a white cube” — and the metamorphosis which the continuous change of skin of matter points to. The formal impossibility that impregnates the poem is, no doubt, due to the operating capacity of metamorphosis, to the fact that this dynamic makes matter enter into an endless chain of proliferations whose very expression annihilates any possible stable shape. Because of this metamorphosis, the signifiers leave behind a form that is too brief to be able to take a fixed position — how would this be possible? If, for an instant, the matter of “Farruca” sets in “volumes of ochre,” “grey surfaces,” “machines,” or “opaque dimensions,” this formal illusion lasts very little. Since everybody is, in turn, another body, ultimately the body could just manifest itself as a continuous flow of material “soup” whose main commitment is to structure and dis-structure itself endlessly just to show its flesh. Fragmentation and metamorphosis cause the material continuum never to focus, since its limits are always active. In a nutshell, “Farruca” is a carnal open-ended flow made of a mix of material and movement realizations that affirm and deny themselves at the same time.

The concept of the universe and the onto-epistemological model “Farruca” points to, on being based on an endless play of presences and absences, of modulations of otherness, challenge the fixities of the metaphysical being, offering as an onto-epistemological alternative the BwO (body without organs). Arriving at similar conclusions to those of the restless and vital ethos of Scherer and Hocquengem’s, Deleuze and Guattari use this idea to argue that the Big Bang, far from making human beings fall into indecibility and nihilism, puts forward “an intensive non-differentiated reality in which things, organs, differ from each other just by gradients, migrations, range zones.” For them, cosmos after the Big Bang would be the BwO par excellence. Does “Farruca” not show as well, using an idea

Deleuze and Guattari apply to the universe, as a BwO, as a “block of becomings, a map of compared densities and intensities, and all the variations in that map” (168)?

It seems so. Being in “Farruca” clearly promotes its maximum existential openness. In doing so, unlike in the metaphysical tradition, it is not forced to choose an always-imposed-a priori identity. Instead, being just shows its becomings: “the body / the body / displays its boxes.” “Farruca,” in the end, proves again that the Big Bang in Sarduy’s poetry is eligible to be read constructively. If in “Sun” and “Crab” the Big Bang filled everything with paroxysm, in “Farruca” it aims to liberate being from the metaphysical constraints of the center and transcendence, promoting, in contrast, a restless and vital BwO that projects itself towards the realm of the endless possibility, sheer *poiesis*.

### Conclusion

The processes of fragmentation and metamorphosis that so distinctively permeate Sarduy’s work have been associated by criticism with the ineffability into which human beings and cosmos would fall after the Big Bang. From this approach, the primordial explosion would shape a reality that can just be imagined as a death drive that leads to nihilism. This article, in contrast, has argued, by analyzing Sarduy’s book of poems *Big Bang*, that these two impetuses are also eligible to work constructively. There are two main reasons to sustain such claim. Firstly, if the explosions at the heart of Sarduy’s poetry are looked at from contemporary, properly scientific, perspectives — something Sarduy suggests in two of his best essays *Barroco* and *Nueva inestabilidad* — and not from 17<sup>th</sup> century stances as his critical commentators have tended to do, fragmentation and metamorphosis show as unstoppable paroxysm, as the drives making Sarduyan cosmos.

Secondly, Sarduy creates a poetic world made of shreds and ever changing skin to undertake a crusade against the monolithic being of the metaphysical tradition, to demonstrate that the belief in a centered and harmonious reality upon which, until recently, modern societies had been built proves to be a clear way to frustrate the access of life towards otherness. In this light, Sarduy, just like Deleuze or Hocquengem, uses the Big Bang to go beyond the 17<sup>th</sup> century cosmological decentering: this contemporary decentering is not a symptom of disenchantment and anguish anymore. On the contrary, its drives — fragmentation and metamorphosis — would transform Baroque melancholy into an off-center form of being whose ultimate aim is to present itself as infinite metaphoricity in its hunger to exist. Bang!, Sarduy reminds his readers, never was a catastrophe so *poietic*!

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# Discursive Vulnerability and Identity Development: A Triangular Model of Bio-forces in Cultural Ecological Analysis of American Romance Fiction

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**Abstract** This multidisciplinary study examines the discursive representation of vulnerability in Debbie Macomber's bestseller, *A Girl's Guide to Moving On* (2016). It is conducted in the light of the psychosocial theories focusing on self-others interaction and identity development of the selected heroines. Also, by applying Brené Brown's theoretical understanding of vulnerability as a social work construct, Hubert Zapf's cultural ecology theorization, and Foucauldian notion of power, the present paper elucidates the ways in which vulnerability concept can be used as a lens to look at its impact on identity development of the selected heroines. Given its negative and dark stance usually associated with notions of weakness, frailty, grief, despair etc., vulnerability is discussed as a result of a metadiscourse in socio-cultural system which is created out of human intimate relationships and emotions such as trust and love. However, if being recognized and embraced, vulnerability can be seen as an imaginary counter-discourse which gains its potential only by self, interacting with the society. The analysis shows that the re-integrative inter-discourse as embodied in re-connection, results in love and belonging within the cultural reality-system. It concludes that how the proposed triad conceptualization of vulnerability traces the interpersonal relationships to reconstructing a new self.

**Key words** vulnerability; cultural ecology; Debbie Macomber; contemporary American romance fiction; self-others interaction; psychosocial theories of

development

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### **Vulnerability: The Paradoxical Key to Connection and Development of the Self**

Given its centrality in all human emotions (Brown, "Daring Greatly" 5), vulnerability plays an important role in love and romantic relationships as thematised in contemporary romance fiction. The concept, in general has negative connotations, mostly attributed by dark emotions such as weakness, sadness, fragility and helplessness. In Merriam-Webster, according to Brown, vulnerability denotes "open to attack or damage" or "capable of being wounded" which interestingly converges with the definition of "weakness" as "the inability to withstand attack or wounding" (20). However, a more thorough outlook towards the term, makes vulnerability as key to human communications and interactions, due to its productive potential in assisting the psychosocial identity development (Erikson, "The Life Cycle Completed" 28). So, the term is an essential component of human connection and growth if only being recognized and embraced.

Vulnerability could be considered as a paradoxical concept in the way it associates with negative emotions, while simultaneously is essential to human interactions and development. The contradictory essence of vulnerability beside its functional role in human culture, makes the concept compatible with cultural ecology's theorization of literature developed by Hubert Zapf. Based on Zapf's theory, literature's unique potential of creative and cognitive power is driven from a triadic dynamic including a cultural-critical meta-discourse, an imaginative counter-discourse and a re-integrative inter-discourse ("Literature as Cultural Ecology" 138-141). It is hypothesized that the fear experienced by the characters of the novel is the outcome of a normative social negative attitude towards life emotional crisis. This is the socially-established way of thinking that should be criticized since it only considers the negative aspects of vulnerability which ascribes to characters'

fear, shame, frustration, failure and despair; However, according to psychological theories, even though crisis is traumatic and threatening to human's life, it could be regarded as an opportunity to either growth or decline (Updegraff and Taylor 20). Accordingly, embracing vulnerability by the characters of the novel could be considered as a counterforce to the discussed meta-discourse which they use to break up the social repressive cliché and attitude towards crisis. In this regard, the meaning of being vulnerable and helpless due to a threatening situation could be changed into a productive opportunity to challenge the meta-discourse. This positive challenging mindset in turn, provides a constructive opportunity in which the characters take action and struggle to start over and to move on by the help of their experience and change they had been going through after a crisis. Therefore, self-other re-connection or the re-integration of meta- and counter-discourse emerges when the characters are able to move on that crisis and recognize, embrace and overcome their fears and take their vulnerability for granted to develop a new sense of self.

It is also assumed that the unravelling and resilience proceeded by the heroines' embracing vulnerability symbolically implies the empowerment of the main characters who challenge the social norm naturalized by being integrated to everyday life. This power defines what they are (Sindic et al. 2). According to Foucault power is discursive and relational that is exercised unevenly in the society throughout the social bodies (McLaren 37, 64). In this vein, the current examination of identity developmental process which is conducted in the light of the psychosocial theories and defines self as the social being, heavily influenced by the social interactions, is compatible with the ways in which power is exercised. One of the main significant social concepts between self and others is communication and the effective factors that help breaking the social constraints and achieve a balanced self-other interaction throughout the developmental process via overcoming the fear and shame of being vulnerable to those socio-culturally accepted stereotypes.

Furthermore, communication as one of the human's natural needs plays an influential role in shaping human culture and giving meaning into our life in today's era (Castells 4; ch. 1). Therefore, being a key to connection, vulnerability is of great importance which should be accepted and embraced as a "gift of imperfection" (Brown, "The Gifts of Imperfection" 13) by the individuals. This embracement will function as a counteraction and a medium which can facilitate self-reconstruction process. The current paper will explore the ways in which vulnerability is represented within the selected novel when being experienced and embraced by the main characters in response to the cultural-critical metadiscourse that ultimately

leads to reconnection and development of the self.

For the current analysis, a romance fiction bestseller, *A Girl's Guide to Moving On* (2016) written by the American author Debbie Macomber is selected. The novel portrays the two female protagonists – Leanne (the mother-in-law) and Nicole (her daughter-in-law) – who are struggling to move on their husbands' infidelity and the emotional crisis proceeds through the ways they deal with their vulnerable status. The objectives of the present study are first, to examine the ways in which being vulnerable, fearful and shameful of a life crisis such as divorce influence the selected heroines' development. Second, the current paper analyses the ways in which the selected protagonists counteract with the normative social negative attitude towards divorce by resorting to their own attributes, hope for a better future, and courage. Finally, to synthesize the ways in which embracing vulnerability by the heroines could lead to an inter-discourse through sense of love, belonging and developing a new self.

### **Vulnerability and the Romance Fictions**

The ubiquity of the notion of vulnerability has placed the term at the centre of so many studies in humanities and social science during recent decades (Ganteau 2, 7, 12). It covers a broad range of topics in diverse multidisciplinary fields such as psychology, sociology, geography and environmental studies and so on. Within the literary canon and specifically contemporary fictional narratives, vulnerability has been examined in terms of its relationships to many fields of research including poetics, politics, ethics and trauma studies with a focus on the female protagonists of the novel (Ganteau and Onega 1-16). The previous research studied vulnerability as the notion related to diverse disciplines and approaches such as trauma studies and the theories of ethics, care, feminism psychology, ecological and sociological perspectives (Goodin 1-208; Gilligan 1-185; McKenzie et al. 1-317; Hirsch 1-2; Vital 297-313) However, these studies consider a negative value for the concept of vulnerability and attempt to reduce the negative effects it brings up. Yet, the viewpoint that the present study holds is opposite to the normative negative one which also considers the positive dimension of the term in human's life and the essential role it plays in the process of identity development via its effect in the interpersonal relationships. Given the fictional context of literature, the vulnerability as represented in contemporary romance narratives denotes the very basic feature of the heroine which although it creates traumatic experience, it leads to growth and development of the character.

The general definition of the term vulnerability has roots in its Latin origin,

“Vulnerare” which means “to wound” (Patterson 1). Accordingly, being vulnerable in different contexts is usually described as being exposed to harm and wound associated with concepts of weakness, vanquish and frailty. However, within the context of human relationships and social interactions in general and the intimate love relationships in particular, vulnerability becomes a condition that forms and opens up the gates to love, intimacy and closeness (Brown, “The Gifts of Imperfection” 5-17; *Daring Greatly* 105) while simultaneously it makes lovers unarmed and exposed to be wounded. In the present paper, we attempt to examine the ways in which vulnerability, as a discursive term, is represented in selected contemporary romance fiction. Even though past studies mainly are concerned with the negative connotation of the term, little attention has been paid to discussion of vulnerability as a power tool which could be utilized in human developmental process. Hence, the current work tries to fill the gap by proposing a conceptual model consisting of the ways through which vulnerability could be looked at as a counter force to the meta-discourse of the present negative normative attitude towards life crisis in general, and divorce particularly, within the American society as the same system in which the term is originated.

Although vulnerability has been considered as weakness, frailty and the wounding capacity (Campana 12), it has been known as “the heart of romance” in which lovers are set (Ganteau 39; Pearce ch. 2). In his study, Ganteau regards wounding, sore hearts and being prone to a broken heart at the core of romantic affiliation as the origin where “contact and connection” (41) arise. However, the trauma followed by vulnerability as depicted in romantic narratives is repetitive which leads one to return, a view that causes the romance be seen as an open or incomplete mode (Parker 14, 35, 45, 60, 76, 87, 173). In this sense, vulnerability is the main cause of forming a vicious circle in which the protagonist risks by being prone to be hurt and giving one’s individuation in a desire for love and connection (Winterson 222). This metaphorical two-sided double blade, signifies the paradoxical and discursive nature of vulnerability; while being vulnerable increases the possibility of hurt feelings and wound, it functions as an important and fundamental element in forming love relationships among individuals. This feature in turn, challenges the purely negative connotation of the term and opens up a new venue to approach vulnerability not as a human weakness but as a substantial psychosocial factor in identity formation. Hence, a sense of risk-taking lies in the romance since departing “relentlessly” from one’s self or being vulnerable and exposed are preludes to “the quest for love” and intimate “connection” (Ganteau 41). However, if recognized and embraced, this exposure could be transformed to

an influential factor in interpersonal contexts on which identity development of the heroines is depended. Also, the aesthetics and ethical study of the term hold on the idea as vulnerability being imperative in human communications (41). “Individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically related in continual change” (Erikson, “Identity and the Life Cycle” 114). Given the social essence of human being by nature the current study takes on the idea of inevitable and pivotal presence of vulnerability in attachment and inter-connection.

Moreover, the representation of vulnerability in the romance as an empowerment tool for the oppressed has been previously studied (Fuchs 29). This type of vulnerability evocation in romance affirms the feminist perspective which marks the genre’s potential to dislocate politics (Radford 14-16; Pearce and Wisker 15) by distributing power in the society and giving voice to the powerless and the oppressed mostly women and slaves (Elam 23). Although the feminist point of view is beyond the scope of the present study, the empowering mechanism of vulnerability as an integral element in interpersonal human relationships constitutes one of the main concerns of the current analysis.

### **Vulnerability and the Triadic Dynamic of Romance Fictions**

The interaction between the individual and society has been the central idea of the psychosocial theories (Erikson, “Identity and the Life Cycle” 1-171; *Identity: Youth and Crisis* 1-336 ; *The Life Cycle Completed* 15-131). In the light of the psychosocial and developmental approaches and from this theoretical context, the importance of “love and romantic relationships” raises which is known as “the most intimate human communications which has connection with self-identity development” (Mazloomian et al. 167).

The interrelationship between psychological (self) and social (others) as the core idea of the psychosocial theories is also fundamental in cultural ecological theories such as Hubert Zapf’s. According to Zapf (“Ecocriticism” 137-139), cultural ecosystems play important role within human cultural system as a whole and literature significantly functions as one of the mentioned subsystems; it uses its internal potential of self-renewal and raises consciousness in an individual while at the same time it concerns with the self’s environment.

Furthermore, literature as a powerful symbolic form of cultural ecology celebrates the diversities, complexity and differences of the mind through the representation of cultural imagination, creation and social interactions that form the modern man’s cultural ecosystems. However, the individuals are vulnerable to standardized norms and overgeneralizations that are imposed by the surrounding

society. The power of literary innovation and cultural self-renewal lies in the interconnection of human and nature or the individual's mentality and the environmental/social forces (either human or non-human).

The unique potential of literary creative and cognitive power is driven from a triadic dynamic in its relationship to a more inclusive cultural system that are: "a cultural-critical metadiscourse, an imaginative counter-discourse, and a re-integrative inter-discourse" (Zapf, "Ecocriticism" 138). Through its textual form, does literature rebel against the rigid social ideologies, norms and structures, give voice to the marginalized and bridge the culturally-separated gap in between. In this regard, literature reciprocates the established interpretation of man's life by empowering the excluded or repressed halves of the self and the world. Therefore, based on this perspective, a balanced interconnection between the internal as well as external landscapes of humans -as both instinctual and cultural beings- is considered by means of literary products. The following paragraphs will discuss the current framework's approach to power and the significance of vulnerability in conceptualizing the ways in which imaginative counter-discourse is represented against the metadiscourse as explicated in the social norms and stereotypes within the selected corpus.

Further, the idea of power as to be "discursive rather than purely coercive" has been first coined by Foucault, based on which power "constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them" (Gaventa 1). Promoting norms, standards and stereotypes are what define the mechanism of this form of disciplinary power (Foucault, "Discipline and Punish" 170-230; Pylypa 21-35). In other words, Foucauldian understanding of power concerns with the ways in which norms impact individuals and their lives beyond their perception, by making them discipline themselves without any external forces. One of the ways of exercising power is discipline. Also, according to Foucault, power is exchanged and exercised on a relational basis in all human relationships, yet in different forms (Foucault, "Power/Knowledge" 98). This view mainly emphasizes the juxtaposition of the power as a relational entity causing a discursive practice to be emerged. This body of knowledge, in turn, determines the norms and controls what is defined as common, or socially accepted. One of the influential roles in exercising this form of discursive power is played by "communication networks" which causes the circulation and "production of knowledge" (Castells 5).

It is assumed that the metadiscourse as embodied in the negative attitude towards life crisis as focused in the current paper, stems from this type of normative social demands that oppress the individuals. Accordingly, it is attempted to offer a

way to resist against this constraint by following a conceptualized model that takes the discussed negativity at its centre. In other words, embracing vulnerability as represented in the selected novel highlights the ways to distribution of power in the society.

Respectively, social relationships and communications are regarded as the means to acknowledge about other value systems and beliefs rather than own in the developmental process. Although there is no coercion in accepting and conforming to the social norms, they are still considered as power being exercised which constraints the individual. Meanwhile, feeling vulnerable to the social constraints and against the socially defined ideology - once it is entrenched as everyday life's practice - is one of the influential factors in social communications of the self and environmental sources. So, the vulnerability experienced by the selected heroines of the novel within the psychological as well as social contexts is the main focus of this paper.

For the purpose of the current paper, the analysis is conducted within the three discourses as conceptualized by Zapf (138) with a focus on the self-others interaction and the concept of vulnerability. Within the first cultural-critical metadiscourse, the social normative view towards life crisis will be discussed. At this level, the discussion attempts to show how the novel as a metadiscourse culturally criticizes the socially-constituted system of interpretation that is normalized. The argument is based on the hypothesis of how the normative negative social attitude towards life crisis –divorce and emotional separation in the selected corpus- becomes a risk and threat for the heroines. Emotions of fear, shame, frustration and despair are the constructs and emotions resulted by this attitudinal restriction. Although the heroines need to be exposed in order to move on and to socially interact, they find it difficult and fearful and they choose “silence” to stay disconnected rather than facing with their fear of being vulnerable. Hence, the vulnerability at this level equals to a threatening factor in heroines' psychosocial lives.

The second analysis section is dedicated to the discussion on how the novel functions as “an imaginative counter-discourse articulating and valorising that which is excluded by the socially dominant systems of reality” (Bergthaller 1; Zapf, “Literature as Cultural Ecology” 95). In this case, the heroines begin to challenge the negative normative orientation toward divorce. It will be elaborated that how the main female characters' resistance and constructive mindset help them to change the risking opportunity into protection which in turn, conducts them to recognize their vulnerability and fear. So, at this level, they struggle to get themselves prepared

for a new life by embracing their fears as a counter-response to the oppressive metadiscourse. Therefore, courage, daring and hope are the key-concepts to be discussed.

Lastly, when the heroines put themselves at the line by embracing their vulnerability practically, they try to re-integrate the metadiscourse and counter-discourse to achieve a compromise. Consequently, at this level the heroines put their trust and vulnerability into practice to interact with the society. They struggle to negotiate a new relationship and a renewed life by the changes they make based on the experiences they gained. At this level, vulnerability is considered as a reproductive concept which re-connects self and others and results in a new love and sense of belonging which ultimately leads to develop the heroines' new sense of selves. In what follows a discussion is made in three subsections by employing the conceptualized framework described to examine the representation of the term vulnerability by the selected author.

### **Be Vulnerable, Stay Connected and Be Loved**

As being discussed earlier, communication involves being vulnerable and open to be wounded. That is why the concept has been viewed as a risk and negative factor which seemingly hinder human's psychosocial development. Because being vulnerable might cause hurt and pain and finally leads to a life crisis, there exists a negative normative attitude towards being vulnerable. So, the metadiscourse is this negative socially-normalized way of thinking towards the life crisis and vulnerability it causes. However, if being recognized, challenged and embraced, the discussed situation could be changed from risk to a protective tool leading one to a sense of love and re-connection as essential in developing a new self.

### **Metadiscourse: Vulnerability as a Negative Stand**

Being a form of emotional crisis, divorce could be considered as a platform from which one can either grow or decline. It is considered as "not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential" (Erikson, "Identity: Youth and Crisis" 96). However, it is difficult to think of the consequences of the mentioned crisis within the modern society that still considers divorce as a "taboo" due to the destructive changes it makes by "breaking the home" (Glaeser 1) and the social threatening effect it causes (Gilson 26, 76). As a result, people find it quite precarious and insecure to put in their trust and to invest on another love relationship with the risk of being hurt again. In this regard, the cultural-critical metadiscourse as embodied in the negative

orientation dominating the society and represented in the selected novel affects the individuals' way of coping with the distressing event. As a result, the individuals find themselves fearful, desperate, shameful and helpless when facing with the crisis.

Macomber clearly represents the American society's negative ideology towards divorce in her novel through the fear the heroines feel for the following psychological and social influences on their lives. For example, we read how Nicole's "social life dried up" once she "filed for divorce". Even though Nicole seems not to care about becoming a "third wheel" in their married-life friendships, she was annoyed by the way the "so-called friends ... gossip" about her married life as well as her husband's "indiscretions" (Girl's Guide 6). Beside social exclusion experienced by the heroine, Nicole was fearful of other consequences of divorce. For instance, she is scared of "being alone", "finances" and lack of "support" which all make the distressing event a "complete upheaval" in her life (4). However, she is not sure of being able to "ever trust him again" rather than to continue to live with her husband (89); Nicole's confusion and doubt on whether to finalize her divorce or to forgive her husband and return to live with him again implicitly conveys her psychosocial conflict; on the one hand, she feels so terrible and devastating as if her "heart pounded like the judge's gavel, securing the nails in the coffin of my marriage" when she looks at the final signed and recorded divorce papers (144), while on the other hand, she feels to be surrendered by "a deep sense of loss and unreality" (19). Therefore, it is difficult for the heroine to strike a balance between how miserable she feels about putting an end to her married life and equally how undaunted and insistent she is on her decision to get divorced. Although it could be said that the discussed conflict has psychological basis as it deals with the character's emotions and feelings, it could also be viewed as her serious and intense concern about the social consequences of her divorce. Evidently, the death imagery as the writer uses emphasizes the notion of the divorce as being extremely mortal and dismal against life.

Also, the unwelcoming and despising feature of divorce and separation is apparently reflected in the case of the second heroine of the novel. Leanne is a middle-aged woman who has chosen "denial" for thirty-five years to her husband's cheating (195). Even though the question to her voluntarily silence remains unanswered, it could be implied as her uncertainty and ambivalence as she looks at herself as "a woman unloved and discarded by her husband years before she had the courage and the strength to walk away" (226). However, after divorce, Leanne's response to her silence is anger as "directed at" no one but "herself" which makes

her wonder and regret why she “waited so long to take care of herself emotionally and spiritually” by putting an end to her marriage (110). The denial, silence and the way she and her husband “separated” their lives “for over last ten years” as “love ... between them had died long ago”, suggest her inability in accepting the divorce emotionally; but, the way that she tries to live “a pretended life” (215) signifies how she cares about the social aftereffects in the society where she lives:

I thought of awkward situations that I’d faced in the past. Once I’d sat at the dinner table with a woman and her husband when I knew Sean was currently having an affair with her. I’d been forced to be polite and friendly when I really wanted to do was rage at them both. (195)

The excerpt above exhibits Leanne’s fear of how she will be looked at as a divorcee that has its root in the social negative view towards divorce. However, the use of the time adverb “past” shows that the statement is made by Leanne after her divorce which celebrates a counteraction against the discussed metadiscourse as will be elaborated in the next section.

Besides, the novel represents a metadiscourse which not only sees divorce unfavourable, but also disapproves being vulnerable due to the fears and apprehensions ensued. The heroines’ anxiety and fear of being emotionally hurt as a result of being exposed and getting involved in another relationship is the result of the mentioned normative ideology. When Nicole finds herself falling for Rocco, she wonders if her feelings for him is “real” or is the result of her starvation for “affection and love” (Girl’s Guide 156) she has been deprived of after her divorce. This level of hesitation in giving in and becoming vulnerable enough to restart a new love relationship shows two contrary points. At one point, the heroine finds herself doubtful of putting her vulnerability at the line since she is scared of being hurt again, while at the other, her interest in making a new relationship points out to her ambition and defiance against the frailty and despair she feels after her emotional confrontation.

Similarly, Leanne’s fear of risking her openness to receive love and re-connection is pictured obviously in the novel. When she gets conflicted due to a misunderstanding in her almost newly-formed relationship with Nikolai- one of her students at ESL class for the immigrants where she teaches voluntarily after divorce- she says: “I don’t like being vulnerable. I prefer to think I’m strong and independent ... I’m going to tell him I don’t want to see him again ... I need to do this to protect me, to protect my heart” (216). Explicitly, the protagonist shows her unwillingness

in starting up a new relationship since she considers being “vulnerable” as being hurt and agonized again and as a result, she decides to follow the fear she feels and to stay in her loneliness as a way of protecting her emotions and feelings from getting injured.

Hence, the negative and threatening outlook on life critical situations such as divorce creates a metadiscourse as represented within the novel. The discussed attitude condemns vulnerability as the main origin of the crisis which influences the main characters of the novel in dealing with pessimistic and despondent emotions such as fear, despair, frustration, frailty and social exclusion. The next section is an elaboration on how the heroines counteract with the metadiscourse as discussed earlier.

### **Counter-discourse: Embracing Vulnerability**

Although divorce is one of the life-changing events in human’s life, it could be considered not as an absolute breakdown but as a great “unravelling” (Brown, “The Gifts of Imperfection” 10-11, 31). This positive approach sees divorce as a critical situation in which self-exploration could be practiced. So, affirming to this view, one can counteract with the negative orientation towards the crisis as the metadiscourse which finds the event devastating and so dreadful. When the female protagonists of the novel find their attitudes and feelings in clash with that of the metadiscourse, they get conflicted. Consequently, their mental attitudes incline to resist against the metadiscourse that is constraining. The challenging mindset towards divorce and vulnerability is formed as a counterforce and here is the level at which the characters make up their mind and find enough courage and hope for a better future despite the negative consequences of their decision that they are already aware of.

Macomber brings the imaginative counter-discourse into the light through the title of the novel, *A Guide* that the heroines write for themselves to move on the crisis and to start their life over again. In other words, they gain the courage to endanger their vulnerability and start to face with their doubts and to be authentic by accepting themselves the way they are:

When Leanne and I (Nicole) created our list for moving on, I never dreamed where it would lead me. The list had helped pave the way, leading us to healing and love. To Rocco and Nikolai. (*Girl’s Guide* 480)

The final excerpt from the novel indicates how the novel is specifically a representation of embracing vulnerability and starting over in order to receive love

and belonging.

Moreover, being vulnerable firstly requires being authentic and real to oneself that in-turn requires self-trust, self-love and self-acceptance as reflected in the novel. Even though Nicole has double-bind feelings and confusion about her divorce, she finally learns to “listen to her guts” (90) that indicates to believe in herself and her very inner feelings to make a final right decision which she understands that “the marriage was over” (99).

In addition, following her instinct and heart in making up her mind, Nicole welcomes another relationship with Rocco that is considered as another critical step to challenge the metadiscourse. In spite of the fact that she is “afraid of what she feels toward Rocco” (194) she finally decides to cherish her vulnerability and give a chance to herself to love and to be loved again. Also, Nicole has been “advised” to follow her guts that highlights the necessity of accepting one-self and having a strong belief and trust in one-self as pre-requisites to harbour vulnerability and dealing with fears and uncertainties that follow.

Likewise, Leanne believes that she is “blessed” by having found “the courage to move on” (476). The word “blessed” metaphorically implies how difficult and farfetched she thinks of moving on process. Leanne understands that the first step to embrace vulnerability is not to “allow yourself to wallow in your pain” which both her and Nicole find “easier than done” (5). This level of awareness and recognition shows the heroines’ challenging mindset as a counter-discourse that allows them to be exposed and give their trust and “let go” of their “desperate loneliness” “in order to receive” love and re-connection (15). However, in the beginning of this process, Leanne does not think that having relationships helps with her being happy with her life: “I don’t need a man ... I’m just learning who I am and what brings me joy” (108). Yet, later on, she finds out that she “is ready to date again” when she thinks of Nikolai who “had shown me exactly how ready I was” (143). Therefore, the character’s desire to be loved and her hope for a promising future proceeds when she learns to realize and overcome her fears. This challenging mindset as conceptualized as a counter-discourse is put into action by the selected heroines throughout the novel which will be discussed in the following section.

### **Inter-discourse: Vulnerability and Self-Others Interactions**

The novel could be regarded as an inter-discourse when the heroines put their guide into practice that is well captured by the writer through a few themes of re-growth and re-building life all of which centre their social interaction and inclusion that leads to develop a new self. Within the inter-discourse, the main characters,

attempt to re-connect the society and resolve their conflicts by negotiation that directs them a compromise and reconciliation. They do this by applying the guide they planned to their lives.

The first and the most important step forward to this re-integration is represented throughout the voluntarily jobs both heroines start to take, in order to get themselves “out of the house and force us to stop dwelling in our own loss” (Girl’s Guide 6). Leanne chooses to teach as she believes that teaching gives her “a sense of pride and accomplishment”. The fact that she teaches voluntarily could be considered as a way to compensate her “shredded self-esteem” and to reclaim her “pride [which] was eaten up with the acid of my husband’s infidelity” (35). Also, teaching is a metaphor to the give and receive theme as Leanne finds as satisfying as a way “to ease the pain with a distraction, by giving to others” (39). Besides, the students whom Leanne teaches ESL are immigrants who come “from all around the world” (40) that also directs the reader to the heroine’s urge and tendency to reconstruct and re-settle home in a better life condition like what her students aspire to.

In a similar vein, Nicole finds a voluntarily dressing job in an agency that “helped dressing women going into the workforce for the first time” (Girl’s Guide 40) as delightful and enjoyable. The point that “dressing others was something I[Nicole] loved” (261) could be indicative of her longing for a new start; she enjoys helping women by dressing them and preparing them in hope for a better future through the job they are trying to get. This effective tendency towards growth and building in life is also represented in her fond towards “gardening”:

I missed my garden and the flower beds. Gardening had become a passion of mine. When Owen [Nicole’s son] and I could manage it, I’d buy a house and plant another garden. (Girl’s Guide 25)

The theme of planting “another” garden as stated in the extract symbolically points to the heroine’s hope and prospect to re-build a new life which she sees no barrier to achieve since she has once planted a garden (metaphor for love and life) in her house she shared with his husband during their married life.

Hence, the novel functions as an inter-discourse with a focus on the heroines’ struggle to get involved into the society and to strike a balance between themselves and the others. By embracing vulnerability and the courage, daring and openness they put in order to reconcile with the society from which the metadiscourse originates, they achieve satisfaction, love and social inclusion.

The theme of giving and receiving and life re-building is also symbolized in “bread” and “bakery” throughout the novel. Bread baked and given to Leanne by Nikolai is clearly indicative of giving “life” and “love” (174). The love and life granted to Leanne through bread is something that has been lacked in her life which metaphorically changes Leanne. An evidence to this argument is the time when Sean (Leanne’s husband) asks her to have lunch at her place while he seems to be attracted by the new version of his ex-wife; after tasting the bread Nikolai had baked and Leanne fed him with he tells Leanne: “This is a new you, Leanne, and I have to say that I like it ... So, that’s what was different with lunch, ... it was the bread. I don’t know when I’ve ever tasted better” (199-200). The change in Leanne as symbolized in the different taste of the bread shows the way in which her life begins to differ, flourishing with a taste of love and life as offered by Nikolai. “I bake you bread every class. You will eat and enjoy my bread and I will remember your smile. Your smile make me smile here [pointing to his heart]” (45).

Nikolai expresses his love, care and attention through baking and giving bread to Leanne in order to make her happy and receives her love back. However, Nikolai gets hurt and angry when he finds out that Leanne feeds Sean with the bread he makes with his “own hands” for her: “you give him bread I bake for you? ... bread from my heart... I make with my own hands ... and you give to other man ... his heart is black like charcoal” (200-201). Although at first glance, the reason behind Nikolai’s anger could be jealousy, a deeper view connotes the giving-receiving theme. In this regard, it is important to take care of the fact that to whom you give your love. Although you need to be exposed and welcome your vulnerability in a relationship, you have to choose the right person who deserves your love and openness. In this case, Leanne needs to “protect” herself both “emotionally and spiritually”, yet she seems to neglect by offering bread of love and life to his ex-husband who used to abuse her love and trust.

Additionally, the theme of creating and building is obviously present in the process of baking bread and particularly in the kneading process. Nikolai insists on the necessity of kneading with hands not with “a bread machine ... [that] mixes and bakes all in one” which Leanne used before (Girl’s Guide 196). Nikolai’s insistence on baking bread with “own hands” (164) and his exaggerated feeling of being “horrified” to think of the mixers in baking bread, metaphorically emphasizes one’s control over one’s own life and the effort one needs to put in order to re-create one’s life not to be dictated by others like the way Leanne used to be in her married life. An example to this is when Leanne was still depressed of her ex-husband’s death because of cancer and she woke up one morning “with the compelling urge

to bake bread” (470). Leanne finds baking and especially “kneading the dough ... therapeutic” which could help her “come more alive” (470). However, her depressing and low mood has another reason that is missing Nikolai of not having “heard from him” for “months” during which she decides to take care of her ex-husband as what hurt Nikolai. So, one may conceive that how the theme of baking bread symbolizes the heroine’s practice of embracing her fear and vulnerability to move on another emotional crisis in her life; this is when she feels as if “the grief that consumed me left slowly ... soon, I found I could smile again, laugh again ... feeling refreshed and exhilarated” (470-471). The reinvigorating effect that bakery inspired by Nikolai has on Leanne is that it is served as a way to cultivate hope and courage to start it over afresh.

Experiencing “connection” and making “relationships” require being open and vulnerable to others (Brown, “The Gifts of Imperfection” 81). This theme is represented within the novel through the ways in which the heroines start to interact with others. They jeopardize their vulnerability and struggle to overcome their fear of starting a new relationship by re-integrating to the society and to give their trust and let them fall in love again. Nicole feels so “vulnerable” at first when being threatened by her ex-husband to “be filed for full custody of” their son, Owen, if she continues to see Rocco: “Owen made me vulnerable, and Jake knew that. My son was everything to me. As much as I cared about Rocco, I wouldn’t risk losing custody of Owen” (Girl’s guide 399). As the quote illustrates, even though the heroine’s weakness” is her son, she chooses to fight by undertaking the risk of being hurt and by accepting the fact that she can’t “lose” Rocco “no matter how much it costs” (436). However, her resistance finally leads Jake to accept the truth that he cannot “fight her” back and learns to move on his divorce too; The scene of “Owen stood between the two couples [Nicole and Rocco at one side of Sean’s casket and Jake and his to-be wife at the other], one hand holding his mother’s hand and the other holding on to his father’s” (466) clearly illuminates the themes of re-integration and re-connection. Likewise, Leanne and Nikolai’s mutual love and cooperated life is depicted in final baking scene where “the two worked together now, baking bread and cinnamon rolls for area restaurants ... no one could look at them and not see the love flowing effortlessly between them” (479).

After all fears, angers, obstacles, denials and depression that both Nicole and Jake have been going through in order to take advantage of their vulnerability, they both are finally able to win the battle and counteract with the negative attitude toward life crises to achieve tranquillity in their life. Consequently, this sense of tranquillity leads to creation of happiness and satisfaction that comes with their

renewed life and re-produced love they have struggled hard to build up:

I was happy too. Happier than I ever imagined possible. I remembered how heartsick both Leanne and I had been when we'd left our husbands. We'd never believed a failed marriage would happen to us. We were unloved and unlovable. Rocco and Nikolai had shown us otherwise. (Girl's Guide 479)

The excerpt illuminates the inevitability of divorce as one of the life crises which can possibly occur to everyone. Even though divorce leaves them with unpleasant feelings of emotional rejection and exclusion, they finally succeed in challenging the fear of its negative consequences by embracing their vulnerability and re-starting new relationships. The happy ending of the novel emphasizes and celebrates the significance of being open to life events in a hope for the optimistic and lighter dimension of vulnerability that is love, sense of belonging and re-connection that are culturally-separated in the metadiscourse.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of vulnerability as a weapon to enable one to trust others again and to restart a more genuine social life has been neglected. It assists individuals in reconnecting to others and even making love relationships to a fuller and healthier self-identity development. Therefore, within the context of psychosocial development, self-others interactions and human communications are core concepts. Given its significant place in human interpersonal relationships, vulnerability is key to the formation of a genuine and authentic man's connection with others. However, the fear of "laying oneself bare" in order to seek for love and belonging is what causes the term usually be avoided by the individuals. This multifaceted view towards vulnerability has built the contemplative basis for the current paper. Focusing on the essential place and function of vulnerability in social interactions and psychosocial development, the present study explored the ways in which the term is represented as a two-sided coin; being vulnerable increases the risk of being emotionally hurt, while simultaneously, it is the gateway to love, belonging and connection. As represented within the selected novel, the vulnerability experienced by the selected heroines was examined within the triadic cultural ecological conceptualization of literature.

Within a society where the negative attitude towards the emotional crisis and divorce is normalized, being vulnerable means the frailty, depression and frustration. Respectively, the metadiscourse as discussed in the present paper stems from the

negative stand of vulnerability as represented by the selected author. Evidently, the discussed cultural-critical metadiscourse causes both heroines to struggle with offensive and undesirable emotions such as fear, shame, despair, frustration and sense of social exclusion.

However, the discussion indicated that overcoming fear, adopting and accommodating vulnerability by the heroines of the novel could function as a counterforce to the metadiscourse. Since human being is “imperfect” by nature, embracing the very imperfection requires courage and self-awareness which in turn brings hope for a better future. Hence, the novel is an imaginative counter-discourse due to the main characters’ challenging mindsets which led them to become daring enough in order to recognize and embrace their vulnerability.

Finally, when the female protagonists of the novel decided to stand against the culturally separated system by following and exercising their own planned guide, they tried to re-integrate to the society. The novel is an indication of the re-integrative inter-discourse which directs the heroines to re-build new relationships, love, belonging and ultimately to re-connection. However, the re-connection occurs only if the characters are brave enough to venture their vulnerability again in life’s gamble.

We, as human being are living in a society with an urge to be loved and socially included, therefore, being prone and exposed in the interpersonal relationships is of great significance. In other words, the individuals need to be vulnerable and open to make connection in order to develop a healthier new sense of self that is psychosocially approved. Also, this positive and optimistic attitude towards vulnerability led by self-others interaction opens up an avenue which empowers the individuals to have control over their life by giving voice to the socially and culturally separated aspect of their identity. Hence, it can be concluded that one needs to be vulnerable enough to interact with the others since social interaction forms an immense part of the human growth and development.

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# Ambivalence and Its Implications from the Standpoints of Modern and Postmodern Ethics in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*

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**Abstract** The perplexing silence of Michael K continues to baffle readers. It is often argued that Michael's rejection of food and his infatuation with gardening are interpretable as forms of resistance defying absorption into prevailing discourses. My argument here will follow the same line of reasoning but I will be using a different route. In the first part of this paper, I will focus on Michael's ambivalence. In the second part, I will discuss the problematic of ambivalence in light of two conceptions of ethics and morality represented by modern and postmodern perspectives. The main difference between them, according to Zygmunt Bauman, revolves around their acceptance and rejection of ambivalence. I will argue that the conflict between modern and postmodern viewpoints ends in a crisis reflected in the medical officer's obsessive thoughts about Michael. The situation is compounded by Michael's nonsensical unresponsiveness which problematizes the relationship between the care-giver and the care-receiver. My argument would deal with the nature of this challenge and its implications for the moral self which I believe result in a moral crisis symbolically depicted as the reversal of positions between Michael as the care-receiver and the medical officer as the care-giver. This final section of my paper would be premised on the term 'hostage' borrowed from Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of ethics.

**Key words** ethical responsibility; Postmodern ethics; Zygmunt Bauman; Immanuel Levinas

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### Introduction

J.M. Coetzee's *Michael K* is unique but not quite without precedent in his oeuvre. In silence, reticence and inscrutability, Michael is preceded by the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and followed by Friday in *Foe* (1986) and Vercueil in *Age of Iron* (1990). Outside Coetzee's fictional world, the most familiar character that approximately resembles Michael's unyielding obduracy is Herman Melville's *Bartleby*, the scrivener featuring in a short story of the same name. Before I start my argument and by way of an introduction, perhaps it is better to present a succinct overview of some of the salient critical works on *Life and Times of Michael K* (1984).

The desire to unravel Michael's mystery has made critics resort to various perspectives. Gert Buelens and Dominiek Hoens (2007) read *Life and Times of Michael K* (henceforth *LTMK*) through its thematic similarity with Melville's famous short story. Their reading is based on what they consider to be the problem of relationship between rule and exception based on Giorgio Agamben's writings. They explore the interdependence of rule and exception and point to their not being mutually exclusive. The exception needs the rule to mark it as intransigence. Similarly, the rule requires the exception to mark its boundary. They pose two questions: "if exception is always an exception to the rule, how can it exist otherwise than by virtue of that rule?" and "if the exception radically breaks away from the rule, then how is it possible for that rule to identify the exception and recognize it as such?" (157). Rules can be anything from the law to any other interpretative frameworks. In the context of literary criticism Buelens and Hoens equate the rule with allegorical reading and the exception with singularity. They argue that an allegorical reading fails to do justice to the singularity of literature, an idea which as they acknowledge has been discussed by Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). However, they find Attridge's non-allegorical reading exceptionable. In their opinion, Attridge promotes a kind of reading which "relies heavily on a process of identification between readers and protagonists that actually amounts to a variation on allegorical theme" (159). Such identification takes place according to Buelens and Hoens only, by placing our consciousness as readers "in some sort of continuity with the consciousness of a protagonist" (162) which to their mind, is problematic. The reason is that in Attridge's account, the reader metaphorically substitutes the protagonist. What Buelens and Hoens fault in Attridge is his inability to "escape from the allegorizing/metaphorizing tendency

that he is aiming to expose in his account of the singularity of literature” (162). According to them an adequate response to characters like Michael and Bartleby lies in a syntagmatic/metonymic engagement with the text whereby “occupying a position of continuity with regard to protagonists rather than arrogating unto [ourselves] an identity that is derived from the latter’s particularity” (169). This is the same as maintaining that Michael invites us to sympathize with him but we suffer from the inability to empathize. In order to empathize one needs to understand the other. Understanding the other is never complete because we always adopt a position in relation to the other which is seen from an external point of view. In other words, we never succeed in empathizing because the object of empathy is inaccessible to us. Michael’s silence and Bartleby’s incomprehensible willfulness enable them to “strongly resist an allegorical reading, and the texts in which they appear stage what happens when allegory gets provoked. The tendency to understand (help, empathize with etc.) gets obstructed and this very obstruction” puts an end to the desire to understand (Buelens and Hoens 169).

Along with Michael’s streak of adamancy and nonconformity another distinguishing characteristics of him is his glaring political and historical passivity. Stephen Watson (1986) argues that Michael’s elusiveness can be explained in terms of a resistance to colonization. He writes that Michael K intends to be free from “colonization whether it be the colonization of the body (through labour camps) or the colonization of the mind (through charity)” (370). Coetzee’s characters are distinctively resistant to any kind of totalization. Different readers have different ideas of the totality against which Coetzee pits his characters. Obviously, Michael is dismissive of his social and historical positioning. Maintaining silence and leading a nomadic-cum-subterranean life signify his reluctance to participate in the socio-historical dynamics of his times. Michael’s reclusion and impenetrability are triggered by the “unspoken wish of the white authorities in the novel” to disenfranchise the blacks “from human existence on the earth’s surface” (Wright 437). Michael seems to be determined to minimize his dependence on human beings by adopting a subterranean life which limits his needs to Mother Earth.

Michael’s atavistic yearning for staying close to earth and nature, according to Anthony Vital (2008), enables Michael to savor a “full sense of being” (96). This is the freedom which is obtained by escaping the oppression of modern institutions. From the beginning of his life, he has been subject to oppressive domination of patriarchal disciplinary institutions to the extent that lacking a biological father he acknowledges that: “My mother was the one whose ashes I brought back, he thought, and my father was Huis Norenius. My father was the list of rules on the

door of the dormitory, the twenty-one rules” (104-5). Vital argues that Michael like others has the kind of idea of nature which is the product of the discourse of modernity and colonial adventure: “K’s relishing of isolated reverie in nature leads him into collision with the determining fact of life, that bodies, their birth and daily renewals, exist only in time” (Vital 98).

But while Vital sees Michael’s negligence of his bodily needs as problematic, Jane Poyner (2009) argues that Michael’s willful refusal to take food and the resultant atrophy are forms of defying colonial discourse. Poyner, however, agrees that Michael craves to stay “outside the time of camps, of apartheid and of South African’s bleak history-in-the-making” (83). Michael’s insistence on insubstantiality both physical and textual (that is in terms of historiography), is achieved via hunger and silence. As Poyner argues, Michael’s intention to constitute his identity without regard for any prevailing discourses indicates his desire to “author his own body, a body that colonial and apartheid discourse have sought to inscribe, define and regulate” (88). Michael’s impenetrable silence represents his resistance to be embedded in the discursive historicity of apartheid. This wish for overtaking humanity and history is clearly reflected in the novel:

Now surely I have come as far as a man can come; surely no one will be mad enough to cross these plains, climb these mountains, search these rocks to find me; surely now that in all the world only I know where I am, I can think of myself as lost (66).

### **Michael K and Ambivalence**

As ‘the other’ in the discourse of apartheid, who has been marginalized and denied a voice, Michael’s withdrawal from human community and his desire to outdistance history seems self-defeating. Ironically, much to Michael’s dismay, his retreat to no-man’s land and his disregard for human community are still considered threats by the state. The reason is that Michael’s uncanny nonconformity and benign noncompliance problematize apartheid’s hegemonic control over meaning and identity. Apartheid embodies a highly rationalistic system of governance based on modern intellect’s dependence on the binary opposition of the same and the other. Apartheid, like his German and Russian predecessors, inherited from modernity the epistemological penchant for disambiguation and categorization. As Zygmunt Bauman (1991) has argued the acceptance and rejection of ambivalence constitutes the criterion for distinguishing postmodernity from modernity.

One of the important issues of modernity is the problem of ambivalence. Modernity equipped with the rigid rationality and scientific objectivity of enlightenment developed an intolerance of the ambiguous and the unknown. Its mission was to create order through conceptualization and demystification. Such an epistemological venture more often than not functioned at the expense of violating the other. Bauman's characterization of postmodernity as tolerantly inclusive of difference and ambiguity indicates a drastic change for the establishment of a new relationship with 'the other' which departs from "individual rational capacity of synthesis, conceptualization and organization" (Morgan 88) to welcome the reconsideration of the self's relation to the other.

Imposing order and creating conceptual harmony are part and parcel of modern intellect. That is why for Bauman (1991), "the other of modern intellect is polysemy and cognitive dissonance" (9). Polysemy and cognitive dissonance pose a major threat to modernity's predilection for order-making and the establishment of binary divisions. Bauman explains that the struggle for order is a battle raging between "determination [and] ambiguity . . . semantic precision . . . [and] ambivalence, transparency . . . [and] obscurity, clarity . . . [and] fuzziness" (*Modernity* 7). This urge to purge the world of the ambiguous, and the unknown was the legacy of enlightenment whose objective was to evoke a sense of freedom and autonomy in the Cartesian subject. Bauman was influenced by Emmanuel Levinas whose dissection of western philosophy was an attempt to reveal the self's propensity for autonomy through the reduction of the other to the same.

Contrary to modern intellect, postmodernity allows for plurality and calls for the recognition of 'other' voices and identities. As the theoretical and political praxis of postmodernity, postmodern thought lends itself more easily to the restoration of suppressed histories, voices and identities. It has also contributed to the emergence of minority discourses which struggle to dispute the center by pursuing counter-hegemonic politics. While modern intellect, seeking to reduce plurality to uniformity, tended to relentlessly compartmentalize the world into meaningful and familiar entities, postmodernity with its "plural and pluralistic world" accepts "every form of life. . . on principle" (*Modernity* 98).

In *LTMK*, Michael emblemizes ambiguity and ambivalence. The desire to know Michael--'the other'--and to unravel his mystery is the dominant theme of the novel. Michael is an embodiment of ambivalence through whom Coetzee seems to be striving to expose the faulty and restricted outlook of modern thought manifested in its most extreme form in the exclusionary policy and dualistic worldview of apartheid. Apartheid in its political sense means "separate development of each race

in the geographical area assigned to it” (Cornevin 25). This kind of governance rests on an absolute organization and engineering of society with every race and ethnic group classified and assigned a specific place in the system. Anything which cannot be accommodated within the existing conceptual divisions purportedly jeopardizes the integrity of the system. Seen in this light, Michael is a major problem for such an exclusionist system of control as he switches from one mode of existence and identity to another. It is this freedom to remain ontologically or better yet semantically ambiguous and politically indeterminate that encourages me to read the novel from a postmodern perspective. If, as Bauman argues, modern state rests on a rational dichotomization of the inside and outside of its territory under the name of friend and enemy (*Modernity* 24), then Michael’s transitions from a secondary civilian to a nomad and finally to a subhuman challenges the cognitive assumptions of the modern state. His interstitial vagrancy exasperates apartheid more particularly in the volatile times of war when preserving the monopoly on meaning and identity is crucial for a rigorous obliteration of polyphony. Under such circumstances apartheid cannot permit a sign to remain in abeyance.

Michael’s ambivalence is maintained by circumventing mutually exclusive categories such as the friend and the enemy. This is not tolerable for any totalitarian modern state power. As Bauman argues modernity has a strong aversion to the ambiguous and the ambivalent because it relies heavily on conceptual understanding of the world within predefined categories. According to Bauman friends and enemies “exhaust the *possibility* of being with others. Being a friend and being an enemy are the two modalities in which the other maybe recognized as another subject. . . . If not for the opposition between friend and enemy, none of this would be possible” (*Modernity* 54; emphasis in original).

The problem with Michael is that he cannot be categorized neither as a friend nor an enemy. Of the two categories of other-definition recognized by the state, that is, insurgency (like guerrillas) or subordination (like camp inmates), Michael defies both and remains categorically undefinable and politically noncommittal. As a result, his story cannot be subsumed under any prevailing narrative. Not only does Michael problematize this dichotomous view by evading the imposition of identity and meaning but also challenges rationality and logic: his behavior cannot be accounted for in terms of any familiar cognitive paradigms as it is incongruent, illogical, and irrational. In other words, Michael is apparently devoid of the will-to-power, will-to-life and will-to-know: a human with no claim on humanity.

Throughout the novel Michael is subject to attempts at interpreting him. Such intrusive acts of interpretation are usually met with disappointment because he

remains elusive, impervious and unresponsive. The urge to demystify Michael is particularly in full swing in the mid-section of the novel and is epitomized by the medical officer. He represents modern intellect whose search for signification and the removal of ambivalence has taken on the gloss of care and concern. However, by the end of the midsection his authoritative and professional concern for Michael gives way to a submissive enthralment to him. Interestingly, this transformation comes about when the medical officer reaches the end of his cognitive tether. Before this change transpires, he strives incessantly to explain for his inscrutable silence and inexplicable self-immolation. His desperate attempts at understanding Michael's resolution to go unheard and unremembered in history simply indicate his uneasiness with the contingent and the indeterminate. As Bauman explains modern intellect is intolerant of contingency: "Since the sovereignty of modern intellect is the power to define and to make the definitions stick" therefore it is at variance with "polyvalent definitions [and] contingency" (*Modernity* 9). Also, as an embodiment of modern intellect, the medical officer is disposed to teleological and totalizing thinking which is exemplified by his wariness of the imminent unfolding of historic events which is set off by Michael's inattention and indifference to what is happening around him as he continues "living in a pocket outside of time" (60). The medical officer's pontification about the gravity of the situation and his Hegelian projection of history as it tends "towards a moment of transfiguration in which pattern is born from chaos and history manifests itself in all its triumphant meaning" (158) is similarly offset by Michael's localized perspective and liminal positioning. Michael does not even deign to be a casual observer let alone an enthusiastic participant in the revolutionary times.

With the passage of time, the medical officer's passion to resolve the obscurity of Michael shows no sign of abatement leading to the development of a fixation on him and his life. He believes that there is some "sense of a gathering meaningfulness" about Michael arguing that Michael "means something, and the meaning is not private to me" (165). He admits that it is not "a mere craving for meaning that sent me to Michaels and his story" (164). He feels that he has been singled out because Michael has a mysterious meaning hidden to everyone except him: "I was the only one who saw that you were more than you seemed to be" (164). The medical officer firmly believes that Michael is definitely "more than what he seems to be" or he (the medical officer) would have retreated "to the toilets" and put "a bullet through" his own head (165). Confronted by an unresolvable enigma, the medical officer aches to find out Michael's motives. He tries to explain away Michael's obsession with his mother by falling back on myth:

And — if I may be personal — you should have got away at an early age from that mother of yours, who sounds like a real killer. You should have found yourself another bush as far as possible from her and embarked on an independent life. You made a great mistake, Michaels, when you tied her on your back and fled the burning city for the safety of the countryside. Because when I think of you carrying her, panting under her weight, choking in the smoke, dodging the bullets, performing all the other feats of filial piety you no doubt performed, I also think of her sitting on your shoulders, eating out your brains, glaring about triumphantly, the very embodiment of great Mother Death. And now that she is gone you are plotting to follow her. (150)

Attributing Michael's disregard for his wellbeing to a death desire inflicted by his mother, the medical officer paradoxically resorts to mythology to rationalize Michael's inscrutability. This is a serious intellectual relapse undercutting his credibility as an embodiment of modern intellect. It also betrays the cognitive bankruptcy of reason by laying bare its reversion to mythology. The medical officer discredits the sovereignty of rational thinking by revealing the inability of reason to account for Michael's eccentricity. It is reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's famous statement: "Myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (xviii). Adorno and Horkheimer diagnosed the real cause of the recidivism of enlightenment in its antipathy to truth and self-inspection. Enlightenment sought to disenchant the world by going on a myth-busting rampage which paved the way for scientific knowledge and rationality. This was a disappointing turn for those who had invested hope in the ideals of enlightenment which had promised the deliverance of "the human consciousness from an immature state of ignorance and error" (Roy Porter 1). Instead, what came to pass was the enslavement of humanity to a totalitarian system of thought revealing the fact that "Enlightenment is totalitarian" (Adorno and Horkheimer 6).

The other important implication of the above passage is that, unbeknownst to him, and boggled by Michael's conundrum, the medical officer fails to see that he is reading meaning into Michael. Perhaps through Michael, Coetzee is testing the readers' tolerance of the unintelligible and the different. The text beckons at the reader to be aware of the pitfalls of reading meaning into the unknown. From a postmodern standpoint, one needs to be reminded of the fact that understanding is not an absolutely objective but rather a productive act. Simply put, understanding shades into interpretation. Adorno and Horkheimer have expressed the same point

by arguing that “the intelligibility which subjective judgment discovers in any matter is imprinted on that matter by the intellect as an objective quality before it enters the ego” (64). In other words, the perception of reality and the conception of truth are heavily influenced by pre-given assumptions.

The other area in which Michael problematizes modern intellect concerns its impersonal and foundational attitude toward ethical issues. Camps and medical centers represent the impersonal and rule-guided mode of relating to “the other”. The interpersonal perspective which will be discussed in details later entails a face-to-face and non-relational manner of addressing the moral phenomenon. In short, the interpersonal is the disruption of the impersonal, but before I elaborate more on this point, it is necessary to discuss the flaws of the impersonal perspective.

In this novel (and I do not mean to generalize) the setting up of camps and medical centers dissimulate the real intent of the state behind the façades of conscientiousness and care for the other.<sup>1</sup> The state is facing a moral plight which needs to be alleviated, or alternatively, covered up through palliative measures such as camps and medical centers. There are on the one hand, the white people who wish to keep the misery of ‘the other’ out of sight and, by extension, out of mind (Coetzee 92). On the other hand, the state is striving to put up a legitimate front and gloss over its incompetent management. Rehabilitation centers and camps are makeshift state apparatuses working to ameliorate the pernicious effects of poverty, discrimination and deprivation. Both utilize instrumental rationality relying on means-end reasoning. Camps and rehabilitation centers address the question of ‘the other’ based on *a priori* knowledge and through the implementation of *calculated* decisions and effective measures.

Hiding its duplicity under a humanistic veneer, the medical center is a rehabilitating facility whose primary function is to restore health and strength to those who have already suffered under the oppressive regime so as to make them fit enough to be reused as labor force. According to this logic, profitability determines the value of everything and everyone. Based on this utilitarian tenet, as the subject ceases to be profitable, she or he becomes a liability, hence expendable. Michael’s lamentation about his mother’s fate clearly corroborates this point:

My mother worked all her life long,’ he said. ‘She scrubbed other people’s floors, she cooked food for them, she washed their dishes. She washed their

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1 I have already elaborated on the importance of camps in “Place and the Politics of Space in J.M.Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*”, *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* – Vol 22(1): 29 – 38.

dirty clothes. She scrubbed the bath after them. She went on her knees and cleaned the toilet. But when she was old and sick they forgot her. They put her away out of sight. When she died they threw her in the fire. They gave me an old box of ash and told me, 'Here is your mother, take her away, she is no good to us.' (136)

The unjust treatment of the heterogeneous non-white population creates an irresolvable moral dilemma because the white ruling minority depends heavily on the active heteronomous population, more than half of which reside in white areas (Cornevin 26). The white community benefits from the labour of the black majority but the latter has no right to self-determination and well-fare. Such inconsistency betrays the moral hypocrisy of the town-dwellers and their pervasive desire to sweep the squalor and misery of the unwelcome 'other' under the carpet. Robert, one of the camp inmates, points to this moral squeamishness when he explains the real attitude of the town-dwellers toward camps:

They don't want a camp so near their town. They never wanted it. . . We breed disease, they said. No hygiene, no morals. A nest of vice, men and women all together. . . What they would really like — this is my opinion — is for the camp to be miles away in the middle of the Koup out of sight. Then we could come on tiptoe in the middle of the night like fairies and do their work, dig their gardens, wash their pots, and be gone in the morning leaving everything nice and clean (81-82).

The state struggles to conceal its moral duplicity and depravity through the implementation of perfunctory actions such as the setting up of camps and medical centers. Once this 'other' resists assimilation into the same and evades the systematic categorization and boundary-drawing of the state, its alterity is disconcertingly accentuated shattering the moral complacency of the self. This resistance to assimilation constitutes the breaking point of the impersonal conception of modern ethics. My argument here will turn to postmodern ethics expounded by Zygmunt Bauman.

### **Michael K and Postmodern Ethics**

Bauman (1993) warns us against the complexity of being responsible for the other and how this might lead to the imposition of one's will on the other. The case that Bauman illustrates is pretty similar to the moral dilemma facing the medical officer.

Bauman argues that the relationship between the other and the self engenders meaning for both. This creation of meaning is founded on reciprocity between me and the other: "I am I who is responsible, he is he to whom I assign the right to make me responsible" (*Postmodern* 86). In this relationship the priority is given to the other as if I am always summoned and commanded by the other. But since the other is silent his silence compels me to speak for him and this entails having knowledge of the other. The command is not clear so I am responsible for decoding or reading it. The result is that my reading fails to do justice to the truth of the command because the process of reading recreates and represents the other based on my knowledge which according to Bauman "sets a distance between the Other as she-may-be-for-herself and the Other I am for" (*Postmodern* 90). In Bauman's opinion the command is rephrased as the command to follow my interpretation which equals divesting the other of autonomy (*Postmodern* 91). The response that I may receive in return for this presumption is either silence (in which case I can never learn of the veracity of my assumption) or the breach of silence and disagreement. The outcome in both of these cases is that "I feel obliged to include in my responsibility also the duty to overcome what I can see as nothing else but her ignorance, or misinterpretation, of her own best interest" (*Postmodern* 91).

The medical officer's well-intentioned concern for his patient is obviously motivated by a sense of responsibility which exposes the complication and intricacy of speaking for the other. This is an important issue since it involves the ideas of authority, representation and justice, which are key terms in the politics of postmodernism. Bauman, conscious of the pitfalls of caring for the other, warns that the relationship between the care-giver and the care-receiver is potentially a slippery slope as care-giving tends to border on the exertion of power and responsibility on oppression (*Postmodern* 91).

Michael's abstinence from food and the consequent delay in his recuperation disrupt the medical officer's complacent attitude to his duty as a care-giver. This is closely related to the question of ethical principles formulated in modernity. Michael's anarchic silence creates an irresolvable moral conflict which cannot be resolved by adherence to universalizable reason and its rule-bound laws. Bauman (1993) explains that ethics in its modern sense is sustainable only under the aegis of states or communities. Ethical codes are conceivable only in the impersonality of organizational procedures and prescriptions. Bauman enumerates three characteristics for this kind of ethics which includes purposefulness, reciprocity and contractuality and argues that calculability is the backbone of all these (*Postmodern* 59). His analysis of these features points to the fact that the ethical perspective of

modernity promoted a universalizable blueprint for the enactment of the ethical codes. Such ethical codes are predicated on the belief in the rectitude and soundness of its rules. Furthermore, these codes are delivered as a package of universally applicable injunctions. But Bauman argues against the universalizability of ethics because he believes that such a trend leads to “the annihilation of the autonomy of the Other, to domination and oppression” (*Postmodern* 11). He avers that modernity is self-deluded in that it advances the idea of the functional universalizability of its ethical codes. Bauman also asserts that “morality is incurably aporetic” and postmodernity is the awareness of this truth and the acknowledgment of the fact that there is no hard and fast rules to show us the way thus “postmodernity . . . is modernity without illusions” (*Postmodern* 11, 32). In short, “moral phenomena”, from the postmodern standpoint of Bauman, “are grounded in the essentially ambivalent (neither good nor bad) character of human beings” (James Porter 559). The confusion and frustration that the medical officer experiences, is the result of his inability to appreciate this point. He finds himself at a loss because he has been taught to dutifully follow the procedures endorsed and prescribed by rule-bound ethics of care. These ethical rules have a temporarily sedative effect guaranteeing that we have conscientiously (if not perfunctorily) fulfilled our task.

Michael’s rejection of medical assistance helps to stir up the nullified feelings of guilt and shame and delays the restoration of normalcy. The medical officer’s confession to being weighed down under Michael’s burden of responsibility<sup>1</sup> evidences the uneasiness of the incipient moral awareness based on an interpersonal relationship that negates the impersonality of systematic ethics whose goal is to create complacency for the moral actor. The mediation provided by heteronomous rule-guided ethics shields the moral agent from the pangs of conscience that inevitably arise out of interpersonal responsibility.

Michael rejects assimilation into the ideological discourse of apartheid through his resistant singularity. By taking recourse to silence and food abstinence Michael problematizes the ethical codes of modernity which are based on the foundational and universal ideas of ethics. He brings this universalism and foundationalism into discredit by revealing its faulty discursive strategy and precarious foundation. In my opinion, *LTMK* casts the ideological workings of the medical center into sharp relief. Drawing on Giddens triple major forms of ideology namely the naturalising process, representing special interest as general ones, and the transmutation of contradictions,

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<sup>1</sup> He likens Michael to an albatross hanging from his neck: “You have never asked for anything, yet you have become an albatross around my neck. Your bony arms are knotted behind my head, I walk bowed under the weight of you” (146).

Robert Cohen explains how apartheid as an ideologically manipulative system of governance utilizes these to inculcate the belief in its legitimacy (9-11). Cohen argues that the existence of the general feeling of naturalness and the absence of anxiety among the white minority “constitutes one of the most important attributes of apartheid as an ideology” (11). Interestingly, Cohen, discussing the prevalence of the feeling that everything is normal, cites the case of a survey done to determine the level of stress among English, Colored and Afrikaner nurses. Surprisingly, the results showed that there was abnormality in the personality profile of the Afrikaner nurses which was due to the insufficient degree of anxiety in them. The point is that the presence of a certain degree of anxiety is necessary in order for a person to be considered normal (10). It is exactly Michael’s singularity, his refusal to be assimilated into the hegemonic discourse of the recuperative health system that enables him to deepen the cracks on the seamless surface of normalcy. He does not recover thus his incorporation into the system is indefinitely deferred.

### **Conclusion: Levinas, Sensibility and Hostage**

I have discussed the problematic presence of Michael as a figure that embodies ambivalence. His vagrancy and his reckless disregard for spatial restrictions imposed by the state and his inattention to his corporeal needs pose a challenge to the restrictive and order-creating tendencies of modern totalitarian thought. Michael’s behavior cannot be rationalized or simply explained away. His mind-boggling devotion to his clandestine farm and his mindless negligence of his own well-being and subsistence urge us to view Michael not in terms of rationality but in a totally different light. With the failure of reason to provide an answer to the enigmatic existence of Michael, I turned to ethics. As a radical figure of alterity (both in literal and figurative senses: different skin color, a disfigured face and his adamant noncompliance), Michael manages to stand out and capture the attention of the medical officer.<sup>1</sup> There is something in Michael that fascinates the medical officer. Being inapprehensible, Michael frustrates the cognitive maneuvers of the medical officer and awakens him to the fact that responsibility “is not a cognitive act, that is, an identifying re-presenting, recognizing act. It is effected in expressive acts by which one . . . exposes oneself to the other” (Lingis xiii). This exposure is not an intentional act but a birth of sensibility: “exposure as sensibility . . . reverts from grasping to being grasped . . . It reverts from the activity of being a hunter of

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<sup>1</sup> The medical officer tells Michael that “You are like a stick insect that has landed, God knows how, in the middle of a great wide flat bare concrete plain. You raise your slow fragile stick-legs one at a time, you inch about looking for something to merge with, and there is nothing” (149).

images to the passivity of being prey” (Levinas 75).

Responsibility means approaching the other in a sacrificial gesture. That is why, according to Bauman, it is not characterized by reciprocity and self-interest. For Levinas, the relationship between the self and the other can be described as persecution, obsession and being a hostage. The medical officer’s fixation on Michael can be discussed in terms of bondage in an ethical sense which can be explained in terms of his failure in winning Michael’s acquiescence to medical procedures and in view of his frustration at incorporating him into a rational explanatory mold. The problem is that the prescriptive ethical codes — premised on the belief in the irrevocable authority and indisputable efficiency of the all-embracing and encyclopedic laws — cannot resolve the medical officer’s professional predicament. Michael’s case reveals the conflict that exists between the responsibility for the other as a non-negotiable, non-transferable moral concern on the one hand and on the other, the adherence to ethical rules specified by heteronomous moral reasoning. For Bauman, the latter proves woefully imperfect when seen from a postmodern perspective. Unlike its predecessor, postmodern perspective construes genuine responsibility as asymmetrical and non-relational.

Trapped by the gravitational force of Michael’s weakness and vulnerability, the medical officer faces the enormity of moral responsibility for the other. No matter how much Michael receives medical care and attention, his presence demands more than the usual, more than what has been stipulated by impersonal laws. Fulfilling his commitment to Michael does not bring “the complacency and pleasure of contentment” because “being exposed to the other is being exposed to being wounded and outraged” (Lingis xviii). The medical officer’s reliance on principle-based caregiving procedures proves insufficient because moral issues are related to sensibility and not rationality: “Sensibility as exposedness to the other. . . reverts from being an intellectual act of apprehension to an obsession by another who does not manifest himself” (Levinas 75). This reversion occurs gradually. At first he defines his interest in Michael in terms of his professional obligations: “Felicity and I are the only people in the world who care enough to help you. Not because you are special but because it is our job” (145). Yet with the passage of time he feels increasingly concerned for Michael’s vulnerability as if persecuted for emaciated body. Though he has spared no effort to talk Michael into saving his life, the medical officer finds himself in a hostage-like situation where he feels inexplicably responsible for Michael. In Levinas’s words, this obsessive responsibility is an “obsession despite oneself” (55). Disarmed by the weakness of the other, the self becomes a hostage to the other, that is, the self “is always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the

responsibility of the other” (Levinas 117).

The emergence of this hostage-like relationship reaches a peak toward the end of the mid-section of the novel. After Michael escapes from the rehabilitation center, the medical officer lost in his hallucinatory ruminations, imagines following Michael, while imploring him to take him to a place beyond the camps to uncharted areas where no one “finds it worth their while to live” (162). Mistrustful of maps, he has chosen Michael as his guide. This desire to venture out of one’s comfort zone is not unprecedented in Coetzee’s fiction. It is also expressed by the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), when he encounters the mute and unresponsive barbarian girl whom he voluntarily brings into his quarters to look after. The Magistrate develops sexual and mental obsessions with the barbarian girl and her mutilated body. Similar to the medical officer, the Magistrate becomes involved in the act of reading meaning into the torture scars on the girl’s body. This unmediated encounter with ‘the other’ has a particular outcome: the wish to get away from the reductive discourse of modern thought. Like the medical officer who rejects the monopoly on meaning, identity and space, the Magistrate yearns to “live outside history. . . that Empire imposes on its subjects” (206). In short, both of these dissident colonizers, conscious of the repressive discourse of modern intellect, desire to disentangle themselves from its totalizing manifestations, namely, nationalism and historiography. I believe this yearning can be interpreted as a symbolic desire to transcend the totalitarian discourses. It also implies the acceptance of a perspective which decries the effacement of the singularity of the other in the face of totalizing concepts such as history, nation and ethics.

To be an ethical subject in its Levinasian sense entails sensibility. Only sensible beings have the capacity to feel pain and pleasure. The acknowledgment of the de-sensitizing effect of rule-guided ethics highlights the self’s non-reciprocal and asymmetrical moral responsibility to the other. It is only on the basis of this acknowledgment that Bauman renounces universal and foundational modern ethics. For him postmodern ethics is the recognition of the irreducibility of the other. In my opinion, Michael problematizes ethics in its principle-based modern conceptualization and thus points to the precarious and inexhaustible nature of moral responsibility as demonstrated by Bauman and Levinas.

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# Psychosis in Hybridity: Locating the Identity of the Postcolonial Subject in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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**Abstract** Cultural hybridity is a burning issue in recent times especially for the postcolonial individual whose contemplation of culture and the creation of new cultural forms is characterized by a form of coercion to adopt western mores. This issue finds expression in postcolonial literature across the various continental and cultural regions. This paper is therefore an attempt to explore the cultural formations and expressions of the postcolonial individual to ascertain whether they result in a form of self-realization or perpetual conflict and dissatisfaction. In doing this, aspects of the postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories will be employed to the characters in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The various stages from lack of confidence in indigenous culture, a preference for western culture, and a complete denial of indigenous culture will be explored as phases in the identity formation and expression of characters in the text, leading up to unbalanced hybridity. Consequently, an explication of these phases will result in the demonstration of psychosis of postcolonial individuals in a state of failed hybridity. In light of this, the paper presents as a major conclusion the idea that; a postcolonial individual's failure to incorporate in a balanced manner, aspects of the dual cultures confronting him or her results in a conflicted identity which leads to dissatisfaction and in its highest state, could result in psychotic behaviour.

**Key words** conflict; psychosis; postcolonial subject; self-realization; failed hybridity.

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### **Introduction**

Identity and its affiliates such as hybridity, self-expression, self-realization and fulfilment have begun to gain increasing importance in recent times. For the postcolonial subject, this trend is also the case especially as for this individual, various factors are at play in the identity discourse. The postcolonial individual is a conflicted individual. This is because in the aspect of culture which permeates and affects every other sector of life, this individual is pulled in different directions. Thus, Edward Said says of it: The people were faced with a plethora of issues and came to realize that they had “freed themselves on one level but... remained victims of their past on another” (207). The postcolonial subject is therefore faced with new problems upon regaining his independence from the West because there is a new form of colonization taking place, that of “labour and power” (Quijano 533-538). These factors at play in the interaction of the West and other cultures of the world allow for the prevalence of the former over non-dominant cultures, especially those which are not to a large extent, economically independent. Thus, the Gramscian notion of hegemony comes in where Western culture has been and is continually privileged in the minds of postcolonial individuals, over their own indigenous culture in line with the binarism discourse. It is in light of these that hybridity is explored in this paper. The conflict and lack of self-realization associated with the form of hybridity which privileges western culture over indigenous culture is what will be pursued.

### **Hybridity in the Postcolonial Subject: Forms and Patterns**

Hybridity involves a mixture of aspects of more than one culture, here, the Indian and western. Whether the degree of this mix results in fulfilment or a form of balance for the individual involved is another question altogether. For some postcolonial characters, this mixture results in harmony because they are contented with taking on aspects of western culture but careful to make sure their postcolonial cultures also reflect and are not eclipsed by the adoption of western cultural values.

For others, the reverse is the case which leaves them in a state of imbalance as they cannot fully relate in places where their indigenous cultures dominate seeing that they have rejected it altogether, neither can they properly relate in the West as their mimicry is never fully intact (Bhabha 86), thus demonstrating their unbelongingness. However, because the present world is one becoming increasingly characterized by cultural affiliation and cooperation,

Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: *Who* are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them.... They identify with cultural groups.... non-Western societies increasingly assert their own cultural values and reject those 'imposed' on them by the West. (Huntington 21-28)

Accordingly, postcolonial individuals are on a path of rediscovering and re-privileging their indigenous cultures and postcolonial texts such as *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o as well as *Wizard of the Crow* by the same author, demonstrate this idea.

Hybridity therefore comes into play to further demonstrate this rediscovery and significance of indigenous culture to the postcolonial subject. In this context, it is cultural hybridity that is in question and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, refer to it as "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone Produced by colonialization" (108). It is also "an operative verbalization of ambivalence and mutability illustrating a dynamic stride of (remonstrance) and resistance in opposition to a domineering ideological and cultural colonial hegemony" (Raj 125). In spite of this option of hybridization, there are postcolonial individuals who are unable to reconcile the aspects of the varying cultures in their daily activities to result in harmony and a certain level of self-realization and fulfilment. Such individuals go through the various stages of hegemony and western subjugation but instead of fighting back and struggling to retain a sense of cultural uniqueness and selfhood, in a form of balanced compromise, they give in and conform to the image of them created by others, the West. Consequently, they go through a number of stages.

The first of these is the stage of alienation. Having been brought up to view themselves as members of a particular culture and group, the western vision of themselves results in a form of conflict or confusion. Who they are does not fit

into the new society which they find themselves. When this happens, the second stage occurs. This stage can be either one of two things. Fatimeh Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour give them as “ambivalence and adjustment” or “Abandonment and return” (787-689). While ambivalence and adjustment occurs when the migrant postcolonial subject is able to navigate between his or her indigenous culture and the majority or western culture to create a balance, abandonment and return is associated with a failure to achieve hybridity. This failure is exhibited in a number of ways and will be the object of this paper. Abandonment and return can be further re-categorized into ‘unbalanced hybridity’ where the characters who demonstrate this have taken on so much foreign culture that their indigenous culture is almost eclipsed. Failed hybridity on the other hand involves the not only the ‘hostile take-over’ of indigenous culture by foreign culture in the lives of postcolonial individuals, but also the utter contempt for indigenous culture demonstrated by characters who exhibit this. At this stage, the individual cannot find anything good or admirable in his or her indigenous culture. Not only does contempt well up in him. Intense shame and self-loathing for being associated with the indigenous culture is also present. This is what this paper terms failed hybridity and it results in psychosis as it creates a severe case of conflicted identity in individuals.

Psychosis is a “syndrome that markedly interferes with an individual’s functioning, entails a significant departure from reality, often including false perceptions or beliefs and disordered thoughts and speech” (Larson, Walker and Compton 1). Larson et al go further to say that often times, “these psychotic symptoms are... accompanied by blunted or inappropriate emotional expressions and motivational deficits” (1). Sigmund Freud in his contemplation of neurotic disorders cites emotional excitement, tied to the innate sexuality of individuals, left unrepressed and allowed free reign as causes of psychosis. Thus, when it is no longer repressed or expressed only in dreams and fantasies, it becomes exhibited as neurotic or psychotic symptoms. Additionally, Rafeq Habib on the subject posits: “Freud hypothesized that, in the neurotic, any powerful impulse or instinct which was embarrassing continued to operate in the realm of the unconscious where it retained its full “cathexis” or investment of energy. This instinct began to seek substitutive satisfaction by circuitous routes and would produce neurotic symptoms” (574).

Emotional excitement for the postcolonial subject is tied to the ability or lack of it, to create and express cultural identity. This creation is influenced by the colonial experience as it produces continuously a site of enunciation or continuous articulation of culture. The culture of the postcolonial individual is therefore always

at play with that of the coloniser, thus creating a new cultural form(s). While the successful creation and expression of cultural identity by postcolonial characters leads to a form of satisfaction or fulfilment, failure to achieve this results in the exact opposite. This is the situation expressed *The Inheritance of Loss*.

*The Inheritance of Loss* is a postcolonial text in numerous ways. It encapsulates the struggle for integration and recognition of certain peoples within the postcolonial nation of India as well as presents the migration and aspiration to higher societal status which characterizes postcolonial nations. In doing this, the various mix of people resident within society are explored. There are hybrids who are citizens of postcolonial nations as well as Westerners who have resided for lengthy periods in the Postcolony and also become hybrids. The entire events in the novel revolve round these characters and their relationship to and with each other. It is in these relationships and lack of it that the ideas of hybridity, migration, race, class, gender, nationality, lack, loss, despair and disillusionment in the text are demonstrated.

### **Psychosis in Hybridity: Jemubhai Popatel Patel**

Jemubhai Patel is the central character of this text and like many others in the novel does not achieve fulfilment in the attempt to blend or harmonize the dual conflicting cultures of India and the West which characterize his society. However, the difference or peculiarity of his experience lies in his complete lack of control over his emotional excitement, spurred on by the desire to be like the westerner. Homi Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* discusses how the colonial encounter results in mimicry by the colonised, of the coloniser. This mimicry is desired by the West as articulated in the words of the educationist T.B. Macaulay in 1835 who in his mission to India desired: “a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Bhabha 87). In light of this, the postcolonial subject’s mimicry of the culture of the colonised is never fully accurate or complete. It is constructed “around an ambivalence... (thus, it) continually produce(s) it slippage, its excess, its difference” (Bhabha 86). This is the case with Jemubhai. He fails at his attempt at hybridity because he is unable to harmonize the conflicting cultures which he is faced with and he also fails in complete mimicry of westerners. His search for fulfilment sees him adopting an isolationist tactic; as he isolates himself from the westerners he comes in contact with and from his fellow Indian people. This tactic does which do not work and he does not achieve self-realization. All he has at the end of the day is loss. Loss of respect, love and the ability to love,

friendship, material things, family and dreams of regal living. This condition he shares with a large number of other characters in the texts.

Jemubhai's failed hybridity begins from his youth and is linked to his migratory experience. When on completion of high school, he gets a scholarship to study for the Indian civil service examination in Cambridge, England, he is overwhelmed by excitement. Excitement here connotes Freud's notion. On board the SS Strathnaver, on his voyage to England, he first demonstrates a lack of inhibition in suppressing his ambivalence spurred by the conflict for dominance which western and Indian culture have in his mind. In the attempt to act and be 'civilized' like an English man, exuding the type of power welded by the plain-faced Queen Elizabeth whose portrait graced the hall in his elementary school, he rejects his parents advice and gifts. He refuses to throw the coconut as offering for good passage which his father provides. He also scorns the food wrapped and prepared for him by his mother as well as the love involved in this gesture. He thinks she did it to provide him with an alternative if he was too shy to eat on deck in the company of others or if he found himself too nervous to use European eating utensils. Either way,

He was furious that his mother had considered the possibility of his humiliation and thereby, he thought, precipitated it. In her attempt to cancel out one humiliation she had only succeeded in adding another. Jemu picked up the package, fled to the deck, and threw it overboard. Didn't his mother think of the inappropriateness of her gesture? Undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love — the monsters of the ocean could have what she had so bravely packed getting up in that predawn mush. (Desai 38)

This marks the beginning of Jemubhai's failure to rein in his emotions on account of his shame and contempt for Indian culture as well as his admiration and longing for western and specifically, English culture. It is also the first step in the beginning of his psychosis as he becomes increasingly worse. He is not only anti-Indian but anti-social and delusional. Thus his departure from the shores of India in that moment of his migration marks the death of his innocence, its attendant peace, self-knowledge and the ability to love. "Jemu watched his father disappear. He didn't throw the coconut and he didn't cry. Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn't adulterated by another, contradictory emotion" (37).

Upon arrival in England, Jemubhai faces discrimination, hostility and racism due to his difference from Caucasians and their lack of tolerance for people from other cultures and regions. Because of this, he becomes alienated and rather than

looking for other immigrants like himself to associate with, he isolates himself, spending almost all his waking hours at the library or in the room he rents off an English family. It is in this place and at this point in his life that he learns to deny himself. He does this by denying the truth of his past, his being an Indian and his immersion in Indian culture. Thus he avoids as much as possible speaking so as not to demonstrate or portray his accent. He covers up almost every part of his body to prevent his skin, not as pale as that of the English, from being on display. He also keeps to himself so as not to offend.

Thus, Jemubhai's mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact, he could barely let any of himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. He began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling.... To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly. (Desai 40)

These actions of his suggest schizophrenia which is a form of psychosis. He is hallucinating, seeing things that are not and imagining things that are not true. This is the second stage of his descent to psychosis. It is at this stage that he demonstrates a preference for western culture in all aspects of his life. Thus, when his landlady tries to be friendly to him and inquire after his welfare and advises him not to study too hard, he is shocked before he replies in the third person: "“One must, Mrs. Rice.’ He had learned to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen” (111). Even in the euphoria of passing his examinations and making it on the list of civil servant enlisted, he informs his hostess: ““One is done. One is finally through” (117). He also rebuffs the friendly banter of the sale's girl at a convenience store where he goes to buy a shaving brush. “The shop girl said her husband owned the same item exactly, at the acknowledgment of their identical human needs, the intimacy of their connection, *shaving, husband*, he was overcome at the boldness of the suggestion” (40). He is thus completely wrapped up in his own make-believe world where things done and words said by people carry on new and additional meanings and weight. In carrying out his act, Jemubhai “eventually took revenge on his early confusions,

his embarrassments gloved in something called ‘keeping up standards,’ his accent behind a mask of a quiet. He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn’t — a man of dignity. This accidental poise became more important than any other thing.... He worked at being English with the passion of hatred” (119). Therefore, he combines the first stage of his psychosis which involves his shame and distaste for his ‘Indianess’ with the second stage where he shows blatantly in every sphere of his life, a preference for western culture. Jemubhai’s preference for English culture is seen in his use of powder to colour his face, thereby hiding his brown skin under white powder, effectively putting on a mask, camouflaging his identity.

Hence, he finds it easy to disassociate himself from his wife, abuse her physically and emotionally as well as disown the child produced by their union. In their years of marriage, upon his return from England, he does not speak with her in the manner of having a conversation. She is no longer worthy of his attention and he decides that they have no common ground other than the fortune which their union provided him with to enable his travel. He travels to the various stations where he is assigned to alone, leaving her at home and without a companion but her English teacher. When he returns, he suppresses her spirit by demanding she speak to him in English and uphold English standards of culture. She cannot cope and she who was nurtured in love and affection with companionship from family becomes isolated and unwanted. She feels his hatred for her and becomes withdrawn into herself even while he rapes her, taking from her the remaining shards of her individuality and humanity. He easily dismisses her beauty and “it seemed beside the point. An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one” (168). His love for western things and his inability to fully relate with them leave him unwilling and unable to love, to appreciate and take interest in things not western or imitating the West. Thus he destroys the relationship which he had never really even developed as well as his wife. “He... took her head and pushed it into the toilet bowl, and after a point, Nimi, made invalid by her misery, grew very dull.... She peered out at the world but could not focus on it, never went to the mirror, because she couldn’t see herself in it, and anyway she couldn’t bear to spend a moment in dressing and combing, activities that were only for the happy and the loved” (173).

Jemubhai’s parents are not spared either. He strains and eventually destroys his relationship with them. Thus even when he sends Nimi away, telling her that if she remains in the house, he might kill her from his hatred of her, his father comes to his house to make him see reason and rescind his decision. He refuses to do so and his father leaves, defeated. Jemubhai has become someone who nobody can appeal. He is an authority unto himself. Because he is unable to reconcile aspects of Indian

and western culture, he accuses his father: ““You are the one who sent me and now you come and say it was a mistake! A fine thing”” (306). The text continues by explicating the situation. “He had been recruited to bring his countrymen into the modern age, but he could only make it himself by cutting them off entirely, or they would show up reproachful, pointing out to him the lie he had become” (306). The text predicts this when he is yet in England, becoming a servant to the state and enrolling in the Queen’s service. Because he cannot reason with his people any longer, seeing that unlike him, they do not revere western culture to the detriment of theirs, he “envied the English. He loathed Indians... he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both” (117). When his father leaves him having failed to persuade him to take back his wife Nimi into their home, he does not ask about anyone in his home town of Piphit. It is fruitless as he no longer has ties with them. His father refuses his money and goes away, seemingly never to return and Jemubhai becomes truly alone.

Having toured India as a member of the Indian Civil Service and risen to the position of judge, he buys the house; Cho Oyu, off a Scottish man. The house is located uphill, with the Kanchenjunga Mountain in sight, isolated from neighbours and Kalimpong town’s people. He buys it because he believes he could live there “with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language. He never went back to court” (29). This action symbolizes his utter alienation from India. He no longer desires to make an effort like he did while in England and immediately after his return to India when he toured the country, speaking a smattering of Hindi, Urdu and other local dialects in the attempt to dispense with the idea of justice handed over to ICS men. His contempt for India is also demonstrated in his abandonment of his duties as he no longer goes back to court. He does not go because the British have left and he feels the country is headed towards a path where he can no longer fit in.

The situation with the judge is so bad in his old age that the only being he is capable of truly loving is the dog Mutt. He spends money on winter jackets for it and dog food as well as visits to the veterinarian. Even when his granddaughter Sai arrives, newly orphaned on his doorstep, he does not do much by way of a relative, he hardly knows how to relate with her even though he reasons once that it could be an opportunity for him to right the wrong he did in his relationship with his wife and the daughter she bore him who he never acknowledged. So warped is his mind that he is careful to use sweet words while addressing the dog, so as not to hurt its feelings. He also allows it to sleep in his bedroom, on his bed. It is the one thing that stirs up positive emotions in him. He physically and verbally abuses the cook

because of the dog. It gets stolen by a poor couple who come to beg him to influence the police to release their son and husband. When Mutt disappears, the judge becomes frantic. “He felt more keenly than ever that at nightfall in Kalimpong, there was a real ceding of power. You couldn’t rise against such a powerful dark, so enormous, without a chink. He went out with the biggest flashlight they had, shone it uselessly into the jungle.... By the time dawn showed, he was frantic” (289).

The fact that no one can evoke such depth of emotion in the judge except a dog speaks volumes about his personality. Additionally, in his delusion he demands that the cook keep up the tradition of serving tea with scones, cakes or biscuits even though he doesn’t provide for food and other necessities in the house as he ought to. “Why is there nothing to eat?” the judge asked, irritated.... Never ever was the tea served the way it should be, but he demanded at least a cake or scones, macaroons or cheese straws. Something sweet and something salty” (3). The cook augments the meagre money he gets by selling a local beer which he brews himself as well as farming local vegetables which instead of appreciating, the judge looks upon with contempt. In light of his delusionary tendency therefore, Jemubhai finds it easy to unleash his pent up anger and frustration at losing Mutt as well as the disrespect shown to him by the Gorkha boys on the cook when he offers himself to be beaten.

Consequently, for Jemubhai who is unable to reconcile the conflicting cultures in his life even to a little extent, there is no fulfilment. Rather, what he demonstrates is a deep seated discontent, spattered with demonstrations of psychotic symptoms from time to time. Thus, in his old age, he constantly recollects with regret and dissatisfaction, the manner in which he had lived even though he does not do much to change it.

### **Hybridity as Continuous Reassertion of Selfhood and Compromise:**

The phases of emotional excitement which result in insecurity or lack of confidence in indigenous culture, a preference for western culture, and a complete denial of indigenous culture and therefore the self by postcolonial characters is not limited to Jemubhai alone. However, the other characters in the text do not follow it up to the third and final stage of utter rejection of their ‘Indianess’ like Jemubhai does which results in his psychotic behaviour and lack of self-realization. Sai, Jemubhai’s granddaughter who is also closest in demonstrating a mix of western and Indian culture, hybridity, is taught from a young age to abhor all things Indian. “This Sai had learned ....cake was better than *laddoos*, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi”

(Desai 29, 30).

With such a background, it is expected that she become even more severe in her negative perception of Indian related things than the Judge. However, she is glad to have escaped the confinement and rigid rules of the convent where she was raised and taught. Thus, because she feels no shame, only alienation from Indian culture and things. She does not develop a loathing for them. Rather, she demonstrates a certain level of comfort with English food, table manners, film and literature than she does with Indian ones. She is open to learning as towards the end of the text even after losing in her love affair with Gyan due to his passion for the Gorkha land movement, she realizes “life wasn’t single in its purpose... or even in its direction.... The simplicity of what she’d been taught wouldn’t hold. Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it” (323). This is in line with postcolonial celebration of the privileged position of cultural polyvalence which Henry Louis Gates projects. Simply because the postcolonial individual is not exactly like his or her predecessor does not mean that something is being missed or that the individual is less for that. Rather it means that like Sai, the individual is opported to take the best of each culture, the Indian and the western. However, because hybridity for the postcolonial individual is not only a recognition of the fact that “cultures are never unitary in themselves nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” but rather, involves an act of enunciation or continuous articulation (Habib 752), the postcolonial subject is continually negotiating the third space. This third space is the space of contact, it is also a space of remonstrance which allows for possibilities from the cultures at play. On this note, Stuart Hall opines that: “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact... we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (222). Thus, although Sai has a hybrid identity, she is still on her way to taking the best of what she can from the two cultures confronting her. For she has just realised towards the end of the story that she needs to leave Cho Oyu and her grandfather in order to improve on herself seeing that the world is much more complex and bigger than she had ever imagined.

Other characters like the cook, Biju, Lola, Noni, Mrs. Sen and Uncle Potty demonstrate their awe and admiration for western culture. They have all been socialised through the colonial encounter to view the western culture as superior to and more rational and developed than Indian culture. However, they only demonstrate this longing for and admiration of it because of what they stand to

gain through it which is social and economic mobility. It is this dream that drives Jemubhai's and Biju's migration to England and America in the text. It is also the reason why the cook is suddenly respected and sought after in Kalimpong by other lowly placed individuals because they think he can with his son's influence, aid the migration of their own children and wards to America thereby elevating their social and economic status in the process. Thus, the "cook's desire was for modernity: toaster ovens, electric shavers, watches, cameras, cartoon colors. He dreamed at night not in the Freudian symbols that still enmeshed others but in modern codes, the digits of a telephone flying away before he could dial them, a garbled television" (55). It is this same preference for western culture that fuels his disappointment upon discovering that the Indian Civil Service man he is expected to serve is not a European but an Indian like himself. Thus, to beef up his reputation, he peddles stories of how well treated he is, how liberally he is paid and inflates the status and character of the Judge.

Gyan is another character in the text who achieves a sense of selfhood in his hybridity experience. Sai's physics teacher later turned lover, he tolerates Sai's ignorance and lack of interest in Indian culture. Although not an ardent admirer of western culture, he longs for and works hard to get western education which he feels is his ticket to an improved social and economic status. Before he gets involved in the politics of the Gorkha land movement, he longs also to demonstrate his western sophistication to Sai. Thus, he attempts to eat with the cutlery provided by the cook when he is invited to dinner at Cho Oyu. However, when he gets involved in resistance politics, he decries Sai's criticality and the pretence and hypocrisy in which she and her grandfather live. Hence he takes pride in his love for and comfort in Indian movies, food and manner of eating amongst other things.

Biju, the cook's son is also able to assert his selfhood in his demonstration of hybridity. Hybridity for him is very little and the only aspects of western culture which he takes on involve the fashion and dress sense. He does not eat beef as a Hindu despite serving it as a waiter in restaurants in the United States. After a while, he ceases to work in such restaurants altogether and works in Indian themed restaurants like the Ghandi where beef is not served. He also does not lose respect for his father like Harish-Harry's daughter does, calling him 'Dad' and using words like 'ass' while speaking to him. So secluded is he from American society on account of his lack of means as well as his repulsion for some of their cultures that he returns home without having seen even a little of the country where he stayed.

Biju saluted himself. Here he was, on his way home, without name or

knowledge of the American president, without the name of the river on whose bank he had lingered, without even hearing about any of the tourist sights — no Statue of Liberty, Macy's, Little Italy, Brooklyn Bridge, Museum of Immigration; no bialy at Barney Greengrass, soupy dumpling at Jimmy's Shanghai, no gospel churches of Harlem tour.... (286)

Harish-Harry like Jemubhai is another character who undertakes hybridity which leads to situations outside his control which he is unhappy with. Having migrated to America, he owns a restaurant and has a daughter who demonstrates to a large extent western culture. This grieves her father whose attempt to remedy the situation with corporeal punishment and having a peer relationship with her do not work. He is therefore dissatisfied with the level of compromise he has to make but is resolved to continue doing so for the material benefits. "He tried to keep on the right side of power, tried to be loyal to so many things that he himself couldn't tell which one of his selves was the authentic, if any.... It was only the recollection of the money he was making that calmed him. Within this thought he found a perfectly reasonable reason for being here, a morality to agree on, a bridge over the split" (148, 149). In light of this, hybridity for Harry is an ongoing compromise. He is constantly reviewing the gains he has to make sure they are worth the compromises he make. Balance or harmony in hybridity is therefore achieved only when the individual involved is satisfied with the choices he or she makes from day to day.

### **Conclusion**

Hybridity for the postcolonial character could either be failed like in the case of Jemubhai or a pursuit for balance and harmony in the effort to assert the self like Biju, Gyan and other characters demonstrate. Either way, it is obvious that hybridity suggests a negotiation and re-negotiation in a constant state of flux as it is identity, "always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 222). Thus, Jemubhai's failure to assert his notion of selfhood, his utter surrender to his image as 'perceived' by the West (in his thinking), is what results in his failed hybridity and ultimately, psychosis.

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# An Existential Crisis: The Significance of the Opening and Concluding Passages of Robert Walser's *Jacob Von Gunten*

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**Abstract** This study examines the opening and concluding passages of Robert Walser's *Jacob Von Gunten* (1909) as they contain the essence of the novel. The novel follows the life of Jakob, a young man of supposed noble background, as he enrolls in the Institute Benjamenta to become a servant. Jakob's lack of history and the failure of modernist ideals in him lead to a state of identity crisis, wherein he questions the possibility of any authentic sense of existence. By drawing on a conjunction of Existentialist and Marxist theories, it is claimed that subordination and domination that Jakob experiences is in effect, the metaphoric critique of bourgeois and modernism. Also these eventually lead the protagonist to an existential feeling of nothingness and alienation.

**Keywords** Subordination; Crisis; the Existential; Walser; *Jacob Von Gunten*

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“To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled one’s self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage. To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself gray on gray.”

— Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

In “Walser’s Voice,” a foreword to Robert Walser’s *Selected Stories*, Susan Sontag writes, “The moral core of Walser’s art is the refusal of power; of domination” (VII). Walser, primarily in his short stories, writes on nothing but everything. He deals with issues of power, loss, and a chosen form of subjection and autonomy. His novel, *Jakob von Gunten*, highlights a binary of power relation that centers on the lord/servant and the master/slave trope, where Mr. Benjamenta acts as “the dominant lord and master” and Jakob as “the subordinate servant and slave” (Pister 114). Walser’s treatment of this problem is appropriated to intricate yet ordinary and internalized narrative, turning the novel into what Walser’s translator Christopher Middleton in the novel’s foreword calls, “an analytic fictional soliloquy” (5). However, the significance of the opening<sup>1</sup> and concluding<sup>2</sup> passages of *Jacob Von Gunten* is that they contain the essence of the novel. J.M. Coetzee writes in “The Genius of Robert Walser” that Walser’s prose contains “lucid syntactic layout, [...] casual juxtapositions of the elevated with the banal, and [...] eerily convincing logic of paradox” (15). The novel itself is complex in nature as it contains biographical information, unreliable narration, normalized subordination and irresolute choices.

*Jacob Von Gunten* is written as a combination of traditional Swiss prose and the European avant-garde in a period between Spitteler’s *Imago* (1906) and World War I which today is known as Epische Dekade or Epic Decade (Schellinger 1309). Walser picks up the theme of subordination and autonomy in his satire of modernism to portray aporias erected atop inter-discursivity of power, religion, and ideology that issue the boundaries of the modernist society. A power that is a chosen form of subordination by subjects who are seen to be dominated, and it is thus that Walser provides the readers the possibility of resistance by disobedience.

The importance of modernism as a historical context for existentialism has been realized by critics. Henry Berry in *From Revolution to Fads: The Progress of Modernity* asserts that “Existentialism, then, is the first phenomenon of Western culture to deal with the disintegration of the anxieties that were the driving force

of modernism, anxieties that were generated by the anomalies of modernism” (175). Berry claims that the role of society is the primary vehicle for realizing the ambitions of modernism and that existentialism despairs society that has nothing positive or productive to offer (176). The argument here is that Walser chooses forms of subordination and domination as a critique of bourgeois, modernism, and courses that lead him to an existential nothingness and alienation.

Walser succeeds by transmuted his narratives out of the ordinary throughout the text in a modernist fashion and merging it with existential concerns. He combines what Guy Davenport calls the “kithless epistemology” with what Susan Sontag calls “creatureliness of life” forming an uncanny metaphysical and captivating representation of the real world, turning everyday things and shared experiences of history into existential accounts that make him a practitioner of a dialectical materialism analogous to Walter Benjamin (Fragopoulos par. 1). Davenport in calling Walser “kithless” in his epistemology questions him for being without origin, or without epistemological concerns, which leads to this fact that Walser’s concern is more ontological. Also, being kithless in one’s logical discourse could be a question of what Martin Heidegger calls “Befindlichkeit” [state-of-mind] and the ontological question of “Wie befinden Sie sich?” [How are you feeling?] which shapes the assimilation of individual’s knowledge?

Walser’s *Jacob Von Gunten* takes on a mock-bildungsroman form, but unlike the bildungsroman tradition, Jakob’s subjectivity as the protagonist of the story is overtaken by subordination (Tobias 259). Predominantly, Jakob’s subordination comes with the acceptance of Mr. Benjamenta as his master but the fact is that this binary of power arises from Jakob’s participation in the institute to become “sehr Kleines und Untergeordnetes” [very small and subordinate] (Walser 7). This participation implies choice, a choice made by an autonomous mind reduced to its basic instinctual criterion of survival in the modern society that is defined by “Gelder verschwenden” [squandering money] (Walser 7). This reification has been used by Walser to portray the structure of social consciousness wherein individuals are left to be identified with objects or things.

Slavoj Žižek in his discussion of ideological fantasy uses the Marxian expression of “they do not know it, but they are doing it” (*The Sublime Object of Ideology* 28). As for Jakob, he does know why he is doing, but he is doing it because everybody is doing it. Such behavior might be reflective of a false consciousness that lies in false logic of ideological judgments in the “knowing” or in the “doing” of the individuals. Žižek claims the “concept of ideology implies” an abjured form of naivety, inexperience, “misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own

effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it" (24). Jakob is doing it for money, a fetish commodity that is the materialization of a network of social relations. He is living in a society where social relations are between commodities or things. Žižek calls this unconscious illusion "the ideological fantasy" (30). This unconscious fantasy masks the authentic state of things for Jakob and blinds him to the social reality and thus creates an illusion for him.

David Knights and Hugh Willmott in "Dualism and Domination: An Analysis of Marxian, Weberian and Existentialist Perspectives" discuss the problems of reconciling the separation of the individual from society (sociological dualism). In their discussion of three perspectives of domination and dualism, they believe in a neglected existential perspective of domination. In this model social relations are a reflection of "insecurity" that involves "anxiety" stemming from an ideology that is associated with "the identification of self as subject" which encompasses "the subordination of experience to social identity" (37). In the experience of dualism in "social existence," the individual bases his presumptions on the mere experiences and tend to shape his/her consciousness as a "concrete entity" by escaping the socio-temporal and socio-spatial reflections. This reflection involves a "preoccupation with securing a solid sense of self" which is solidified through the opening passage of the novel. Jakob renders the naivety of his experience as a means to "reconstructs his experience to sustain identity that secures the concrete senses he has of himself." This reconstruction happens through isolation of the individual and it is intensified "through the materially instrumental actions of self-interested individuals" (41).

In this regard, believing that he will become nothing with the anxiety of the gaze of the others in the society, Jakob wears uniforms that "erniedrigt und erhebt" [humiliates and exalts] him but brings a sort of social identity by making him a homogeneous human labor, abstracted and defined by what he wears. Jakob seeks to work as a butler because work is the source of money and social identity while he knows that this work will hardly bring him personal fulfillment and progression. Also, there was neither the force of compulsion nor that of violence in Jakob's decision to attend the institute so the whys of attending there remains a mystery for the reader who glances at Jakob saying, "Aber auch in dieser Beziehung bin ich mir vorläufig noch ein Rätsel. Vielleicht steckt ein ganz, ganz gemeiner Mensch in mir. Vielleicht aber besitze ich aristokratische Adern" [I am a mystery to myself for the time being. Perhaps there is a very very commonplace person inside me. But perhaps I have aristocratic blood in my veins] (Walser 8).

The opening passage starts in medias res, and Jakob's past is revealed by bits

of information later in the novel. We find ourselves in an ethical version of the hermeneutic circle and the meaning making process starts in the beginning and by the end to attain the full meaning we have return to the beginning. The existentialist or Jakob judges in-situation and places the readers in-situation. However, where “the prudent person [phronimos] *discovers*,” “the existentialist *decides* the right thing to do,” and if the individual is “authentic” he or she will decide “in full recognition of judgment’s fallibility” (Flynn 154-155; emphasis in the original). Jakob decides to attend Institute Benjamenta, being not aware of his judgment’s fallibility, because he lacks authentic individual’s decision making ability.

In *The Division of Labor*, Emile Durkheim describes the rise of the individuality as “the disappearance of the segmentary type of society” (261). In Durkheim’s view, we can only “liberate ourselves” as autonomous moral actors, “through understanding” (270). The social intelligence restricts Jakob’s knowledge, and he defines “Taschengeld” [pocket money] as the definition of social stature, and not having it reduces him to a state of “Nichtswürdigkeit” [nothingness] (Walser 7).

In the heart of Walser’s text, there is a controlled society, with policies for unifying it, blocking the creation of new ideas, preserving rules and avoiding criticism. The concept of autonomy stresses an individual’s autonomous abilities and the facility to make a decision. In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre writes:

Authenticity and individuality have to be earned: I shall be my own authenticity only if under the influence of the call of conscience (Ruf des Gewissens) I launch out toward death with a resolute-decision (Entschlossenheit) as toward my own most peculiar possibility. At this moment I reveal myself to myself in authenticity, and I raise others along with myself toward the authentic. (332)

Authentic existence in Walser is full of despair, ungratefulness, transmogrified, autonomous but lacks choice, dispassionate toward the others and is filled with unethical ethics. Heidegger believes when being of “Dasein” [being there] becomes primordial then it must answer basic ontological questions and “light existentially the Being of Dasein in its possibilities of authenticity and totality” (234). Thus, an entity’s “state of Being” must be traced back to the existential backgrounds and constructions. This “ontological analysis of conscience” is before any justification and categorizing of “Experiences of conscience.” However, it is closer to “a theological exegesis of conscience” for creating an “immediate consciousness of God” (269).

In the modern condition, in Heideggerian terms, as the realization of authentic existence, the desire to eternal life with God or “authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole” has been switched to “Sein zum Tode” [being-towards-death] (277). It could be stated that in such condition of being, “only a god can save us” as Heidegger declares in his interview with *Der Spiegel*. In the concluding passage of the novel, Jakob says, “Gott wird mit mir sein. Was brauche ich da an ihn zu denken? Gott geht mit den Gedankenlosen” [God will be with me. What should I need to think of Him? God goes with thoughtless people] (Walser 175). The existence of Jakob’s self, in spite of accompanying a divine being, lacks significance and authentic existence because he still desires to thoughtlessly wander about with God, an entity he endeavors to touch but fails as he becomes an anomaly.

In the opening passage we also see that Jakob believes he can achieve nothing with what he calls “Innere Erfolge” [Inward successes] (Walser 7). Seeking “outward successes,” rather than “inward successes,” makes Jakob reject his own inner desires and lead to state of subjection, a collective state of self-estrangement, domination, nothingness, and seclusion and alienates from what he truly is. It is thus that in the beginning, the reader faces a state of crisis that the narrator is unaware of and although he knows this fact he turns a blind eye. Yet, in the concluding passage we see Jakob coming into terms with his religious alienation. In all its various forms, religious alienation is what “man creates [as] a force outside himself that he does not recognize as his own, to which he is submitted” (Vandenberghe 48). Karl Marx in his *Critique of Hegel’s “Philosophy of Right”* writes:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo. [...] It is, therefore, the task of history, once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world. It is the immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked. (131-132)

The interesting fact about Jakob is that his religious estrangement is the result of money in face of God. Marx in “On the Jewish Question” believes, “Money debases

all the gods of mankind and turns them into commodities. [...] Money is the universal self-constituted value of all things. [...] Money is the estranged essence of man's work and existence" (67). There is a skeptical view of money and it is considered as the cause of the anomalies of a society and it is taken as God himself. The concluding passage disintegrates this view but not in a positive sense.

Mr. Benjamenta, on the other hand, is taken over by Jakob and sets off to wander with him thoughtlessly in the desert. Jakob as a commodified object turns to Mr. Benjamenta as an autonomized product to overpower him, that is, an object dominating the subject. This incident shatters the hierarchy of society that in the novel stems from the manifesto of Institute Benjamenta, "[...] d. h., wir werden alle etwas sehr Kleines und Untergeordnetes im späteren Leben sein" or [that is to say, we [the students] shall all be something very small and subordinate later in life] (Walser 7). One can conclude that Jakob had the freedom and autonomy, regardless of the society, to attend Institute Benjamenta. However, one is responsible for one's values, regardless of society's values and by taking that Jakob is suffering from existential crisis; and individuals suffering from existential crisis cannot "take responsibility of their existence" (Nelson-Jones 113). Individuals are in need of a leader and in the concluding passage of the novel, the non-violent death of Fraulein Benjamenta and the transition of power, leads to the liberation of the subordinates who now do not have a leader to dominate them. Jakob needs a master and when Fraulein dies, his true master, he suffices to a new master which is God himself.

The supposed autonomous and authorizing individual is a "Null" [Zero], as Jakob calls it, a herd animal ready for becoming small and dominated by obeying the principles of the institute. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Søren Kierkegaard considers "dialectical determinations of anxiety" in the face of nothing and asserts that ignorance, for instance, is about nothing and "innocence is ignorance" (41-44). Jakob's ignorance for coming to the institute Benjamenta can be justified by saying that he is nothing thus innocent and ignorant. Kierkegaard believes that this nothingness brings anxiety and continues his argument:

[...] God said to Adam, "Only from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you must not eat," it follows as a matter of course that Adam really has not understood this word, for how could he understand the difference between good and evil when this distinction would follow as a consequence of the enjoyment of the fruit? When it is assumed that the prohibition awakens the desire, one acquires knowledge instead of ignorance, and in that case Adam must have had a knowledge of freedom, because the desire was to use it. (44)

The state of being that Jakob faces in the institute awakens Jakob's eye to say farewell to the institute, and leave it "sein, aufrichtig Gutes wollen und tun und nachts schlafen und träumen läßt" [willing good things and doing them, and sleeping and dreaming at night] (Walser 175). It is significant because it shows the transition of Jakob from one state to another in the face of nothingness and redeems the anxiety of death in the face of it. Heidegger characterizes existentially authentic Being-towards-death as anxiety that is "an impassioned freedom towards death – a freedom which has been released from the Illusions of the 'they,' and which is factual, certain of itself, and anxious" (Being and Time 311; emphasis in original).

Walser deconstructs the rigid binaries of repressive and hegemonizing Institute Benjamenta with its repressed and hegemonized butlers as his protagonist identifies his authentic existence within the chains and definitions of the society. In a modernist society, "historicism" mean chains and subordination and "its opposite is presentism" (Tymieniecka 326). However, the modernism brings its own chains and subordinates its subjects. In a presentist state, the author and the character either handle the death "of the past without emotion, or they deplore the loss as an amputation of the narrative and the self" (Hoffmann 295). Hoffmann claims that a presentist believes that everything is present and the obscurity of the past and the inability of the self to make it significant might "lead to the loss of personal and collective history; the flow of time is reduced to the present" (295). Walser's protagonist Jakob submits and later refutes, to an extent, with the purpose of the institute by accepting Institute Benjamenta as propagators of uniformity and subordination. It's through presentism that Jakob deconstructs the binaries and by the end of the novel the institute is taken down by the deconstruction of tradition which comes along, again, by the death of Fraulein Benjamenta but this presentism comes at one price, to exist no more. Concerning this, Heidegger writes:

If Being is to be conceived in terms of time, and if, indeed, its various modes and derivatives are to become intelligible in their respective modifications and derivations by taking time into consideration, then Being itself (and not merely entities, let us say, as entities "in time") is thus made visible in its 'temporal' character. [...] Thus the way in which Being and its modes and characteristics have their meaning determined primordially in terms of time, is what we shall call its "Temporal" determinateness. Thus the fundamental ontological task of Interpreting Being as such includes working out the Temporality of Being. In the exposition of the problematic of Temporality the question of the meaning of Being will first be concretely answered (Being and Time 40).

History in a traditional sense is the exploration of the past from the perspective of the present, but Heidegger's history is "[...] primordially and always the future, that which[...] comes toward us [...] The future is the beginning of all happening" (Basic Questions of Philosophy 35-36). It can be concluded that to be authentic and to exist the individuals needs to be historical or toward history, and this signifies that individual identity has a time-based constitution that is narrated in terms of events, originating from the history. Opening the story in medias res gives Jakob a chance to find out his past later in the text as the reader is warned by Jakob, "Aber weg jetzt mit der Feder" [I'll throw away my pen] so he will exist no more (Walser 175). By this warning, the reader understands that Jakob is the author, or simply Walser is reflected, camouflaged in Jakob, giving the novel a meta-fictional touch. However, the significance of the sentence remains in that Jakob (Walser) questions his existence, as the novel loosely follows Walser's own life.

Jakob's knowledge is dependent on others, and he is to silence what he wants by wearing "uniforms," obeying and accepting what others say as true. His lack of autonomy and the need to achieve freedom and authenticity, on one hand; and on the other, being incapable of loving, lacking the feeling of belonging or accepting the truth plunges him into a state of crisis. This state of crisis is associated with the need to maintain a sense of self when his being and entire universe is unjustified, ephemeral, and interconnected.

Taken together, *Jakob Von Gunten* can be considered as Walser's masterpiece. Walser's opening and concluding passages give a microcosmic picture of the course of the novel and Jakob's transformations in his state of crisis. It succinctly reflects Jakob's journey from subordination to a state of conceited autonomy and freedom, one that he fails attain in the novel's end but the one which he has attained as a writer. Walser ironically questions the nature of existence. Jakob will not be the same person for the stigma carved up in his unconscious resulting in psychosis, caused by the state of crisis in this period when the modernist dreams brought about a mode of existence that led to nothingness without history. He puts on stage an exaggerated and fantastical representation of subjectively disoriented individual as a manifestation of modern establishment and the condition of the individual within it. Walser utilizes the alienating effect of existentialism to disorient the readers and challenge what would be passed as unnoticeable.

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# Angela Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman*: A Subversive Cartesian Thought Experiment

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**Abstract** Carter's novel revolves around two opposing characters and two opposing definitions of truth: Desiderio and Dr Hoffman. Dr Hoffman commits himself to destabilize all the givens in the 'Enlightenment' civilization of Desiderio by breaking the spatial and temporal moulds and demarcations and by destroying all the symmetries in its logocentric thinking. He aims to create a civilization without the chains and structures of reason in an alternative site of existence filled with mirages and elements of phantasy. Against the backdrop of the problematic relation of reason to unreason, he interrogates the nature and function of the rational acts. Proposing another mode of consciousness, Dr Hoffman indulges in a Cartesian thought experiment in a subversive fashion and rethinks a fundamental Cartesian problematic: the ontological status of reality and identity, thus, the disjunction between imaginary and symbolic registers. This essay aims to give a Lacanian hearing to Hoffman's project which makes more sense from a Lacanian vantage point as he tries to open a gap in the symbolic register or create a disastrous disturbance in it, and tries to delete or distort the place of the shared Other, by creating a domain outside symbolization through imaginary distortions.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords** Jacques Lacan; Angela Carter; Love; Desire; Imaginary Register

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In *Hoffman* Carter translates ideas into fiction. (Sage, "Savage" 52)

Carter's *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* revolves around two opposing characters, two opposing sites of existence and two opposing definitions of truth, which are created around Desiderio and Dr Hoffman. Proposing a different mode of consciousness, Dr Hoffman indulges in a Cartesian thought experiment in a subversive fashion and rethinks a fundamental Cartesian problematic: the ontological status of reality and identity, the disjunction between imaginary and symbolic registers, or the disjunction between pre-discursive and linguistically castrated subjectivities. Dr Hoffman's version of the cogito runs against the Cartesian dictum: he believes that objectified desire is possible and the appearance is organically restructured, as for him, to desire is to be, or he says, I DESIRE THEREFORE I EXIST.

His reality modifying machines which precipitate essence of being generate the germinal molecules of objectified desire, and in this free play of unconscious, time, which is characterized by evanescence, doesn't proceed in a progressive line but is a serial composition of apparently indivisible instants. A world of seductive illusions and images is given priority over essence in traditional sense: so "[e]verything depends on persistence of vision" (*Hoffman* 107) and Hoffman's alternative universe is populated with characters who are the creations of nebulous time with no reality status. Unleashing unconscious, he reverses the traditional hierarchy between the binary polarities; between reason and desire, reality and dream, symmetry and asymmetry, essence and imagery, logical thought and analogical thought, singularity and multiplicity, fixedness and mutability, unity and disunity, order and chaos, totalitarian conformism and liberation of the psyche, the synthetic and the authentic. Based on these binaries, Hoffman tries to create an alternative universe with an alternative mode of consciousness and in this universe he can make the subjects perceive ideas with their senses as he sees no essential difference in the phenomenological bases of the two modes of thought. Hoffman allows ever-changing mirages to inhabit the same dimension as the living.

This is also an experiment of representation as Hoffman problematizes the givens of realism which assumes a correspondence between the word and the world. His attack on realism is best explained by Albertina as follows; the Minister:

decided he could only keep a strict control of his actualities by adjusting their

names to agree with them perfectly. So, you understand, that no shadow would fall between the word and the thing described. For the Minister hypothesized my father worked in that shadowy land between the thinkable and the thing thought of, and, if he destroyed this difference, he would destroy my father. (*Hoffman* 194)

In such a context, Elaine Jordan commands attention as she says:

Angela Carter traces the history of reason and desire in literary and philosophic representation, from the Enlightenment through to psychoanalysis and its post-romantic consciousness of the unconscious- Enlightenment seen from its dark side, its blind spot. *Hoffman*'s serial episodes explore our conventions and classificatory myths. (34)

With his project, Dr Hoffman stands for the transgression into the forbidden area, into *jouissance* and the *moi* which imply the dissolution of the reality principle. Through this subversive Cartesian thought experiment Dr Hoffman seems also to probe the possibility of transcending the barrier of ego ideal excluding any form of alienation in the discursive self, whether historically produced or psychically conceived, in so far as it represents a threat to the image of seamless unity of the pre-discursive self. In other words, with a pose of psychic self-query his project holds out the prospect of a return to origins of identity as a seamless continuum, to the pre-discursive self without disruptive effect. His project rests in the untested assumption that such a return is possible and posits an operative psychic continuity between the rational and the irrational by problematizing the very terms within which the question of desire is posed and resolved. This essay aims to give a Lacanian hearing to Hoffman's project which makes more sense from a Lacanian vantage point as he tries to open a gap in the symbolic register or create a disastrous disturbance in it, and tries to delete or distort the place of the shared Other, by creating a domain outside symbolization through imaginary distortions.

The protagonist of the novel speaking in his stable, autonomous self called Desiderio, the desired one, tells what happened in the Great War of defining reality: The Reality War during which Dr Hoffman fills the city with mirages by his reality distorting machines and wages "a massive campaign against human reason itself" (*Hoffman* 11) takes place in the capital city of an unspecified Latin American country, one of the remnants of the humanist civilization based on reason. Dr. Hoffman is in complicity with chaos and plays around the concepts of time and space, and

modifies the nature of reality as his “gigantic generators sent out a series of seismic vibrations which made great cracks in the hitherto immutable surface of the time and space equation [they] had informally formulated in order to realize [their] city and, out of these cracks, well- nobody knew what would come next” (*Hoffman* 17).

Everything starts to metamorphose in the city which is “the ideological castle” of the Minister of Determination; and for Desiderio, the secretary to the Minister of Determination, this new project carried out by Hoffman is a phantasmagoric redefinition both of reality and the city which becomes the kingdom of the instantaneous. The concrete city in the inhabitants’ memory metamorphoses into a dream. Empirical reality is threatened by unstable and constantly changing, unfixable, un-categorizable, chaotic concretizations of phantasy as Hoffman scientifically literalizes dictates of desire and objectifies it after collecting and channelling the eroto-energy from his set of samples and the lovers who volunteered to spend the rest of their life copulating with their beloved in “love-pens.” His huge machines bombard the city with illusions and mirages, and this nightmarish process involves transmutation of things and concepts and dislocation of everyday life. The previously fixed parameters start to fluctuate and now the polarity between dream and reality determines the course of things in their lives; “the city was no longer the conscious production of humanity; it had become the arbitrary realm of dream” (*Hoffman* 18). They cannot receive any news from the world outside as Hoffman blocks all the radio waves so they get confused about their dream in traditional sense and the dream that invades their city:

By the end of the first year there was no longer any way of guessing what one would see when one opened one’s eyes in the morning for other people’s dreams insidiously invaded the bedroom while one slept and yet it seemed that sleep was our last privacy for, while we slept, at least we knew that we were dreaming although the stuff of our waking hours, so buffeted by phantoms, had grown thin and insubstantial enough to seem itself no more than seeming, or else the fragile marginalia of our dreams. Sheeted teasing memories of the past waited to greet us at the foot of the bed and these were often memories of someone else’s past... Dead children came calling in nightgowns, rubbing the sleep and grave dust from their eyes. Not only the dead returned but also the living. (*Hoffman* 19)

Hoffman orchestrates time and space they live in, certainty and uncertainty, the thinkable and the unthinkable. He acknowledges that time and space have their own

properties, thus he liberates the streets from the tyranny of directions and sets the timepieces free so that the inhabitants of the city can live whatever time they like. He populates the city with analogies dislocating the previous demarcations. He aims to suspend disbelief, to uncover the infinite potentiality of phenomena and to make the world a timeless place outside the world of reason by establishing a world of shadows. Accordingly, he plays games with the objects that regulate time, so when they look at their watch they see that "its hands had been replaced by a healthy growth of ivy or honey-suckle which... writhed impudently all over its face, concealing it" (*Hoffman* 21). They no longer hold a structure of time in common as all the clocks tell a different time and nobody trusts them anyway.

In such a context, the inhabitants of the city are ranged according to their reality ratings and very suitably, Desiderio groups people with regards to whether they retain "some notion of what was real and what was not" (*Hoffman* 21). Amidst these mirages and illusions many people go crazy and the city becomes a place of the irrational coincidences and distortions, insanity and crime. Some of the scientists are somehow invalidated like Dr Drosselmeier who went mad after, Desiderio supposes, he "had unwittingly exposed himself to an overdose of reality and it had destroyed his reason" (*Hoffman* 23). Or in this downward-drooping convoluted spiral of unreality, many commit suicide.

All these cause the Minister of Determination "the gravest concern for he feared that one day a man would impregnate an illusion and then a generation of half-breed ghosts would befoul the city" (*Hoffman* 19). For the Minister, the most ascetic of logicians, all these are nothing more than giving the phantoms a reality status. He refuses the transcendental and wages war on the illusion and mirage that surround them, and aims to return the city back into attitudes of perfect propriety and stasis. His main project is to enforce a strict system of rationing, thus to determine every bit of detail in life and to "formulate a systematic procedure for calculating the verifiable self-consistency of any given object" as he believed "the criterion of reality was that a thing was determinate and the identity of a thing lay only in the extent to which it resembled itself" (*Hoffman* 23). The first thing the Determination Police did for this purpose was to seal off the city to keep more illusion outside and to break the mirrors in the city because of the most seductive phantoms and "the lawless images they were disseminating." Mirrors were dangerous because they offered alternatives, and they "had all turned into fissures or crannies in the hitherto hard-edged world of here and now and through these fissures came slithering sideways all manner of amorphous spooks. And these spooks were Dr Hoffman's guerrillas, his soldiers in disguise who, though absolutely unreal, nevertheless,

were” (*Hoffman* 12). They build a vast wall of wire around the city, “to quarantine unreality.” The Minister forbids any act that involves imagination, a case in point is, he permits only the bicycle as a form of transport as it doesn’t require imagination. With the help of the physicists with “a three-star reality rating” the Minister tries to develop counter weapons like the Determining Radar Apparatus to the weapons and the unreality atom cleverly designed by Hoffman to offend non-substance. However his technological weapons fail in a world where objects change their names, shapes and functions constantly. The Doctor’s research laboratories swiftly restructure their own prototype molecules to invalidate their determination system.

The minister with his theory of names and functions believes that “[e]ach man was secure in possession of a certain name which also ensured him a certain position in a society seen as a series of interlinking rings which, although continually in movement, were never subjected to change for there were never any disturbances and no usurpation of names or ranks or roles whatsoever” (*Hoffman* 24). The epistemological frame to which the Minister belongs murders “the imagination in the womb” according to Hoffman’s ambassador but the Doctor will reverse this process because he knows how to piece the appearances and to allow real forms to emerge into substantiality from the transparency of immanence (*Hoffman* 37). Next to Hoffman’s, the Minister’s personification in the novel seems to be an assault on the positivist and empiricist thinking as he believed that the city as a microcosm of the universe:

contained a finite set of objects and a finite set of their combinations and therefore a list could be made of all possible distinct forms which were logically viable. These could be counted, organized into a conceptual framework and so form a kind of check list for the verification of all phenomena, instantly available by means of an information retrieval system. So he was engaged in the almost superhuman task of programming computers with factual data concerning everything.... (*Hoffman* 24)

Meanwhile Desiderio is regularly visited by a very beautiful glass woman in his dreams. He cannot make sense of her appearances but he is aware that they are manifestations of a language of signs which he cannot read. She occasionally leaves imperatives like “BE AMOROUS” or “BE MYSTERIOUS,” “DON’T THINK, LOOK,” which haunt him. Later she reveals her name in a Platonic mode in the form of a swan accompanied by an elemental music as Albertina.

### Lacan and Hoffman

Lacan transliterates the Freudian Oedipus complex into a linguistic phenomenon and designates it as the subject's discovery of the Name-of-the-Father. So the infant's accession into speech and into the symbolic order overlap as the subject is caught up by the signifier and language; and positioned in culture by the Name of the Father: "[i]t is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of law" (Lacan, *Écrits* 230). Therefore "the law of man has been the law of Language" (Lacan, *Language* 35). The Father makes possible the principle of law, particularly the law of the language system through basic signifiers (phallus being the most important of these signifiers as the object of desire) which pin down the floating mass of reality and sliding signifiers, thus human signification becomes possible. In this process, to go beyond the all-powerful imaginary symbiotic tie with the (m)Other on the way to its constitution as a subject, the infant needs to go through the processes of humanizing castration by the paternal metaphor and to learn to submit its desire to the law. This is also the infant's journey from the imaginary register to the symbolic register. The symbolic sets a limit to and organizes the imaginary and the instinctual energies and gives them direction. Lacan explains the intricate correlation between the paternal metaphor, mother and desire in the following formula in *Écrits* (465):

$$\frac{\text{Name-of-the-Father} \cdot \text{Mother's Desire}}{\text{Mother's Desire} \quad \text{Sogmofoed to the Subject}} \rightarrow \text{Name-of-the-Father} \left( \frac{A}{\text{Phallus}} \right)$$

Phantasy is an important component of the imaginary register and its essence is its impossibility or it is important because in it the subject relates to its object of desire, which is impossible in reality. In a Lacanian context the reality for the subject of desire is phantasmatic and thus the phantasy is "really the 'stuff' of the 'I' that is originally repressed" (Lacan, *Écrits* 314). In other words, the phantasy constitutes the primordial form of narrative and "constitutes our desire" (Žižek, "Seven" 191). It is the realization of desire, however, "not 'realization' in the sense of fulfilling it, but rather 'realization' in the sense of bringing it forth, of providing its coordinates. It is not the case that the subject knows in advance what he wants and then, when he cannot get it in reality, proceeds to obtain a hallucinatory satisfaction in fantasy. Rather, the subject originally doesn't know what he wants, and it is the role of fantasy to tell him that, to 'teach' him to desire" (Žižek, *Interrogating* 304).<sup>1</sup> In such a context, Žižek aptly points out the significance of phantasy in Lacan as follows:

“Lacan rewrote Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am’ as ‘I am thinking: ‘therefore I am’ - the point being, of course, the non-coincidence of the two verbs ‘am,’ i.e. the fantasmatic nature of the second ‘am’” (Žižek, “Seven” 192).

From a Lacanian vantage point the imaginary eradicates the symbolic when Hoffman tries to objectify desire by unlash the unconscious to underpin symbolization. What the Doctor tries to achieve is very much like what the infant with its specular ego/ideal ego experiences in its imaginary register. He promises to liberate the subject from his/her many layers of consciousness (repressions in Lacanian terms) and to lead into a sensual world, the pre-discursive self in the imaginary register in which the infant perceives the world through images: “[t]he imaginary was then the world, the register, the dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined. In this respect, ‘imaginary’ is not simply the opposite of ‘real’: the image certainly belongs to reality...” (Sheridan 279). Hoffman tries to give a reality status to the image and phantasy, the basic components of the imaginary register. Through Desiderio who is superegoized in this “unreal” atmosphere of imaginary massacres, bloody streets and hallucinations, and who is immune to these illusions as he has a high reality rating, the novel seems to give the readers a post-Cartesian hermeneutics of desire. Desiderio survives the war because he doesn’t surrender to the flux of mirages and cannot merge and blend with them (*Hoffman* 11). In Lacanian terms, Hoffman’s illusions cannot eradicate his ego ideal or cannot disconnect him from the reality principle.

The Minister sends him on an undercover journey to assassinate Dr Hoffman. Through different communities he encounters on his journey, the reader is introduced to a variety of modes of existence and consciousness, thus different modes of desire. On the way to his first destination he first meets the Doctor’s former physics professor who is now blind and who works for the traveling fair as the peep-show proprietor. He acts as the mouthpiece for the Doctor as he introduces Desiderio to Hoffman’s scientific principles; and through his magic samples with many graphic scenes of eroticism that challenge sexual taboos, Desiderio is given access to what he is going to live through in future. Desiderio reaches the first stop in his destination; this is a city whose Mayor had mysteriously disappeared. Under the guise of a government inspector he goes to the Mayor’s house where he has a sexual intercourse with the somnambulist daughter of the Mayor, who dies mysteriously later on and with whose death he is held responsible. While escaping from the Kafkaesque Determination Police he takes refuge among the Amerindian River people, with a “womb-like family” (Sage, *Angela* 35). He feels at home among these people who cannot think in straight lines. They can think only in subtle and intricate inter-

locking circles and conceive only the basic polarities like light and darkness, birth and death. As they cannot comprehend linearity in Desiderio's logic they cannot learn the alphabet, which signifies nothing in their world. Their family system is matrilinear and two centuries of inbreeding produced a generation of webbed hands, ingrowing eyelashes, lobeless ears and other deformities.

Then he joins the traveling fair as the nephew of the peep-show proprietor. The fair in which all the hierarchies are shattered is a microcosm for a carnivalesque mode of existence where all the taboos are violated. It is a microcosm which has people from all over the world and which acknowledges no geographical location or temporal situation. The workers of the fair cannot acknowledge any other nationality and cannot imagine any other home for themselves. Theirs is "a drab world of the here and now inhabited by those who came to gape" at them. They make their living out of the "grotesque" and their bread is "deformity" (*Hoffman* 99) and they are permanently in hiding from the real world. They transcend the commonplace and their language is made up of grunt, bark and gesture. In the absence of a dominant symbolic order they don't have anything complicated to say to one another and thus they communicate through non-verbal expressions. Their world where there is no hidden unity is shaped by the Doctor's principles as it is regulated by the implicit awareness of a lack of rules.

The peep-show proprietor has a handful of figures or samples which offer a microcosm of the universe Hoffman sets out to create, with paradigms of the things that might possibly exist in it. They embody the symbolic representations of the basic constituents of this universe to negate the rational reality: "The symbols serve as patterns or templates from which physical objects and real events may be evolved by the process [Dr Hoffman] calls 'effective evolving'" (*Hoffman* 96). These samples produce the energy that is necessary to maintain and change mirages, which are in essence, the objectifications of phantasies. The client's phantasies are objectified after the proprietor throws the handful of magic samples in the air and lets them fall randomly.

Dr Hoffman's methodology is based on Phenomenal Dynamics whose first theory is based on the idea that the "universe has no fixed substratum of fixed substances and its only reality lies in its phenomena" (*Hoffman* 96). Its second and third theories are: only change is invariable and the difference between a symbol and an object is quantitative, not qualitative. His main principle is based on fluidity of structure and on the assumption that everything is possible to imagine can also exist. With his theories he offers an alternative to the positivist science of the western world based on reason. He moved out of the realm of pure science and "resurrected

all manner of antique pseudo-sciences, alchemy, geomancy and the empirical investigation of those essences the ancient Chinese claimed created phenomena through an interplay of elemental aspects of maleness and femaleness” (*Hoffman* 97).

After being raped by the nine Moroccan acrobats of desire and after a tragic earthquake in which everything is destroyed, Desiderio joins the Lithuanian Count, who flies from the wrath of the black pimp. This law breaker calls himself the “volcanic enigma, phallic aspiration, unfallen Icarus” (*Hoffman* 134) or the Black Prometheus (*Hoffman* 146). The Count seeks perverse gratification no matter what and is very much self-centred; and he needs others only to glorify himself. The idea of narcissistic indulgence is foregrounded in the Count who easily relapses into narcissistic identification as he easily finds an ideal ego or “a double” in his own words: the chief of the pirates, the black pimp, the chief of the African tribe etc. Their common point is their cruelty. The Count cannot feel any pain as it is obvious in his words: “I feel no pain. Only anguish. Unless anguish is the name of my pain. I wish I could learn to name my pain” (*Hoffman* 147). He is trapped in his solipsism: “I am entirely alone. I and my shadow fill the universe” (*Hoffman* 148). His narcissistic inclinations reach a climax when he says: “I want to learn the savour of my flesh. I wish to taste myself. For you must know I am a great gourmet” (*Hoffman* 162). He learns to suffer when he is boiled to be eaten by the African tribesmen and he feels as a fully liberated man for the first time.

Desiderio and the Count go to the House of Anonymity, a place beyond the Law of the Father where all the Laws are permanently violated and where all the phantasies are realized. They lose their sense of social responsibility in this house. The Count indulges in sado-masochistic fulfilments in the galleries full of instruments of torture and the apparatus of fetishism. Desiderio meets Albertina there but their paradisaical experiences do not last long; the place is invaded by the Police as both of them are wanted for murder.

When they are on the way to Europe to escape from the black pimp, they are captured by the Pirates of Death, and then by cannibal African tribesmen who attempt to eat them. Only Desiderio and the Count’s valet (who turns out to be Albertina herself) can escape but the Count is boiled by the cannibal chieftain, a tragic event which teaches the Count how to suffer as mentioned above. This African tribe is important as in their world moral and humanistic values of the mainstream Western community are subverted. A case in point is the image of the mother which is dehumanized: “Vengeful as nature herself, she loves her children only in order to devour them better and if she herself rips her own veils of self-deceit, Mother perceives in herself untold abysses of cruelty as subtle as it is refined” (*Hoffman* 160).

In this tribe women are literally castrated as a precaution to reduce their capacity for feeling as they believe that “the extent of a woman’s feelings was directly related to her capacity for feeling during the sexual act” (*Hoffman* 160). In this tribe Man has a distorted form too, as the chief of the tribe says: “In these regions, you may observe Man in his constitutionally vicious, instinctively evil and studiously ferocious form- in a word, in the closest possible harmony with the natural world” (*Hoffman* 161).

Then Albertina (who has revealed her true identity now) and Desiderio set on a journey to meet the community of the centaurs. They experience the verifiable activities of beasts with no reality status as these creatures live in the imaginary substratum of time. This is the zone of terranebuloso, the anteriority of all times or “the womb of time” (*Hoffman* 189). As Dr Hoffman loses his models/images in the earthquake he cannot work without them and cannot manipulate people’s desires any more in his castle, and his laboratories cannot produce enough eroto-energy. Still, in terranebuloso the aerial spots detect growths of unimaginable flora and herds of biologically dubious fauna inhabiting hitherto unformulated territory: “In this forest, it seemed that nature had absolved her creations from an adherence to the formal divisions so biology and botany were quite overthrown and the only animals we saw, green-fleshed, marsupial, one-eyed, crawling things, seemed more an ambulant vegetable than anything else. Roasted on a spit, they tasted like barbecued celery” (*Hoffman* 171).

In the world of the centaurs the reader is presented with alternatives to human language, human religion and morality, in fact, to human civilization in general. These creatures with their distorted shapes are extra-linguistic beings and their site of being is beyond the reason of any master signifier. Their language consists primarily of sound clusters and intuition. They are ungendered as Desiderio says: “Though they were men, they did not know what a man was” (*Hoffman* 174) and “[b]ecause they were far more magnificent than man, they did not know what a man was. They did not have a word for shame and nothing human was alien to them because they were alien to everything human” (*Hoffman* 175). They have difficulty in comprehending that there might be other communicable creatures who are not mostly horse; and they possess such a deep conviction the universe is a horse that it is impossible for them to imagine that things might be otherwise. Their human shapes are threatening to the centaurs, accordingly, they come to believe that these strange creatures (human beings) were sent “into the world to show [Sacred Stallion’s] flock what fearful shapes they might all still come to if they did not adhere even more strictly than before to his dogmas” (*Hoffman* 190). And these “hippolators be-

lieved their god revealed himself to them in the droppings excreted by the horse part of themselves since this manifested the purest essence of their equine natures, and it was quite as logical an idol as a loaf of bread or a glass of wine..." (*Hoffman* 175). Therefore "[t]he twice daily movement of their bowels was at once a form of prayer and a divine communion" (*Hoffman* 175-6). They are freed from the human binaries like death and birth, end and beginning, man and woman. Their time works according to circular principles and sexual act is a duty for them not a source of pleasure. Desiderio has difficulty in grasping the reality status of these creatures, yet, he says:

we ate the bread of the centaurs and were nourished by it. ... these phantoms were not in the last insignificant for the existence of the methodological actuality on whose beds of straw we slept, whose language we were forced to learn, this complex reality with its fires, its cheeses, its complicated theology and its magnificent handwriting, this concrete, authentic, self-consistent world was begotten from phenomenal dynamics alone, the product of a random becoming, the first of the wonderful flowers that would bloom in the earth her father had prepared for them by means she, as yet, refused to so much as hint at, except to say they had to do with desire, and radiant energy, and persistence of vision. We were living, then, according to the self-determined laws of a group of synthetically authentic phenomena. (*Hoffman* 186)

When they are about to be sacrificed by the centaurs to their god, they are saved by Dr Hoffman's men in a helicopter and are taken to his castle. From Hoffman's men they learn that after Hoffman's sets of samples were accidentally destroyed, his calculations went awry and the nebulous time arrived instantaneously rather than in the course of a programmed dissolution in time itself. When the Minister employed some logical positivists to construct a philosophy of identity, he was temporarily victorious in the war. That is, only when he turned to "philosophic weapons- or, as he would probably prefer to call them, ideological weapons" (*Hoffman* 194) he could defeat the Doctor.

In his laboratories "deep in the burning bowels of the earth" that reminds one of unconscious, Hoffman achieves mutations of events through certain loopholes in metaphysics and he is able "to base a meta-technology upon metaphysics only by the most scrupulous observance of and adherence to the laws of empirical research" (*Hoffman* 212). He has put a hundred of the best matched lovers into coffins and feeds them hormones intravenously. They come from every race in the world and form "a pictorial lexicon of all the things a man and a woman might do together

within the confines of a bed of wire six feet long by three feet wide" (*Hoffman* 214). Hoffman uses the energy they release- eroto-energy, "the simplest yet most powerful form of radiant energy in the entire universe" and their plentiful secretion falling through the wire to put his project into practice. Desiderio realizes that he himself is one of these love slaves in Hoffman's eyes and their long delayed but "longed-for conjunction would spurt such a charge of energy [their] infinity would fill the world and, in this experiential void, the Doctor would descend on the city and his liberation would begin" (*Hoffman* 215). Now Desiderio has the uncanny feeling that he too has been manipulated by Hoffman as what he has experienced so far was hinted at by the magic samples of the peep-show proprietor or these magic samples offered him a simulation of his desire in a cryptic fashion. That is, these fantasy machines narrated for him the fundamentals of desire as the visitant lover of the somnambulist girl Mary Anne, with whose death he was held responsible and, thus who disconnected him from the world of the Minister (the signifier of the paternal metaphor in Lacanian terms); the compliant member of the Amerindian River People; the peep-show proprietor's nephew; the companion to the Count, the erotic traveller; the brave killer of the chieftain of the cannibal African tribe; and the prize lover that Hoffman is after to produce the greatest amount of eroto-energy. On these adventures, Albertina, his lover to be, secretly accompanied Desiderio assuming different identities. Desiderio feels uneasy about Hoffman's future plans about himself, and one part of him wants to stay and experience the eternal fulfilment of desire with Albertina while another part feels the impossibility of this project. When he gets closer to achieving the desired end, it loses its grasp on him.

Desiderio cannot feel sympathy for Dr Hoffman as he feels that Hoffman is another totalitarian figure with his pervert wish to be in the place of the Father rather than submit himself to his authority: he wants to establish a dictatorship of desire. In other words, the Doctor's system too has its own authoritative principles which operate on a will to power and which create an alternative domain that cannot go beyond the master and slave discourse. As a result, he re-establishes another world whose operative systems echo the previous one. Before Desiderio makes love to Albertina, Hoffman makes him listen to the recorded speech of the Minister which brings back all the dimly remembered certitudes and Desiderio comes back to the world of reason and the forgotten harmonies in it. After hearing the Minister's speech, Desiderio cannot fall under Hoffman's spell: "Yet there was still that duplicity in my heart's core.... Reason was stamped into me as if it were a chromosome, even if I loved the high priestess of passion" (*Hoffman* 195).

Dr Hoffman offers Desiderio his heart's desire but he chooses a lifetime's

contentment. He kills Dr Hoffman and Albertina and ends the nebulous time. By denying the object of his desire he experiences a self-inflicted castration and becomes a traveller “who had denied his proper destination.” He says: “I saw no colours anywhere around me.... I knew I was condemned to disillusionment in perpetuity. My punishment had been my crime” (*Hoffman* 220). He sees himself as the “check, the impulse of restraint” and once more, time “lay more thickly about me than the mists” (*Hoffman* 221) exerting great pressure on his blood vessels and eardrums. He leaves the nebulous time behind, thus for him the impossible remains as impossible. While leaving the castle Desiderio burns the bridge to the castle in case he might go back, an act which implies that he is still under Albertina’s spell and acts against his desire. Interestingly, even in old age when he closes his eyes, Albertina comes unbidden. That is, when she becomes impossible, she once more assumes the place of the object of his desire.

When Desiderio refuses the final consummation with Albertina, which means an irreversible immersion into the imaginary register and dying to the symbolic, he chooses to stay with the symbolic Father of his previous discourse as a castrated subject. Thus, the previous balance in the city seems to be restored, the son (Desiderio) chooses to enable the Father of reason (the Minister) to win but this victory underlines the constructedness of identity which becomes a matter of choice. In other words, he resumes the previous symmetries in his identity because he chooses to do so. With this choice he also refuses the Cartesian dictum which reduces the subject to the status of a signifier of a self-knowing, and stable entity. The subject is more than this categorisable Cartesian signifier with a site of a certain excess. Thus one can say that the previous status quo is re-established after its operative mechanisms are demystified. Or as in Sarah Gamble’s words: “Such master narratives as time, truth, identity and historical causation are systematically, deliberately, mangled in *Hoffman*, and although the ending apparently sees them restored, it is not to their former state. They may only have been dismantled once, but once is enough to see that they are not incontrovertible, but chosen” ( 111).

### **The Ideal Ego, Desire, Love and the Imaginary Register in *Hoffman***

Desire and phantasy have an intersubjective quality: “One should always bear in mind that the desire which is ‘realized’ (staged) in fantasy is not the subject’s own, but the Other’s desire” and fantasy “renders the subject’s primordial, constitutive position. The original questioning of desire is not directly ‘What do I want?’ but ‘What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I for the others?’” (Žižek, “Seven” 194-5). As one’s object of love is correlative of the image of one’s

desire, to objectify desire, the subject needs others: "In the human subject, desire is realized in the other, by the other- *in* the other" (Lacan, *Freud's paper* 177). This process involves alienation from one's self into an image:

The subject originally locates and recognizes desire through the intermediary, not only of his own image, but of the body of his fellow being. It's exactly at that moment that the human being's consciousness, in the form of consciousness of self, distinguishes itself. It is in so far as he recognizes his desire in the body of the other that the exchange takes place. It is in so far as his desire had gone over to the other side that he assimilates himself to the body of the other and recognizes himself as body. (Lacan, *Freud's paper* 147)

The narcissistic component of man who sees himself in the other is foregrounded by Lacan especially in his chapter "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in *Écrits*. Love is the capture of the *moi* by another in an imaginary relationship, in a trap or in Freudian terms, introjection of the ideal ego. Imaginary register is a narcissistic or *kaleidoscopic* structure (Lacan, *Écrits* 99) and the ideal ego which constitutes itself in the this register is a projected image with which the subject identifies itself and is an ideal of narcissistic omnipotence constructed on the model of narcissism (therefore it is also possible to call it as the specular ego): "Love is a phenomenon which takes place on the imaginary level, and which provokes a veritable subduction of the symbolic, a sort of annihilation, of perturbation of the function of the ego-ideal. Love reopens the door... to perfection" (Lacan, *Freud's paper* 142). It is the self-image in which the subject is wrapped by the other, it is a form of narcissistic illusion: "That's what love is. It's one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level" (Lacan, *Freud's paper* 142). Lacan gives the intricate correlation among desire, imaginary register and the ideal ego as follows: Desire "alienated, is perpetually reintegrated anew, reprojecting *the Idealich* outside. It is in this way that desire is verbalized. Here there is a game of see-saw between two inverted relations. The specular relation of the *ego*, which the subject assumes and realizes, and projection, which is always ready to be renewed, in the *Idealich*" (Lacan, *Freud's paper* 174).

If one's object of love gives us the image of one's desire, then narration seems to fictionalize Lacanian theory of Mirror Stage identification when Albertina says: "Ours is a supreme encounter, Desiderio. We are two such disseminating mirrors" (*Hoffman* 202). Then Desiderio adds: "In the looking glasses of her eyes, I saw reflected my entire being whirl apart and reassemble itself innumerable times" (*Hoff-*

man 202). Love for Albertina is an exchange of reflections which “can neither be exhausted nor destroyed” and “[i]t is a direct durationless, locationless progression towards an ultimate state of ecstatic annihilation” (*Hoffman* 202).

In the end Desiderio reveals that he is physically a mirror image of Albertina and in his youth Desiderio looked like Albertina whom he calls “my Platonic other” (*Hoffman* 215), a detail which sounds like an aftershadowing element to imply that this was a narcissistic search: “Now I was entirely Albertina in the male aspect. That is why I know I was beautiful when I was a young man. Because I know I looked like Albertina” (*Hoffman* 199).

### **Desire Being Insatiable**

Almost everything is given from Desiderio’s perspective. Narrative tells the story of a world which is ruled by the dialectics of desire. Sexual gratification is abundant in almost each section of the novel and one can even go so far as to call the text as pansexist (finding sexual discourse everywhere) but this desire is a male desire. It is filled with female images without names, as Desiderio states: “for they had been reduced by the rigorous discipline of their vocation to the undifferentiated essence of the idea of female. This ideational femaleness took amazingly different shapes though its nature was not that of Woman; when I examined them more closely, I saw that none of them were any longer, or might never have been, woman” (*Hoffman* 132). As they are not positioned within a defined symbolic Order they are ungendered female beings. They are there to fulfil the desires of their customers, as in the case of the girl who “must have come straight from the whipping parlour for her neck was a ravelled palimpsest of wound upon wound- she was neither animal nor vegetable nor technological; this torn and bleeding she was the most dramatic revelation of the nature of the meat that I have ever seen” (*Hoffman* 133). Among these girls they act like the primordial father, whose murder “is the fertile moment of the debt by which the subject binds himself for life to the Law...” (Lacan, *Écrits* 464) and through whose death Freud demonstrates the origin of universal Law in the primal crime. Women function to objectify the male phantasy through pornographic tropes and obsessive and erotic images which might entail violation, mutilation, rape or any other type of torture exercised on their bodies. Sexual politics of inequality is a fundamental feature of these male voyeuristic phantasies as women are there only to complement their gratification, most of the time at the cost of horrendous humiliation, degradation and violation of themselves. However, from another perspective one can say that abundance of pornographic tropes deconstruct and demystify the male voyeuristic phantasy and break it systematically into smallest particles, and in

the process rob it of its pornographic elements.

These women remind the reader of the Lacanian idea that "...in fact *woman* does not exist, *woman is not whole (pas toute)*- woman's sexual organ is of no interest (*ne lui dit rien*) except via the body's *jouissance*" (Lacan, *Encore* 7). For Lacan woman is a masquerade as it is defined always against the backdrop of what man is. As Soler states Lacan's formulations to "specify the place of 'woman' make her a partner of the masculine subject." These formulations of 'woman' as category are: "(1) being the phallus, that is, the representative of what man is missing; (2) being the object that serves as the cause of his desire; and (3) being his symptom upon which his *jouissance* is fixated" (102). As can be seen here the woman is the "unravished bride of quietness" as she, as a category, stands for the absence that helps to define what man is or does. She is taken as the symptom of man's desire, or she relates man to the site of *jouissance*. In this context she is no more than a function to define a status for man. She is in the site of quietness where there is no Word (Logos) /origin; and where one can find only extra-linguistic elements, which defy the masculine logic. Thus she is unravishable by man because she is beyond definition. In other words, as the signifier for Lack and absence, she transcends the patriarchal site of being because she is "at odds with phallicism" (Lacan, *Écrits* 688).

For Lacan the subject is castrated and deprived of the phallus which is imaginary "though not necessarily hallucinated" and which is related "to (unconscious) desire and to (conscious) demand" (Wilden 187) and which has no signified (Lacan, *Encore* 81). Therefore, man's desire is never insatiable as it is what the Other wants and one can never know what the Other wants due to the primary repression. It is for a lack. It is a desire whose text is repressed: Desire is "the leftover or residue of the fact that something- the Other- has been repressed. In Lacan's dialectical context Desire emanates first from the moi's thrust toward recognition of/from/about/to the Other (A) is, therefore, Desire, a space that widens throughout life." (Ragland-Sullivan 77). Because of this reason, "...there is a radical difference between the satisfaction of a desire and the pursuit of the fulfilment of desire- desire is essentially a negativity..." (Lacan, *Freud's paper* 147). Lacanian definition of desire, then, problematizes the notion of happiness which "relies on the subject's inability or unreadiness fully to confront the consequences of its desire: the price of happiness is that the subject remains stuck in the inconsistency of its desire" (Žižek, *Welcome* 59).

When the subject gets too close to the desired object, "erotic fascination turns into disgust at the Real of the bare flesh" (Žižek, *Welcome* 6) as in the case of the Count and Desiderio. The Count is in a vicious circle of constantly fulfilling his desire, which seems to be a hopeless task as he moves from one project into another

to capture this sense of complete fulfilment. Desire is something like a drop of quicksilver which evades any form of capturing and the Count had set himself up the impossible task of capturing this drop. Albertina says that the Count's desires were beyond the capacity of worldly restrictions and insatiable: "... the real world fell so far short of his desires. But he did what he could to bring it up to his own level, even if his will exceeded his self-knowledge" (*Hoffman* 167). Again in the case of Desiderio when he guarantees a lifetime of fulfilment of his desire with Albertina, the idea becomes unbearable to him and loses its magnetic force. When Desiderio sees the Castle which looked like a place of incomprehensible logic to him he feels disappointed. He says: "once liberated, those desires it seemed to me he cheapened..." (*Hoffman* 213). Albertina can no more occupy the status of the object of desire for him but diminishes from the zone of *jouissance* [which is the psychic feeling of wholeness, "the ecstatic sense of unity which preceded an infant's knowledge of separation from the mother, a metaphorical Garden of Eden before the dividing term" (Ragland-Sullivan 75)] into the zone of pleasure.

It is Dr Hoffman's desire to define this unsatisfied and unsatisfiable desire by reversing the constitutional phases of the subject as in the cases of the Count and Desiderio. According to Dr Hoffman's theories, all these are their desire let loose so it is they who caused all these things. Albertina explains the mystery of what has happened to them as follows: "all the subjects and objects we had encountered in the loose grammar of Nebulous Time were derived from a similar source- my desires; or hers; or the Count's. At first, especially, the Count's, for he had lived on closer terms with his own unconscious than we" (*Hoffman* 186).

Depending on the intensity of their passion the characters themselves invent the characters they meet. Albertina says to Desiderio: "I've been maintained in my various appearances only by the power of your desire" (*Hoffman* 204). Albertina as the object of his desire appears in different forms to him, as the Doctor's assistant, in his dream, as the Madame at the brothel (the House of Anonymity), as the face of the gypsy girl, as the valet of the Count. And the Cannibal chief was brought into existence because of the Count's desire for self-destruction. Accordingly, Desiderio lived in a world of his own making and the Count died because he wanted to, as Albertina says: "He acted the tyrant to his passions. However convulsive the grand guignol in his bed, he had always planned it well beforehand and rehearsed it soften in his brain that his performance perfectly simulated an improvisation. His desire became authentic because it was so absolutely synthetic" (*Hoffman* 168). He wills his own desires and "his lusts always blinded him completely to anything but his own sensations" and his fatal error was "to mistake his will for his desire" (*Hoffman*

168).

It might be interesting to give a Lacanian hearing to Hoffman's relation to desire and sense of lack that stimulates this desire: Suffering from what Lacan calls as "failed Oedipal identification" (Lacan, *Écrits* 96), dominated by a psychotic drive to eradicate the previous Father's place and acting like the primordial father who positions himself as the master signifier in his future universe, he seems to have killed his desire which is constituted during the humanizing castration. Very suitably, Desiderio says "I did not think he knew what desire was" (*Hoffman* 213). Ironically, the man who does not have desire manipulates the desire of the others.

### Conclusion

Hoffman wants to liberate the unconscious, and thus man; afterwards, he says: "the naked man will walk in and out of everybody's senses" (*Hoffman* 208). Here one feels obliged to underline a paradox in the Doctor's project: on the one hand he claims that he aims to put into practice what he calls the liberation of consciousness but on the other hand he uses love slaves to produce the necessary energy. Liberation of the community's consciousness depends on the slavery of the others (even if they are volunteers). The Doctor also objectifies desire through Desiderio himself and to some extent, through the Lithuanian Count, the two figures who are unwittingly caught up in the mechanism of desire as the flow of narrative is based on the kaleidoscope of what these two characters become in keeping with their internal fiction.

Through Hoffman's dispute with consciousness and rationality, one can say that *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* fictionalizes the irrational. In his project, the contradictions between the rational and the irrational elements are not easily resolved by the subjugation of the former to the latter or vice versa. With his project, he aims at the alchemical transmutations of desire into material manifestation and thus threatens the limits of the conceivable (Punter 29-30). By disrupting human consciousness, by unleashing unconscious and by precipitating essence of being in his laboratories, he wants to reduce human civilization to its most basic form, to take it apart and create a new one. However, in this process, he fails because he puts reason to the service of representing and systematizing irrationality as the psychic substratum. Thus Hoffman makes the grave mistake of taking the subject as an objectively knowable thing and runs counter to Lacan, who says, "the subject cannot be reduced to scientific objectification" (Lacan, *Écrits* 122). As a result, he cannot depart from the positivist scientific thought. He ends up creating alternative binaries to the ones he rejected in the previous epistemology

rather than go into a plane of existence where they do not exist.

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# Romanticism and Nostalgia from Afar: Signification of Home for a Political Exile in Leila s. Chudori’s “Home”

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**Abstract** The aftermath of Indonesian 1965 political riots left deep consequences for the parties involved or those considered to have had political affiliation. The world was prospectively promising for a particular group but doomed for the other group of people. The previous group had the rights to determine whether members of the latter might stay alive or might not both literally and metaphorically. The latter group whose lives were in the hands of the previous had only two hard choices - if they were lucky enough: to stay or to flee. To stay means to be stigmatized as partisan of PKI (Indonesia Communist Party) for the rest of their lives and consequently alienated from social and political activities. To flee means to be stateless people with even more social, economic, and political hardships. Suddenly, they became paria. It is in the context of being exiles around which Leila S. Chudori’s “Home” is centred. The lives of the displaced people considered to be affiliated with PKI are recounted. The signification of “home” for the main character, Dimas Suryo, who lives miles away from his birthplace becomes the focus of this paper.

**Key words** exiles; homeland; identity; politics; Indonesian contemporary novel

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### **Introduction**

Most historical books on Indonesian political riots in 1965 claimed it was a coup which claimed lives of a number of senior Indonesian Army generals. Indonesia Communist Party<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter *PKI*) was accused of backing up the action and was then considered to be the one who should have taken responsibility for that action. The coup resulted in executions without trials. The executions were massively done in some parts of Indonesia to those who were accused of members and partisans of *PKI*, such as in Java and Bali during 1965-1966.

The coup is so-called in the history as “the movement of September 30” motored by *PKI* (*Gerakan 30 September PKI* or abbreviated *G30S-PKI*). The term “coup” as a matter of fact is not appropriately used since the aim of the movement was not to overthrow the government. The more suitable term is “putsch” (Chambert-Loir 191; Mudzakkir 173) as the aim of the movement was actually to protect the government from the actual coup assumed to be prepared by the military.

Until now, the accusation towards *PKI* as the mastermind of such a coup to the legal government has been left unproven. So the question remaining unanswered is “who were actually the actors of the kidnapping and killing of those generals which triggered the riots?” Zurbuchen (566) argues that there were “five different scenarios” that could be extracted from 1965 historical literature: first, the assassination of the generals was totally done by the *PKI* and the *PKI* and its partisans alone who were responsible for the action; second, the failed coup was the consequence of an internal armed forces endeavor; third, General Suharto was the coup’s real initiator, or he at least manipulated and falsified the killing of the generals for his own desired results; fourth, there was a secret that President Sukarno allowed discontented officers to act against other officers; fifth, it was a consequence of foreign intelligence operation to expel Sukarno, who was suspected by the west to be in favour of the left political ideology; and finally, there were also some descriptions that combined more than one of the previously mentioned schemes. Whether or not *PKI*, the clash of the generals in the Indonesian military or even foreign intelligence had the stake at the coup, what remains crystal clear is that

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1 Indonesia Communist Party — in Indonesian is called *Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)* - was the biggest non-ruling party in Indonesia during the middle of the twentieth century. It was liquidated in 1965 following the killings of some army General in September 30, 1965 and banned in the following years to date.

it claimed victims: the murdered generals, the execution of hundreds of thousands of innocent Indonesians without trials, the collapse of Indonesian politics and economy, and the exiles.

During the reign of the New Order era, the voices of “people in connection with the coup attempt of 1965” (Hearman 22) are officially prohibited. Those who were sent in exiles by the New Order regime (1966-1998) could not go back to the country they loved and were forced to live in foreign countries without identity of being Indonesians. Just because they were assumed to be involved with the party, they had to bear the political consequence of being exiled. They never had opportunities to delineate their actual position and view toward *PKI* nor did they have a chance to defend legally whether or not they had real involvement with the party or other organizations affiliated to the party. Some of them even “rendered stateless after the New Order refused to renew passport abroad” (Hill 6). Consequently, the only possible way to return to Indonesia is through “surreptitious visit” (Hill 6) once they obtain foreign passports.

The end of the New Order regime in 1998 is also the beginning for contemporary writers to “freely express their ideas and elaborate” (Prasasti 143) what has been silenced for more than three decades. Literary works depicting the events related to the movement of September 30, 1965 are prohibited during the ruling years of New Order regime because such topics are considered socially and politically sensitive. The presentation and depiction of the effects of the movement towards other people deemed to be involved in the movement and their families are forbidden. That has literary writers to have limited room to explore the other side of the story — the other perspectives that has never been told by the government. The people who are forced to live as aliens in foreign countries have muted to tell stories from their viewpoints. There has been therefore no such a written work talking about what have been experienced by the displaced people until the beginning of Indonesian Reformation Era<sup>1</sup> in the new millennium.

Leila S. Chudori’s “Home,” a novel about the life of Indonesian exiles, was firstly published in 2012, almost one-and-a-half decades after the beginning of the Reformation Era. It is inspired by the feeling of longing for the homeland,

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1 Indonesian Reformation Era — also known as Post-Suharto Era — began when the authoritarian president Suharto resigned from his 32-year ruling position in May 1998. It was triggered by the worsened economic condition as an impact of Asian financial crisis and a series of riots in some parts of the country. At these situations, Suharto was willing to be assigned as the sole presidential candidate proposed by the parliament amid the urge of his resignation. The conditions made the students become outrageous. Their rallies resulted in the occupation of parliament building demanding Suharto’s immediate resignation. The era was the beginning of the more open and liberal democracy in the country.

romanticism of being rejected to go back to the homeland, and the tension and dilemma to be coerced into residing in an alien country for being assumed of having different ideology from that of the authority felt and experienced by the exiles. It took six years for Chudori to research all materials needed for writing the novel. The research included interviews with the exiles and their families living overseas or in Indonesia. The novel was awarded *Khatulistiwa Literary Award*, a prestigious award given for outstanding Indonesian literary works in 2013. Due to its popularity and quality, the novel, which was originally written in Indonesian, was translated into English by John H. McGlynn, an Indonesianist, in 2015.

“Home” focuses its story on the life of four exiles — Dimas Suryo, Nugroho, Risjaf, and Tjai — whose Indonesian passports were withdrawn and annulled by the Indonesian consulate general in Paris after wandering from country to country looking for a place that allowed them to go back to Indonesia. After having tried ways to survive in the alien place, they decided to open an Indonesian restaurant in Paris to earn for their living. Their struggle to survive in a foreign country and the feeling of longing for the lost home are painstakingly depicted in chains of events. The focus of this research is on the main character, Dimas Suryo, and his way in signifying the meaning of “home” while living in exile. He had never felt that he completely lived in Paris for he always thought of and left his heart in Indonesia. What had been experienced by the male protagonist is the portrayal of how political exiles lived their lives in an alien place. He was banned from re-entering the country where he was born without being given a chance to explicate his stances towards communism and forced to accept that he was the number one enemy of the state. His visa application to visit Indonesia was never granted because he had already been stamped to be a person holding ideology that might endanger Indonesian ideology under the New Order regime. The journey of Dimas Suryo’s life was told from the time before the movement of September 30, 1965 to the time when the New Order regime relinquished its power in May 1998 with emphasis on his life as a displaced person during Suharto’s presidency.

As part of contemporary Indonesian literary works, Chudori’s “Home” depicts the political turmoil happened in 1965-1966 and its impacts on the people considered to be involved in the movement of September 30, 1965 and their stories - the stories that had been silenced for decades by the ruling authority from 1966, the beginning of New Order Era, to 1998, when the Reformation Era began. The sequence of events is not depicted rigidly based on the timeline as they are told back and forth and viewed from different angles by different characters — among them are Dimas Suryo; Surti Anandari, Dimas’ true love living in Indonesia; Vivienne

Deveraux, Dimas's French wife; and Lintang Utara, Dimas' and Vivienne's only daughter. Since the conflicts in the novel involve both the suspense the characters had to face when dealing with Indonesian political upheaval either in 1965-1966 or in 1998 and romanticism the characters had to experience when dealing with the feeling of longing for the lost home and loving somebody, this paper aims at exploring Dimas Suryo's endeavour in defining the place he is currently living — the host country he is living in as an exile — and the place from which he has been banished - his home country he loves wholeheartedly.

### **Exiles: Being Ideologically and Politically Different from the Authority**

Political exiles are expelled from the country where they were born to other places because they are considered having different ideology from the authority. By definition, exile is a “banishment, the political action that forces a person to depart from his country” (Barbour 293) and “a displacement from the core to periphery” (Piacentini & Pallot 33). They are also forbidden to enter their homeland because their ideology is believed by the authority to possibly endanger the solidity of the country. Their rights as a citizen are annulled as punishment for having antithetical political point of view. Living in a foreign country they are not familiar with is not an easy thing to do. Exile is “the unhealable rift forced” between an individual and his or her indigenous place (Said *Reflection* 131), as becoming exiles is to be “cut off from their root, their land, their past” (Said *Reflection* 140). It may result in a dreadful, strenuous and difficult experience. The memories formed by the experience of being an “exile, nostalgia, homesickness, belonging” (Said *Place* 21) have created an intricate web taken part in the forming of the displaced person's identity.

As part of migration, exile concerns with “dispersion” of the people in a wide areas, and “homeland orientation” (Brubaker 5). The dispersion causes the feeling of longing for a lost home. Even though exile is part of migration, it is, however, different from other terms related to migration such as émigré, refugee, and expatriate. Émigré is “anyone who emigrates to a new country,” refugee is “herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international existence” and expatriate is people “voluntarily live in alien country, usually for personal or social reasons” (Said, *Reflection* 144). Exile is, on the other hand, a forced migration. Because exiles are not leaving the country to look for better lives of their own will, the feeling of longing for the home that is forcefully taken from them is greater than others who voluntarily go away from their homeland.

Exiles live in a foreign country that is totally alien for them not because they

want to. They are banished by the authority and lose their rights to be part of the nation. They live far from the culture they are familiar with, no longer speak the language they are proficient in, and cannot meet their love ones. They have to face the unfamiliar environment, think of ways to survive which is not easy because of being foreigners, and are shocked at the new sociocultural conditions far different from their own. At this situation, Said (*Reflection 140*) delineates that exile is “a discontinuous state of being” — a state of being unable to carry on the past and current stories to colour the future life because of being completely removed from the root, culture, and land and because of being forced to leave their homeland due to the ideological disagreement.

As exiles live in a great distance from their homeland, their nationalisms are often questioned. Some of them, after becoming stateless persons for considerably longer time because of the invalidation of their passports, are granted new citizenships from the host countries and received new foreign passports. It has made their nationalism at stake. Said (*Reflection 139*) defines nationalism as “an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage” and accordingly the feeling of home is generated by the similarity of language, culture, and tradition. The displaced people are obliged to speak the language spoken by the local people, adjust with new culture and tradition of the country they currently live in. Their sense of belonging and their feeling of home are accordingly challenged. The feeling of torn between belonging to home or host countries has raised their “diasporic consciousness” (Friedman 9). Foucault (11) suggests that exiles are prisoners rooted in “a barren wasteland between two lands that can never be his own.” It confirms the dilemma faced by exiles while living in banishment. In spite of the fact that there is a place called homeland, it is not anymore “a welcoming place” (Safran 91) because those exiles have, or are assumed to have, different political or ideological views from the authority.

Exiles are torn in defining a place they can call “home.” On the one hand, their bond with their homeland, the country where they were born, cannot be easily cut off. The memories they have in mind about the cultural beauty, the scent of the soil, the unforgotten web of relations, and even the taste of morning breakfast they have experienced the whole life will always live. On the other hand, they feel that they do not belong to the country where they currently live in because they feel alienated from the society due to the different language, culture and tradition. Since the concept of “homing desire” is “not the same thing as desire for a ‘homeland’” (Brah 177), it has raised a question whether such a feeling is prompted by a significant nostalgic remembrance adhered to the homeland or due to the consequence of being

“un-homeliness” because of the totally distinct situation in the new place (Gunew 31). The answer to the question rests in the heart of the exiles because they can never be separated from the homeland and the country they live in.

### **Dimas Suryo: Entrapped between Home of the Past and the Present**

Works of literature of which storyline is about the life of exile are part of postcolonial literature. Tyson (427) characterises that postcolonial literature deals with “the struggle of individual and collective identity and the related themes of alienation, un-homeliness, double consciousness, and hybridity.” The four exile characters in Chudori’s “Home,” including Dimas Suryo, had to deal with such problematics. As people living in exile, they were obliged to comply with the adjudgement of the authority who banished them to live far away from home. They consequently felt that they were isolated from their root land and at the same time were compelled to adjust to a new socio-cultural condition of a place they unwillingly lived in. They might live in a torn paradigm of “home.”

The journey to Santiago, Chile, for joining journalist conference representing *Nusantara News Agency* right before the burst of September 30 Movement had happened was the beginning of the characters’ journey to be displaced persons. Soon in Cuba, Dimas Suryo realised his passport was invalidated and consequently became stateless. He was exiled and forbidden from returning to his homeland purely because of indication that he had an affiliation with *PKI*, the party blamed for the failed coup on the night of September 30, 1965.

“Then the next bomb dropped: our passports were revoked and we became, in an instant, a band of stateless people with no fixed identity... The sword of Damocles now hung over our heads, ready to fall. Every day our lives were filled with the pounding of our heart, because we have no idea what our future held. To go home was impossible. To wander the world, unlikely — not without money or a passport” (69)

The moment the Indonesian passports of Dimas Suryo and his friends were voided was the time when the anxiousness and uncertainty started shadowing their lives. They lived without certain identity of belonging to a certain nation with certain names and recognition. Dimas Suryo felt that his nightmare has just begun to live overseas without identity and without assurance that they were allowed to go back to their homeland. The exiles had to undergo such traumatic experience because of the sudden banishment and invalidation of the documents authenticating their

identity. Their whereabouts — to be out of their homeland — intensified the feeling of agitated. Dimas Suryo did not even know what really happened in his home country. What he heard from the plenary session in the conference he was attending that the political heat in Jakarta had been escalating due to the coup done to some high-rank military officers seemed to be unexpected and unpleasantly surprising.

“It was during the middle of the conference in Santiago that Jose Ximenez, the chairman, made a special announcement in a plenary session about what the English-language press was calling the ‘September 30 Movement’ which had taken place in Jakarta. We later learned that the Indonesian phrase, ‘Gerakan September Tigapuluh’, had quickly been changed by the country’s new military rulers into the more ominous sounding acronym, ‘Gestapu’ we were shocked. High-level military officers kidnapped and killed? We couldn’t imagine who might have perpetuated such an act” (65)

Dimas Suryo could not believe what he heard. He could not believe that what he just discovered had an immediate impact on his fate. He had never imagined that the political situation, happened millions of miles away from the place he was sent to, had a significant influence on the nullification of his passport. He had been through a state of being “cut off from the roots and birthplace” (Said, *Reflection* 140).

Living as an exile was not easy for anyone, not even for Dimas Suryo and his friends. They had to experience moving from one place to another looking for a permanent alien place that welcomed their existence as stateless persons and possibly allowed them to go back to their home country. Having been stranded in China, Dimas Suryo started thinking that he and his friends would not possibly be able to survive there. He was agitated with absolutism and communism that he had to swallow while living there. He, then, thought of Paris as the next destination.

“After three years of life in Peking and having to constantly raise our fists to praise of Mao Tse Tung and calling out ‘Long Live Chairman Mao!’ all the while studying agricultural production in a number of villages, I was fed up with the absolutism of the Cultural Revolution being crammed down the throats of the Chinese people [...]

One night, after many nights of sleeplessness in the guesthouse where I was living in the Red Village, I finally came to a decision [...]  
[...]

‘Paris, I want to go to Paris. Tjai has already said that he’d be willing to

move to Paris or Amsterdam. We could meet him there.” (74-75)

French as the land of “*égalité*” was deemed to be a place where they would be able to plan to return to Indonesia and re-embrace their past lives. French has always been a place to go for those seeking for political asylum, for those being exiled.

Living in Paris, however, was never easier for Dimas Suryo and friends. In order to survive in Paris, they had to change professions. They did anything in order to earn for their living.

“Life as a political exile would not have been complete without a steady stream of trials: having our passports revoked; being forced to move from one country and from one city to another; having to change professions; even having to change families — all with no obvious design or definite plan. All these things were happening while we were in the midst of a search for our identity, shapeless souls searching for a body to inhabit” (126)

Because of their longing for the lost home, the home forcefully taken away from them, they kept on trying to create a “home” ambience around them. Even though the four exiles were very close and their brotherhood had made them feel that they socio-culturally lived in Indonesia, they wanted something “very Indonesia” that could bind them and that they could call “home”; home coloured by the smell of cloves, the scent of tropical wet soil after rain, the *wayang*<sup>1</sup> [shadow puppets], and the cuisines rich with spices. They also wanted a more steady state of living. Based on their needs and wants, they created a place they call “home” in their version, a place that could accommodate their yearning for their detracted homeland.

“The poet Robert Frost said that home is our destination, the place that will embrace us. *Tanah Air* Restaurant was our destination, the place that would embrace us, but she has to be able to demonstrate cheer upon our arrival (121).”

The name of the restaurant sounded very Indonesia. *Tanah* literally means soil and *Air* literally means water. However, when the two separate words are compounded, the meaning becomes homeland, the place that had been missing in the life of the

1 *Wayang* in this context refers to a shadow puppet personifying characters from two major Indian epochs, Mahabharata and Ramayana, usually performed in a shadow puppet play. The play — also called *wayang* — is a dramatic performance of the epochs and notably from Indonesia. It has been acknowledged by the UNESCO as the intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2003.

restaurant founders for years. The homeland was their destination, their journey's end. They never wanted to permanently live in Paris. Deep down inside their heart, they really wanted to go back to their birthplace, despite difficulties they have to deal with as they have been rejected to re-enter their homeland for being stigmatized as enemies of the state.

The setting of place of Jakarta and Paris has signified the meaning of binary opposition for Dimas Suryo. He lived in Paris yet his mind was in Jakarta. He married a French woman yet he still kept Surti (his ever-lasting love) in his mind.

“He then spoke in his story-telling voice ‘Cloves have an exotic aroma that many a sharp-nose European sailor was able to smell them continent away. And these seamen competed to subjugated and control the spice-laden archipelago where clove trees grow. They even planted the name of their own country in that place and called it the Dutch Indies, making it a part of the land from whence they came.’

“Then why turmeric, Ayah?” Lintang asked wide-eyed as she stared at the yellow powder in the other jar.

The question, Dimas never answered; he just smiled and let Lintang inhale the sharp scent of the turmeric powder. Her nostrils twitched as she did this.

[...]

I [Vivienne] looked at the top sheet. Handwritten with well-structured Indonesian in neat and regular penmanship. A letter for Dimas [...] All were letters from Surti Anandari, dating from the late 1960s, after the military had captured her husband. But wait, there were other letters too, dating from 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1982... I [Vivienne] looked at one.” (223-224)

Indonesia, the Dutch Indies in the colonial era, was never far from Dimas' mind. He kept the history of his beloved country, although he was physically miles away. He was “homed” by Paris yet he kept longing for being under the sky of Jakarta, longing for inhaling the Indonesian air. He was psychologically torn between living with the imagery pictures of his past in Jakarta and living in current reality as an exile in Paris.

“It was around that time, I guess, that Vivienne began to gradually turn Paris into a kind of resting place for me. Not a home, per se, but a place where I

could stop for a while.” (83)

He was neither half Indonesian nor half Parisian. He was not either full Parisian. His mind was full of Indonesian imaginary. Despite the fact that he appreciated what Vivienne had done for making him feel comfortable, still Paris was unable to lull him to accept his wife as part of his full life. His daughter with French passport was unable to wake him up from his past. His family was unable to grant him new life. He acknowledged but refused to accept all.

The binary opposition of Dimas Suryo is also reflected in the way he created a little Indonesia in his Parisian house. He never wanted to abandon the country even though the country had abandoned him for years. He even wanted his daughter to learn about the root culture from her father’s side.

“In the living room of our apartment was an Indonesia that Dimas Suryo recreated. Two *wayang* figures hung on the wall — Ekalaya and Bima — along with several masks, gifts from friends had brought back from Indonesia. There was a batik runner on the top of the bookshelf and a batik map of Indonesia in Lintang’s room” (222)

The *wayang*, masks, and batik are Indonesian signatures. They are all the products of outstanding artistry and cultural heritage signifying Indonesian identity. Dimas Suryo deliberately decorated his house in such a way so that he felt closed to the country he was born, so that he would have felt as if he had been home. Not only did he decorate his living room with Indonesian characteristics, but also put the batik map of Indonesia in Lintang’s room. He just wanted his daughter to be closed to Indonesia and always reminded her that there was Indonesia in her blood. The way Dimas Suryo decorated his house signified his nationalism. He had a tremendous attachment to the country even though he had been discarded by the regime ruling the country.

Dimas Suryo had his own unique way in keeping all the nostalgic memories about his homeland.

“But the most curious items were two apothecary jars, tucked between books on the shelf where Dimas had put them. One jar was filled with cloves; the other with turmeric powder [...]

[...]

Dimas replaced the contents of the jars annually, after the scent of the spices

had begun to fade” (222-223).

Cloves and turmeric are kinds of spices that can only be found in Southeast Asian regions. In Indonesia particularly these two spices are typical due to their particular and exotic aroma. Cloves, along with tobacco, are particularly used as the main ingredients of *kretek*<sup>1</sup> cigarettes — kinds of cigarettes originated from Indonesia. The smell is very distinctive and strong. Turmeric is another kind of spice usually used for cooking some Indonesian dishes. The natural yellow colour of turmeric makes the dishes cooked look delightful. The spice also flavours the dishes. The smell is also exotic and specific. For Dimas Suryo, who favoured *kretek* cigarettes, the smell of cloves always reminded him of the place he belonged, Indonesia, specifically the island of Java. The smell of turmeric was able to evoke his romanticism and nostalgic past memories far before he was stranded in his new home, Paris. The aroma of the spices could bring him to the land and root culture he loved the most, and the past, his first love. When he inhaled the aroma from the spices he kept on a jar, all the nostalgic memories and romanticism lingered in his mind. Such spices as clove and turmeric powder were the ways Dimas Suryo keeps his homeland alive in his mind. He additionally tried to keep the smell on its place so that he could always inhale the strong aroma of the spices by continually changing the faded cloves. It is important for Dimas Suryo, as a displaced person, to always touch the nostalgic memories about his homeland through the senses. The spices were the medium to keep him attached to his root and his past.

Dimas Suryo also wanted the memory of his past, of Indonesia to live forever. He, in his effort to preserve the memory, transplanted the knowledge of his memory in forms of icons and story underlining the icons: icon of wayang with the story of Mahabarata, icon of masks with dances, turmeric with the food he and his friends served in their restaurant Tanah Air, clove with *kretek* he loved to smoke. He wanted her daughter to also be his living memory. He wanted her to be able to pass his memory to her children and her grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren. Dimas Suryo was aware that it was all his loving memory of Indonesia that had helped him survive his life as it is in the case of Nabokov’s Ganin who was able to survive as a Russian exile and “prepared to revisit his homeland” (Pichova 23).

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1 *Kretek* is a cigarette originated from Indonesia, particularly the island of Java. It is made from the blend of Indonesian tobacco and cloves which produces specific and unique smell and taste. The cigarette is named *kretek* because of the crackling sound produced when the cloves inside the cigarette are burned.

He reserved one space in his heart for some things very Indonesia: Surti, cloves, turmeric, batik, *wayang*, and masks. He preferred to accept a divorce to eliminate the space once occupied by his French wife, which consequently would enlarge the space he reserved in his heart for Indonesia, for his past Surti and other Indonesian signifiers.

“At that moment I [Vivienne] realized that I had never completely owned now would ever completely own Dimas. At that instant I also knew why he continued to wish to return to the place that he so loved. Somewhere in the corner of his heart was Surti; there he owned her forever, eternalized in the spices found in those two apothecary jars. Surti was the scent of cloves and turmeric. All were one in Indonesia. That night I told Dimas I wanted to separate.” (226)

He was entrapped between the romanticism of his past in his hometown, Jakarta, and the life he was pursuing, the family he raised in his new home, Paris. He was torn between his past memories and his present day life. He was stuck on his past identity yet at the same time he was unable to compromise it with the new identity, the identity of an exile; the identity of a political asylum; the identity without identity.

In the middle of being socially and psychologically torn between the two places, Dimas Suryo explicitly stated the meaning of “home” for a person forced to live abroad for political reasons — the meaning viewed differently by his French wife. It had caused them to have an argument.

“I followed Dimas to the terrace and attempted to defend my point of view without further upsetting him.

‘Home is where your family lives.’

‘Home is the place where I feel I am at home,’ Dimas replied, his voice cold and flat.” (214)

Dimas Suryo signified that he never felt home after all that time living with his wife and daughter. He still felt displaced for being separated from the root and land he deeply loved. As a displaced person, whose nationalism was theoretically questioned and torn, Dimas Suryo’s case was exceptional. His love for his homeland, his nationalism, is indubitable. His definition of “home” never shifted. Despite his despair of being rejected to re-enter his homeland, he still held his optimism that at

the end he would be home. His nationalism was never torn, although he struggled hard to compromise living in a place he was not socio-culturally familiar with, as an exile. He was still longing for his homeland and sure that at his old age, he could be granted to be back to the country, spend the rest of his life and be buried there when he departed this life.

“Tell me, Ayah, once and for all, are you still a *flâneur*? Are you the inveterate wanderer who is always seeking, always traveling, never able to anchor?”

This time Dimas gave a sincere and honest answer: ‘I want to go home, Lintang. To a place that understand my odor, my physique and my soul. I want to go home to Karet.’” (295).

Karet<sup>1</sup> is the place Dimas Suryo wanted to go at the end of his journey. He never mentioned other places in Paris as his home. The only “home” he meant was his homeland. Although it had been difficult for him to go back to his homeland alive, he hoped that his corpse could go back and be buried in a cemetery he called “home,” the place where he would permanently reside.

Indonesian political condition changed at last. In the year of 1998, the New Order regime finally relinquished its control and power over the country as Suharto resigned from his position. It was a new beginning for political exiles, the moment for them to be allowed to go home. After wishing that someday he could be granted to go home, Dimas Suryo was finally able to go back to his beloved homeland a month after the New Order regime collapsed.

“In *Karet*, even in *Karet* (my future abode), the cold wind comes...

In the end, Ayah did come home, to Karet, to finally reunite with the soil that he said had a different scent from the earth in the Cimetière du Père Lachaise. The soil of *Karet*. The land he was destined to come home to.” (484)

Dimas Suryo was a displaced person who had experienced “homeland orientation” (Brubaker 5) specifically orientation to return to his homeland since he kept all his “memory, vision, and myth” about his place of origin (Safran 83). He experienced the impacts of forced migration. He was never willing to go abroad but forced to go away from his beloved country. Although he never had a chance to go back to the country he loved when he was still alive, he was home at last. He finally rested on

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1 Karet is one of the biggest cemeteries in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. It is a public cemetery and located in central Jakarta.

the land he loved the most, peacefully and soundlessly.

Dimas Suryo had never been in doubt of being an Indonesian. His “Indonesianity” had never been torn. Yet this un-torn identity had torn his life psychologically; struggling to realistically live and survive in the host country while at the same time living in the nostalgic recollection of the home country, and admitting to be estranged in a foreign country while at the same time living his dreams to go back to his birthplace.

### **Conclusion**

Indonesia’s Reformation Era has offered new opportunity for Indonesian contemporary literature to develop. Chudori’s “Home” pictures the other side of September 30 Movement that had been silenced by the New Order authorities for decades. The life of the exile is portrayed in such a way signifying that the sense of belonging, nationalism, and love for the country cannot be easily wiped off just because a person is banished to the countries located miles away for political reasons. The novel has told the readers that being forced to live far away from the country, revocation of the passports, and restriction to visit the homeland cannot stop the attachments of the displaced people to the root and land they love. Dimas Suryo is a representation of an Indonesian exile who was always proud of his identity of being Indonesian and knew only one home, Indonesia.

In living his life as an exile, Dimas Suryo had to live in reality in Paris and at the same time claimed that he was rooted in Indonesian culture and maintained this as his identity in his whole life. His unwillingness to compromise his identity had consequently torn his life psychologically. His memory has turned into a “dangerous territory” (Pichova 22) which eventually “hegemonised” his thought from moving on his life. The memory of Indonesia had helped Dimas Suryo to survive, in the senses that he never gave up his wanting to return to Indonesia.

To sum up, Chudori’s “Home” wants to convey a message through its main character, Dimas Suryo, that living far away from the country cannot easily change one’s identity and nationalism in the middle of the turmoil of being socially and psychologically torn. As exile is a forced migration, Dimas Suryo, as a representation of a displaced person, still felt attached to his homeland and root culture. While living in exile, the romanticism and nostalgia about his homeland could only be pictured from the memories the last time he saw the country, things that he always wanted to keep in his mind. The homeland where he was born denoted the root to which he belonged. Although exiles are deemed to be wandering people with no such explicit identities, their neediness to be rooted to certain

national and cultural identity is undeniable.

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# Normative Femininity and Motherhood as Redemption: The Life Writing of Indonesian [ex] Nude Model Tiara Lestari

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**Abstract** When Tiara Lestari posed naked in Spanish Playboy magazine in the August 2005 edition, only few people actually knew her. She had been working mainly abroad. However, the publication immediately created waves of controversy as she is not only an Indonesian but a Muslim too. The adverse resulting from the controversy was the impetus of Tiara Lestari's blog. The blog eventually became the fetus of her auto/biography, *Tiara Lestari Uncut Stories: Playboy, Ibunda dan Kafila*. This paper investigates both forms of the life writing, namely the blog and the auto/biography as two interconnected works, which at times merge as one. As Tiara Lestari describes in her writing, she wished to be able to present the public with what is considered to be a more accurate representation of herself, particularly post-Playboy episode. This paper examines how the auto/biography is used to reconstruct Tiara Lestari's life in a way that negotiates the local Indonesian and global construct of femininity and womanhood. It also argues that while Tiara Lestari has been portrayed to transgress the boundaries, through her auto/biography she managed to reconstruct her image and recreate a new self that embraces the more conventional notion of femininity and womanhood as a form of redemption following the nude pictures.

**Key words** Tiara Lestari; celebrity, auto/biography; femininity; womanhood

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Her main interests are auto/biographies, popular culture, feminist cultural theory and practice.

### **Introduction**

Coming to the scene of Indonesian media through her infamous nude appearance in Spanish edition of Playboy, Tiara Lestari was exposed to nation-wide criticism for not conforming to Indonesian local values regarding modesty and sexuality. Her response was through writing. Asked if she was just defending herself through the auto/biography, she wrote, “I don’t intend to defend myself. I just want to counter the inaccurate news in various media about me” (Lestari and Ariestanty 6).

Aside from her official auto/biography, Tiara also maintains other blogs which are aimed at certain segmented audience, such as Tiara Lestari’s 4 Women Only which is dedicated to women whom she addresses as “Girls.” Other blogs include Sponsor Tiara Lestari’s Events, Tiara Singles Club, Tiara Lestari’s Press Info, Sensual to Elegance, Call Tiara Lestari, Dari SENSUAL ke ELEGANCE, Tiara Lestari Zone. According to Tempo Interaktif, to take care of her blogs, she dedicates around 3-5 hours a day. This demonstrates her seriousness in this undertaking. It also shows that representation and misrepresentation are significant issues because they concern people’s sense of self and identity.

Having lived and worked abroad, Tiara speaks English fairly well. Her initial blog, which is called Tiara Lestari’s Personal Journal is written in English. This is the one that she aims to be the bridge between her and the people “out there” (Lestari and Ariestanty 7). She also writes because she feels that the media has twisted the truth about her and that it has misrepresented her to the point of making up stories about her without any confirmation sought from her. Her blog, as well as her auto/biography, is opened with her statement about herself:

I am originally from Indonesia. Formerly residing in Singapore, I am now firmly back in my own beloved country. Modeling has been my passion and profession. My journey as a model has taken me to the cover of Playboy Magazine in a far away land and right in the center of a national controversy. It plunged me into depth of humility without prejudice or guilt. It guides me to see through changes, places and faces. Through it all, I understand that life itself is full of surprises that neither reason, nor logic can comprehend. It certainly has been a journey filled with joy and turbulence. It is a journey from sensuality to elegance. Welcome to my life. (Lestari and Ariestanty 1)

Within the context of celebrity auto/biography, from the very beginning it can be argued that her auto/biography was published to serve a specific purpose of controlling image damage at the very least, reconstructing the Self is most possibly the ultimate objective. Throughout her auto/biography, one theme is clear, Tiara is reinstating her normal ordinary Indonesian girl with a humble background, that she is not what her nude poses represent. The auto/biography articulates her side of the story as well as her stepping stones towards being a good woman, particularly through her relationship and later marriage to her [first] husband, and through the portrayal of her relationship with her mother, her mother-in-law and most importantly, through her own motherhood.

### **Reconstructing the Self Post Nude Poses**

Obviously, she takes her appearance in *Playboy* as her point of departure. In fact, she was not known until after the controversy submerged. In the auto/biography, she refers to her appearance in the magazine as an “incident.” In this context, it is understandable why she seems to be urged to make up for her nudity with some intellectual works to counter the prejudice that the pose renders her “cheap.” She seemingly says that the naked pictures of her are not the true representation of her Self. It also implies that the authoritative source for the true representation of Tiara Lestari is Tiara Lestari herself as written and shown in her blogs. She contends, “I just want to be given the chance to show the real me after that incident. Something that is really me. Yes, the true Tiara. May I?” (Lestari and Ariestanty 6, emphasis added).

The so-called true Self or inner Self seem to be the constant preoccupation in her auto/biography. It can even be argued that it is almost always related to her previous decision to pose naked in various men’s magazines, most importantly *Playboy*. On one hand, it shows her guilty conscience although she claims, “Please take note! I don’t regret or feel guilty at all for what I have done” (Lestari and Ariestanty 7). On the other hand, it also shows the potential of “people out there” or the mass to construct one’s identity and sense of Self. In her case, the guilty feeling is not self-generated. It mostly comes from the reaction from people in general as reflected by the controversy and the waves of protests [as well as insults]. Such conscience is also developed through the response from the people around her, her family, notably her mother, and her future in-laws, notably her then future mother-in-law<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> At the end of the auto/biography, she is married with a baby daughter. Her mother-in-law is a prominent pediatrician who happens to be the elder sister of a famous musician, Harry Roesli. This reference occurs almost every time the mother-in-law is mentioned. The Roeslis are a prominent big family whose root is one of Indonesian important writers, Marah Roesli. As per now, Tiara has divorced her first husband, married for the second time to a German man in 2012. Her second husband passed away on March 30, 2016.

As she writes, the first reason why she decided to end her career as a model abroad, and especially a nude model was the tears that her mother shed upon knowing that her eldest daughter was a nude model. In contrast with her claim that she regrets nothing, she finally confesses that she does regret one thing, namely to have made her mother cry. And to wipe the tears away, she said she would do anything, including refusing other offers to pose in *Playboy* in five different countries, “Which was [sic] one of which was from New York”<sup>1</sup>. Asking for forgiveness from her mother, Tiara Lestari cried and promised never to pose nude again (Lestari and Ariestanty 7).

It is obvious that there is a conflict and at the same time inconsistency in what she claims regarding her feelings about the whole “incident.” She insists that she was just being professional and that she does not have any guilty feeling, but such a feeling as well as the sense of Self are not something that a person can totally control. Her insistence on being innocent in her professionalism was again contrasted to her submission to her mother-in-law’s statement that she deserves a second chance. In a way, this acceptance confirms the guilt. As narrated by her then-boyfriend:

“Tiara, she got a second chance to enter a new life. To be a better person.”  
That’s what my mother said. And that’s what I believe in. Everyone has got the chance to be a better person. Even Allah gives the chance. Why, are we human beings too arrogant to give somebody else the chance to be a better person?  
(Lestari and Ariestanty 98-99)

Likewise, her then boyfriend — now former husband, also takes the position of being the authoritative institution that “accepts her the way she is and supports” whatever she chooses in the future. Every person has the right for a second chance” (Lestari and Ariestanty 13). The whole notion of accepting her past suggests her past being flawed and that forgiveness is given to her as generosity from people around her, especially her boyfriend and mother-in-law.

As she narrates, when the pictures for *Playboy* were taken, she was made to believe that her nationality would not be revealed. Only later did she find out that the selling point was actually her Indonesian nationality as the theme of the edition was “Exoticas.” The “need” to reveal her nationality shows the idea of Indonesia being an “exotic” country, whose girls are sexually exotic too, as represented by

1 New York is, of course, not a country. Her constant use of code switching from Bahasa Indonesia to English or vice versa at times are often unnecessary and even out of context.

Tiara. Although Tiara refers to Spain as a “faraway land” (Lestari and Ariestanty 1), that is if the “center” is Indonesia, but in that magazine she is the one who actually comes from a faraway land. She is the one that represents an exotic Other to the Spanish readers. Her nude pose of Tiara somehow also signifies the unclothed Other who is not necessarily “sexy” in the sense of enticing sex appeal, but rather in a sense of being a woman of a “faraway land” who are “naturally” naked. Her nakedness is to be seen as a natural condition of being an Other, an exotic creature from a faraway land. In this way, I can argue that Playboy being a global network has made use of the still fascinating idea of Other, and even made use of it by exotizing it as exemplified by the depiction of Tiara Lestari as the exotic Other. On her part, it is precisely her globalized local position that has made her earn the fascination and recognition from people, mostly men, globally as well as locally. What is interesting though is that her local fame and recognition, was obtained only after she was globally “discovered” first. Thus, although she is a “cosmopolitan” (Lestari “Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the Magazine)”), it can be argued that the physical fascination for her will always remain in her position as a “local.” This is especially due to her inescapably dark skin.

Tiara herself once complained about her dark skin when she failed in a number of castings. She even envied other models whose skins are lighter and white. The consolation given by her white Croatian friend confirms her exoticism in her dark skin

‘You look beautiful with your color of skin. They just don’t realize, one day, I am sure, you will be a famous model. You are great! You are unique. In the west, we all want to have your skin color. It’s exotic’. (Lestari and Ariestanty 45)

This consolation was accepted gratefully as she then self-reflected:

Jasmina’s words relived my spirit. This has got nothing to do with skin color. You can be white, black, brown, or whatever skin color, you are beautiful as long as you’re proud of who you are. That is the essence of self-confidence. And of course, as long as you take care of your body! (Lestari and Ariestanty 45)

On one hand, this means that it is acceptable being any color. On the other hand, it also emphasizes that it is not enough to be any color, a woman needs to take care of

her body well to be accepted. If it is true that it is not about color, it is also true that a body that is not well taken-care of is a body that is not accepted. And if the well-taken-care of bodies are exemplified by her body, then this statement is as alienating as her experience of being denied her work because of her skin color. Just by its physical measurement, her body is not just an ordinary body, and if we should take that this kind of body as the acceptable kind of a woman's body, then the bodies of ordinary women will not be within comparable range with this body. In other words, she/her body is as different from ordinary women/bodies as her skin is different from the white skin.

In addition to her physically 'exotic' feature, Tiara also holds another "exotic feature," namely her religion. She is Muslim. Her appearance in *Playboy* as an exotic Indonesian nude model also creates another fascination. Indonesia being known as the biggest Muslim country in the world, and with the strong global image of Muslim women as those with hijabs and those oppressed by the supposedly patriarchal Islamic culture, it is difficult not to see the hidden promise of "exotic value" in her the image of a Muslim woman completely naked. As her friend clearly remarked on her nude pose, "...the problem is, you are an Indonesian and you're also Muslim" (Lestari and Ariestanty 122).

The significance of being an Indonesian and Muslim in the context of global phenomenon of *Playboy* clearly shows a conflict between the local and the global. In the case of Tiara, whose Self is transformed from a small-town girl to a cosmopolitan woman, she can be said to have transgressed the boundary of local and submits to the global sex capitalism. However, it is also evident that such transgression causes two different receptions. Tiara is considered a disgrace within her locality but highly glorified in the global. The local Indonesian and Muslim culture as embodied by Tiara make the local exotic and of high marketability in the context of the global *Playboy*. On the other hand, it is precisely the same features of marketability in Tiara that has made her the target of insult within her own locality. Her "exoticism" is considered as a disgrace within the local, yet an appeal in the global.

In many parts of Tiara's auto/biography, the notion of "being a better person" is frequently mentioned by Tiara and Andy. Such reference is ultimately framed not only in connection with "her past" as a nude model,<sup>1</sup> but also in its closer relation to her being a good Muslim and a good countrywoman. In fact, the controversy around her is mostly ignited by her being Indonesian and being Muslim.

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1 Before she appeared in Spanish *Playboy*, she had appeared in *Penthouse* the edition of Thailand, Netherland and Australia.

Speaking of her determination to be “a better person”, although in the context of being a nude model, her professionalism has somewhat transgressed her being Muslim, Tiara Lestari nevertheless finds it necessary that to be a better person, she has to return to her religion. She also considers it necessary that in finding the right person to marry, her future husband has to be a Muslim too. As she explains, the same religion is an important consideration for her to choose her husband-to-be. She claims, “I want to marry a person of my religion. It’s impossible for Dave<sup>1</sup> to convert to Islam. I want my future husband to be able lead me in my religious life. I want to be a better person” (Lestari and Ariestanty 78). Thus, her being an Indonesian is closely related to her being a Muslim, and that her choice of her life in the future very much depends on the religion of her future husband rather than the more general reason of shared proximity. At this point, it can be argued that Tiara Lestari’s identities of being an Indonesian and being a Muslim are one package that is hard to disassemble.

### **The Body and the Self**

In the chapter “Naked or Not Naked; That is Not A Question”, the question of Self and what she terms as “the inner me” get elaborated more. In a reflective narrative style, mostly interwoven by her recollecting interviews with the media or other situations where she has to answer questions, especially from her friends. This style somehow builds the sign of her need to justify her choices. I even sense a terrible guilty conscience in her continuous explanation why she decided to pose nude, such as:

I am more than that. Naked or not naked, that’s not a question. But why did I bare my body and my soul to the world...? And the answer is for something that I called ‘professionalism’ (118)

As I quote in the head of this writing, she claims she wants to be known as a person. “The inner me” (Lestari and Ariestanty 117). This somewhat Cartesian claim certainly raises a lot of questions: What does being “a person” mean? Doesn’t it include the body? Or is the so-called “person” equal to the so-called “inner me”? Why does she really want people to forget that first of all she is the body, that she embodies her body. People know her because of her body. Her body is important. Why does she really want people to forget that? Why does she deny her body and her embodiment?

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1 Her former American boyfriend

In her frequent reference to her body and the Self, the Cartesian notion of the body and the self is quite clear. This is especially true in the way she positions the body as inferior to her supposed Self. The word “mere” in “[n]ot a mere Indonesian model who has posed in Spanish Playboy (Lestari and Ariestanty 117) implies that the body is just a mere container, the outer part of the true Tiara Lestari, which is deep inside the body. This Self is supposedly not as self-evident as the body, which explains why she has to work hard to ensure that she will not be mistaken simply for her body. This also explains her anxiety about being a model, who is often regarded as “brainless.”

In one episode in her auto/biography, she suddenly asked her friend, “Eh, why do you think people love to think that models are brainless?” (Lestari and Ariestanty 27). This question of whether “beautiful” is in reverse logic against “smart” is pursued almost in panic. The use of rude words such as “brainless” and “stupid” can be disturbing as well as exaggerating. She could use the word “*bodoh*”, for example, which also means stupid but not as harsh as “*goblok*”, which is almost a taboo word. The word used is “*goblok*” which is a very rude word that means stupid and ignorant. This word has a really harsh tone. The question and answer narrative style does not seem to be flowing in this part, suggesting that this topic is squeezed in. There have been long prejudice about beautiful girls, models especially, of being stupid. Also, there have been suspicions from other bloggers that Tiara hires a ghost writer, at least a professional editor, to write in her blogs, for example as pointed out by a blogger named Tuhu It can partly explain why Tiara seems to have the urge to argue that being beautiful does not mean being stupid. And that before anything else, she is the brain.

This question arguably represents her unconscious anxiety. She wants to be more than just a body, and more than the body is obviously the brain. Her efforts in writing show that the recognition of not being stupid is an important element in building her sense of Self. In other words, her perfect body is not to be taken as the more important representation of her Self.

This topic was discussed in an episode where she was hanging out in a café with a friend and her then boyfriend, Andy Arifin. In this episode, it was Andy’s opinion that became the final words of the “discussion.” He argued that it was unfair that models are considered stupid just because they do not use their verbal skills. He argues that different jobs require different kind of intellectuality. Tiara is described to be excited with anticipation for his answer to her question and she seems to be happy and in agreement with his statement. Andy in this episode plays the authoritative voice that justifies her sense of self. Paradoxically, although

other kinds of intellectuality, such as wearing high heels and walking gracefully are recognized, Tiara nevertheless seems to have the urge to show her existence and intellectuality through words, through her verbal skills, just as Andy defines what being smart in general is. In fact, it was Andy that suggested that Tiara should write a blog to voice her opinions and arguments. In other words, Andy suggested that Tiara should expose her verbal skills to the world to counter the prejudice that she is just a beautiful face and body, despite her other skills and intellectuality. Paradoxically, it confirms that final say of one's intellectuality is only obtained through verbal skills.

At the time this episode took place, Tiara seemed to have taken the decision to take him as her husband. In Indonesian context, as well as in Muslim context, the husbands are supposedly the head of the family. In such a context, the wives are supposed to seek for approval from her husbands in their activities and undertakings. The husbands' approval and support are highly imperative because it is husbands that can justify their wives for better for worse. Thus, "deviant" wives, the feminist wives, the busy and famous wives can make their husbands accessory to their purpose. In other words, they can get on/away smoothly with their undertakings and idealism if they get the approval and support from their husbands. The idea is that if the husbands seem to be alright with them, then other people are forced to accept that there is nothing wrong about them. This is a common phenomenon as I have discussed elsewhere in the case of Krisdayanti's auto/biography (Endah), and that of Tamara Bleszinsky (Prabasmoro).

On one hand, it can be read that women are subjected to men's authority. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a strategy for women to succeed in public domain. With the smooth negotiation with the husbands, husbands can play an active role in/as accessory to ensuring their wives' activities by claiming that the wives are thoroughly supported in their undertakings. Thus, husbands and wives are both "playing" a certain performance that disturbs the subject/object dualism in a way that subject and object are not two totally polar positions.

### **Global Culture and Identity: "Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the Magazine)..."<sup>1</sup>**

Evident in her auto/biography is the cosmopolitan identity that she has happily embraced. As she explains in her blog, not seeking definition from any dictionary, she defines "Cosmopolitan" as "[a] sophisticated person who has travelled in many countries" (Lestari "Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the Magazine)," emphasis added). She then claims that (Lestari "Why Am I Cosmopolitan (Not the

1 The title of her blog entry on her cosmopolitan identity and culture

Magazine”):

If that is the meaning of the word, then it is very easy. I have travelled around the world. A lot. I have met people from across the globe with different backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and attitudes. I am like that boy character in the movie “meet the fockers”... I am like a sponge. I absorb. I adjust. In the end of the process is... ehm.. me. Like this. The one you see and the one you read.

Obviously, Tiara is proud of her “cosmopolitanism” although whether she is really “sophisticated” or not is not really the question. In Indonesian context, going abroad and working abroad are something to be proud of. It does imply wealth and/or intellectuality. Apart from that, in general the number of people who speak the third/foreign language<sup>1</sup> is quite low. Therefore, those who speak foreign language are also considered to be “sophisticated”, high class, and smart. In the use of her fairly good English she asserts her global identity and culture. In addition to that, as Cvetkovich and Kellner argue, the term globalization also denotes “modernization.” In other words, projecting oneself as global can also be signified as projecting oneself as modern.

In that context, it can also be argued that she performs some kind of sophistication in her continuous habit of code switching. This is especially true in her auto/biography where she uses both languages in sometimes-bizarre order. There are sentences where she uses English entirely and sometimes she just squeezes the English words into her Bahasa Indonesia. For example, there are sentences that are thoroughly English such as, “I love being a model. Really, I do” (Lestari and Ariestanty 23), but there are also sentences where she inserts expressions in English followed by Bahasa Indonesia such as: “Obviously, I can experience all that because of my profession as a model” (Lestari and Ariestanty 23). This code switching is sometimes not introduced smoothly making the sentences awkward, such as: “... refusing the interesting offers from five other countries. Which was one of the offers is from New York” (Lestari and Ariestanty 7, emphasis added).

Another awkward code switching is in her expressions in Bahasa Indonesia that are not actually recognized in Bahasa Indonesia. This kind of expressions leaves the traces of English in its production, making the kind of Bahasa Indonesia version of English. One example is to use the term “just or not” for the argument whether it is acceptable or not to refer to models as brainless and stupid as I have explained in the previous part. This expression is not commonly used by Bahasa Indonesia users.

1 Usually Indonesian people speak Bahasa Indonesia and their native language

Indonesians would say something like whether it is acceptable or not, or whether it is good or not, or polite or not. The expressions whether it is just or not to say that a model is brainless is not Bahasa Indonesia in its framework of thinking<sup>1</sup>

This kind of code switching is commonly found in chicklits. In a way, I can argue that her auto/biography is of similar narrative technique as most chicklits whose primary target is young urban women. These chicklits also speak the same kind of Bahasa Indonesia/English and they also take urban culture as their setting. This will affect the readers, I argue, in two different ways. On one hand, it can build proximity between Tiara [and chicklit authors] and their target readers. On the other hand, it can also create a gap that can offer the image of Tiara as an “exotic” person, a real person whom one cannot necessarily comprehend and embrace, at the same time she can be just an Other, just a character in a fiction.

As I have explained, urban culture, which is very much the global culture is strongly marked in her book, particularly through the depiction of chain global cafes and expensive restaurants that she visits. The settings of the many chapters in her book are different cafes, shops and restaurants bearing global [or English] names, such as Cicero, Kemang Food Festival, Crossroad Café, Marriott Hotel, JCo donuts, Coffee Bean, etcetera. This mention of the cafes is also emphasized by the mention of food and beverages globally known and consumed such as wine, pasta, salad, and a lot other “western” delicacies. Although she does mention the episode when her boyfriend was having “*tahu sumedang*”, a local delicacy, and about cooking “*rendang*”, a traditional dish from Padang, most of the food and beverages that get mentioned are those of the “western” culture. She even writes that she is interested in wine and that her specialty is pasta. These cafes and restaurants as well as the “western” food and beverages also mark her social and cultural class because, obviously, cafés and fine dining [restaurants] are not everybody’s culture, and certainly not the culture of Indonesian people in general. As Nagel argues:

Globalization contributes to a collision between local and global sexual standards and images through the global circulation of culture-fashion, style, music, film, ideas, identities. (546)

Through reading her auto/biography, I argue that global culture is an act of consumption, an endorsement of a certain lifestyle supposedly accepted around the globe. In this particular auto/biographical act, this lifestyle establishes her identity

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<sup>1</sup> I consulted a lecturer in Bahasa Indonesia from Universitas Padjadjaran on 15 August 2007 and she confirmed that such expressions are, if not awkward, at least not commonly used.

through its frequent enactment, endorsement, and mentioning of a certain kind of consumption. In her case, this culture is not only metaphorically, but also literally consumed in the form of food and beverages.

While there are times when the use of these settings and mentions of food and beverages feel exaggerated, I find that there are points and topics that can be introduced without having such exposition. Arguably, the settings in the auto/biography are just a place where she can be situated in a casual communication with her friends. And it seems to me that by the excessive mention, such places are represented as the place for such purposes. Thus, it is my standpoint to argue that she does want to establish her identity as global although, at the same time, I can also see her desire to embrace her part of locality, her body and family bonding.

### **Body, Femininity and Sexuality**

There are different kinds of femininity performed, expected, cherished, glorified as well as questioned in her auto/biography. Her first visible attribution of femininity is her highly feminine body. She is known for her body in such a way that her body becomes the dominant marker of her femininity. This normative femininity is highly connected to her sexuality, but not necessarily in the context of reproduction. As Bartky argues:

Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on woman's body — not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance. (148-149)

As femininity is viewed more in terms of sexuality, it does not come as a surprise that it then defines women into the dualism of good women/bad women. According to McClintock, one of the fetishes commonly found in soap advertisements, which are mostly targeted at women, represent women as sexually hybrid. The idea of the ideal[ized] women takes us further to the notion of femininity in Victorian era. As McClintock writes, women in that era were expected to be “an angel in the drawing room, monkey in the bedroom” (McClintock 217).

Although, McClintock specifically refers to Victorian era, I believe that this dualistic notion of femininity is still very much in practice today. Women are still expected to embody both the lady and the monkey. What can be considered transgressive in Tiara's case is the fact that she shows “her being a monkey in a drawing room.” It can be argued that femininity is a series of highly codified traits and per-

performances expected at a certain time and space. Certain performances of femininity are not to be displayed in public. Transgression of the poles can cause social chaos and disorder, just what Tiara Lestari caused after her appearances in *Playboy*.

The fact that people are quick in their judgment about morality and propriety when it comes to women's sexuality implies the sense of ownership of women's bodies. What is supposedly "proper" is closely related to the sense of "property." What is not proper in her appearance is that she is supposed to be the property of certain groups of people who feel represented by her body. Thus, when this body becomes "improper", it becomes a shame to the groups to whom the body is supposed to belong. Far from being individual traits of being a woman, femininity turns out to be a shared property the ways in which deviance from its norms is punished severely. Tiara, whose sexuality threatens the supposedly rigid boundary of good women and bad women, has to receive even the rudest insults a woman can receive.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this transgression, in social context, her sexuality also threatens her other expected attributions of femininity, namely being a good wife and mother. In Indonesian culture, implied in this expectation is that the ideal woman to marry is a woman who is sexually flawless. It explains why there is the notion of guilt and even sin in the journey of relationship with her future husband. The frequent mention of "second chance" simply means that although she is sexually flawed for having shown her body to the world, she can nevertheless be purified by the acceptance of an authoritative man. Her husband who comes from a prominent family represents such authority in a way that her marriage to him has provided her with the protection from being referred to in the future as a "not very good woman."

Following Bartky's argument that "[f]emininity as a spectacle is something in which virtually every woman is required to participate" (140), women are basically object of gaze. Her being a woman happens as a spectacle, the ways in which, "[t]he precise nature of the criteria by which women are judged, not only the inescapability by judgment itself, reflects gross imbalance in the social power of the sexes" (Bartky 140). In thinking of Tiara as a conscious "object of gaze", there are two ways of interpreting it. On one hand, as Bartky argues whatever judgement is passed, it will reveal the fact that femininity and masculinity are not two equal positions. In this framework of thinking, we might consider her as an absolute object that has to

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1 Most of the insults she receives are sexual. Other condemnations are related to her being a shame to Islam as well as to the country and the town where she comes from. See for example the comments on her at: <http://www.sp18.com/2005/09/04/model-indonesia-bugil-di-majalah-playboy>. Some "complimenting" comments are even painfully and sexually degrading. See for example comments at <http://asiapundit.com/2006/01/26/tiara-lestari-on-playboy-indonesia/>

receive the gaze from others, particularly men.

On the other hand, since her objectivity is a conscious decision and choice, this act can also be considered as an act of assertion of subjectivity. Thus, in making herself available to look at, she is actually the subject of the whole process of putting her femininity as an object of spectacle. In other words, her sexuality as object does not necessarily objectify her. Even in the situation where she is situated as an object, she can still play with that situation and make herself a Subject. In her discussion about prostitute and hetairas, Beauvoir argues.

Offering herself for the approbation of her admirers, she does not repudiate that passive femininity which dedicates her to man: she endues it with a magical power that enables her to catch the men in the snare of her presence and batten off them; she engulfs them along with her in immanence.... Paradoxically, those women who exploit their femininity to the limit create for themselves a situation almost equivalent to that of a man; beginning with that sex which gives them over to the males as objects, they come to be subjects. (Beauvoir 632)

Obviously, I am not referring to Tiara Lestari as a prostitute or hetairas, but her nude pose has caused her to receive insults and accusations that she is “cheap” and that she’s for sale. There is even an episode in her auto/biography when she tells a story about a man who “confesses” to have sex with her. She even agrees that some models are “for sale.” What I want to point out is that should even this “insult” be embraced, there is still a possibility to transcend the situation, which I think is precisely what she has shown through her blog and auto/biography.

In this sense, Tiara shows the blurry boundary of femininity. Femininity can be a situation wherein a woman is positioned as an object. However, at the same time, this position as an object can be a very strong foundation for a subjectivity that is recognized even by those who have previously taken the position as the subject. I find it interesting that Tiara has transcended her position as object and turned out a respected subject. It can be argued that this feature of femininity shows that femininity is not a fixed condition. It also shows that femininity can become a very strong trait of a woman that can be manipulated and made use of. In other words, although her body has been the marker of her objectivity, it is actually the body that has been the point of strength for transcendence.

### **Motherhood as Redemption**

There are burning questions in my mind when thinking of what she writes and re-

flects as “choice” scattered through the chapters in her auto/biography. She chooses to pose nude in the name of professionalism. Then she chooses to be a wife and mother and quit her international career. She claims her husband to be a choice<sup>1</sup> (but she is destiny for him). Are these choices? Is posing nude a choice? Or is she trapped in a culture that enforces her to accept that choice as a “natural” path to take. Thus, she did not make any choice, she just followed the always already taken road. Likewise, is with the “choice to marry and withdraw.” Is it a choice or is it something imposed on her, again as a natural course all other women have “happily” taken?

Pleasance argues that in some girls’ magazines, femininity and feminine identity are defined as choices, although the fact that the choices are actually limited is not made evident. In her auto/biography, Tiara Lestari seems to be engrossed in the idea of choice quite deeply. One very obvious example is her husband whom she refers to as “choice.” Another word often used by her in semantic substitution for “choice” is “commitment” or, when it is related to her modeling work, “professionalism.” These words in a contradictory way mean that she is totally free to choose, but at the same time she has no choice. As Pleasance argues femininity is often camouflaged as choices but at the same time, women barely have any choice.

When Tiara was interviewed why she was willing to pose naked, she answered it was “for something that [she] called ‘professionalism’” (Lestari and Ariestanty 118). Having appeared in so many men’s magazines, posing almost naked and sometimes in very sexual and demeaning poses, she must be taking nude modeling as her line of profession. “Professionally”, this genre must have been a successful path for her as she gains her name from it. She expects, like Madonna, Pamela Anderson, Marilyn Monroe and Cindy Crawford, to achieve even higher goals and fame. This choice implies femininity as a marketable commodity. In her case, it is the sexual type of femininity that she chooses to “sell.” She asserts, “I already made that decision. This is my commitment” (Lestari and Ariestanty 132).

Nearing her career peak as she describes in her blog (Lestari “Tiara Lestari Blog Di Internet Mencatat Pengunjung Ke 100.000”), Tiara decides to put her international career on hold as she feels she has other feminine desires to pursue, namely to become a wife and mother. Again, she calls this urge “choice” and “commitment.” She contends that she will never be able to be an international model and a good mother at the same time, saying, “It’s just a matter of choice” (Lestari and Ariestanty 25). Then, she further elaborates this desire (Lestari and Ariestanty 26, empha-

1 Her husband claims she is his destiny, directed by God through dreams after praying particularly asking about his future wife. See Lestari & Ariestanty, 2007: 96.

sis added):

... I can't wait for the moment when I said, "Yes, I do" to the man that will spend his time with me till time does us apart....<sup>1</sup> This is my commitment as a woman. To become a wife and mother. This is my choice. I will become the beloved wife to my man. I will be a good wife to my children. I want them to be proud of me. "I am sure, my husband and my children will be proud of me."<sup>2</sup>

As in auto/biographies of Indonesian female celebrities (Prabasmoro et al.), in Tiara's auto/biography, femininity and all the traits of being a woman are mostly attributed and dedicated to her [future] roles as a wife and mother. In fact, there is a tendency in her to glorify such roles in such a way that there is a consistency in her idea of commitment and choice. For example, for a person who has decided to be so committed to her profession that she is willing to bare her body to the world, giving up is not supposed to be that easy. However, in her reflection about the roles of being a wife and mother, she claims that career is nothing compared to playing the roles of a good wife and mother. Upon her friend's withdrawal from modeling career, she writes:

One day, she sent me an email telling me that she had found the man of her dream. She told me how much she loves this man and that man is the dream comes true... .. "I decided to leave modeling and live in Croatia. I want [sic] being a wife and mother,"... I can understand her decision. It is obvious, what does career mean compared to finding the man to spend your life with? (Lestari and Ariestanty 47)

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1 Indonesians do not have the culture of a man proposing to a woman the way the "Western" people do. Proposal shall be performed formally in the presence of the family. Islam does not teach that a marriage shall last until death does the couple part as in Catholic teaching, which in this context seems to be taken just as an English idiom spoken by a very romantic and sentimental person.

2 The Blog version of this part as included in the auto/biography is: "Make no mistake about it, I will take this modeling career as far as it can get me, before I say "I do" to man [sic] I love. When that day comes... I will be the most loving wife any can have. By choice. And I will be the best mother to my children. I want them to be proud of me. And I think they will" Lestari, Tiara and Windy Ariestanty. *Tiara Lestari Uncut Stories: Playboy, Ibunda Dan Kafilah*. GagasMedia, 2007.

This rather-too-easy switch creates some confusion in me. What does commitment mean? If one is committed, can one switch one's commitment to another just like that? Or, can we think of femininity that has "economic" values performed in public domain as inferior to femininity in private domain, such as becoming a wife and mother?

Tiara Lestari finds justification in her Croatian friend's decision to withdraw from her career, but more importantly, she finds a strong role model in Cindy Crawford, the international super model. She writes,

I remember Cindy Crawford. Lately this supermodel seems to have been swallowed by the earth. We haven't heard anything about her and her projects in modeling. All I know is that she is happy living with her family. Well, I really want to be like her. Someday I will become a mother. I want simple things like having a family, children. Lots of children, to be exact. Isn't it cool? (Lestari and Ariestanty 25-26)

There are a few reflections that can be made. First, there is a fascination in her for the white as race. This is particularly revealed by her wish to have lighter skin. This wish can also be understood in postcolonial context as the wish to switch her position as the other in the self/other dialectic to become the self. Her efforts to "change" her physiognomy can also be weighed in that context as well. Although she cannot change the color of her skin, she changes the color of her black hair to brown, making her "not totally Indonesian."<sup>1</sup>

In Bhabha's term, she is mimicking the white self in such a way that on one hand it claims the "property" of the Self, on the other hand, she acknowledges her being Other. In this particular case, it can also mean the acknowledgement of not being entirely global and international. In her particular context, as long her otherness is signified as the marketable femininity, especially demanded in men's magazines, she will remain an Other. She will remain an exotic commodity from Java.<sup>2</sup>

Second, another fascination for white as culture and civilization is represented in her wish to follow the steps of the "International supermodel" from USA, Cindy Crawford. In taking Cindy Crawford as the role model, it is obvious that there

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1 The natural hair color of Indonesian people is black. Other shades of this color imply unhealthy or at least unflattering.

2 The cover of FHM Singapore, September 2004 edition, presented her wearing bikinis in a cat position tagging it "Forget Coffee, She is Java's Hottest Export"

is a fascination with white femininity as well. As my previous research shows (Prabasmoro), white femininity is often regarded as the representation of modernity, even when it embraces the domestic values of femininity, as represented by Cindy Crawford's turn to wifing and mothering.

In conclusion, I argue that Tiara is an interesting site of struggle of femininity, local/global nexus as well as self/body dialectic. What can be derived from her auto/biography is her constant struggle of transgressing and trespassing boundaries in a way the discourses surrounding her can be regarded as unfixed. Although her hot poses are still on demand and still in circulation, she has been trying to establish a new image of herself, the one that is no longer "sexy" but elegant." She is still a model, but not "just a model" as she is now also a mother and wife. The two femininities are happening at the same time. It is almost as if she had been accepted as two different persons: the nude model and the new Tiara Lestari that holds a different kind of femininity, albeit perhaps the more normative one. Nevertheless, this promises a more flexible structure of femininity, subjectivity as well as global/local identity. One thing is clear though that motherhood has helped her to redeem her previous act considered to be transgressive and unacceptable.

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# Exploring Literary Multilingualism in Indian Diasporic Writing

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**Abstract** The present paper explicates some main characteristics of the function related to literary multilingualism in Indian Diasporic literary discourse. Literary multilingualism can be defined as a phenomenon where word groups whose structures and meanings cannot be derived from a single language directly as they occur in two or more languages. In particular, it focuses on selective multilingualism especially features of spoken discourse that authors like Amitav Ghosh, Chitra B. Divakaruni, Kiran Desai and Rohinton Mistry recurrently use in their novels, and generally which has not been accounted for within linguistic research. By collating Relevance Theory with the use of literary multilingualism, it is proposed that writers who adopt such an approach are dissolving the boundaries between spoken and literary discourse for multiple reasons. This claim will be elucidated through the analysis of the novels within the framework of the concept of a ‘cognitive environment’ as explicated by Sperber and Wilson in their discussion of Relevance Theory (2002 249). The paper explores functions of literary multilingualism in Indian Diasporic literary discourse thus adding a new perspective to the typologies which often have been set up mainly to account for multilingualism in spoken discourse.

**Key words** literary multilingualism; spoken discourse features; literary discourse; Relevance Theory; popularity.

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## Introduction

what happens when a multilingual culture gets constructed or studied in one language, i.e., English? What are the advantages and the limitations of such linguistic compression or collapse ? (Makarand R. Paranjape 101)

The above epigraph juxtaposes the issue of multilingualism with literary discourse. This work endeavours to understand the point through the use of ‘literary multilingualism’ in four Indian Diasporic novelists namely Amitav Ghosh, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, and Rohinton Mistry by illustrating how these writers use various structural characteristics of spoken discourse in their literary texts. The usage will be explicated within the Relevance Theoretic framework in conjunction with insights from fields like Sociolinguistics and Cross-Cultural Pragmatics. Knauth (2007.Web) first used the term ‘literary multilingualism’ to denote the mixing of two or more languages for the cross-cultural or experimental purpose. Literary multilingualism refers to the interspersing of words and phrases from different languages in any multilingual situation in the form of code switching and code mixing. The study focuses on literary multilingualism present in literary discourse, as well as suggests that the Relevance-Theoretic concepts of Ostensive Inferential Communication, Ostensive Stimulus and Mutual Cognitive Environment provide an analytical tool to understand literature written by Indian Diasporic Novelists.

In the context of nonfiction, this feature has been observed by Suzuki (2009) who comments that the adoption of such an approach can be considered as deliberately redefining the boundary between spoken and written discourse. However, Suzuki limits her discussion to nonfiction whereas the present analysis investigates this phenomenon in literary discourse. The study contends that the “mutual cognitive environment” which authors like Amitav Ghosh, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai and Rohinton Mistry so recurrently construct in their novels is largely dependent on their use of features of spoken discourse, and which account for their present day popularity and appeal (See. Khushu-Lahiri and Chakravarty, 2011 112). The contention is established with the help of analysis of the novels within the framework of “mutual cognitive environment” developed by Sperber and Wilson’s Relevance Theory (2002 249). This is incited by the assumption that a comprehensive account of how this “mutual cognitive environment” is created by these writers and the process of their interpretation by readers should generate accounts of how these texts give rise to particular effects.

The effects, it is maintained is created due to the interaction of contextual assumptions. The environment includes markers of spoken discourse reformulation, insertion of spoken features of Hindi and other Indian languages (fillers, particles, formulaic expressions) herein referred to as Pragma-Markers (See. Pragma-Cultural Markers in Khushu-Lahiri and Chakravarty, 2014) and spoken Indian English (plural rules) called S-Markers within the English text. Accordingly, by applying Relevance Theory and rules of spoken language, it is proposed that the phenomenon discussed here may be viewed as a reflection of the language usage prevalent in today's society is the cause of change in the language of the literary texts.

### **Background of the Study**

The paper brings into the ambit of discussion the use of 'literary multilingualism' in literary discourse as exhibiting as well as reflecting the multilingual language situation in Indian society. Akshya Saxena's view about how the present day popular media is using the language in the Indian society substantiates the above contention:

It is this English –injected Hindi which is the culturally confident desi cool donned by MTV Generation who are as comfortable with the multi-lingual title track of Johnny Gaddar (2007) and Pappu can't dance, Saala as with film titles like Jab We Met (2007), Kismet Konnection (2008) as with desi poke application on Facebook with option to darao your friends with a nakli chipkali or pilao them Roohafza. Increasingly, the interface between Hindi and English in India is blurring, giving way to a curious concoction of 'Hinglish' that comes with its own shades of grey across social, religious and cultural stratification (55-56).

The above discussion on the interspersing of Hindi with English further stressed the point that this is not a singular phenomenon in the country as all the state languages like Bengali, Tamil and other major languages in the VIII Schedule are regularly intermixed with English. As a result, the distinct evolution of regional variants of English in contemporary usage has led to terms such as Hinglish, Banglish, Tenglish (See. Dutta and Rajeswari, 2015) respectively. The cause of this can be assumed to be the multilingual competence of the country's population. The existence of an inter-language relationship between English language and over 1500 hundred indigenous languages in India (Census India 2010-2011) have led to literary multilingualism in conversation and discourse.

Most studies conducted by sociolinguists' state that Indians in a multi-lingual

setting often switch from one language to another (e.g., Bhat, 2010). The switch generally occurs not only at a passage/sentence level (code-switching) but also at a phrase/word level (code mixing). Various hypotheses (e.g., Bhatia and Ritchie, 2006; Sridhar, 1980) discuss the phenomenon, as the cause of switch and a mix of the codes either to make communication smoother between the speakers or to make a conversation more effective. Indians seem to do the switching and mixing consciously as well as unconsciously.

Turning to the representation of spoken discourse in the novels taken up for study it seems to occur on several different levels, e.g. at the level of orthography, literary multilingualism, i.e. code-switching/code-mixing and grammar. Notably, this work focuses on the functions of literary multilingualism to create the mutual cognitive environment. The analysis will show how the functions generally correspond to the specific usages in fixed places. Furthermore, the functions of literary multilingualism can be seen as operating at two main levels: a local and a global level. This view derives from Auer's (1999) discussion of local and global meaning, where he differentiates between code-switching as "locally meaningful" (310) and code mixing as "meaningful ... in a more global sense" (310). Local functions of code-switching are thus functions that can be seen in the text and consequently can be considered as meaningful for the readers of the novels, e.g. instances where code-switching is used in reiterations in order to give emphasis. Global functions, on the other hand, operate on a higher level such as identity etc. Since these categories are flexible in nature the study proposes that literary multilingualism can be regarded as having both local and global functions for creating mutual cognitive environment. As an overarching frame, the investigation takes the broader social context (e.g. social, political, historical and economic factors) into account. This is in line with the central assumption in this work that language cannot be understood separately from its socio-cultural context.

This discussion of local functions of code-switching builds on a list in which there are places which have clear local functions and in which switching is frequent. Before discussing this list in more detail and before launching into the analysis of the novels, it is useful to look at other suggested typologies.

Perhaps the most well-known of these is Gumperz (1982) typology of functions of code-switching. He suggests this preliminary typology on the basis of his studies of code-switching in three different language situations. The typology consists of, "quotations, addressee specification, interjections, reiteration, message qualification, personalization versus objectivization" (Gumperz: 75-80).

In addition to the typology suggested by Gumperz, Grosjean (1989) provides

a summary of some of the reasons why speakers code-switch. Code-switching is used to, “fill a linguistic need for lexical item, set phrase, discourse marker, or sentence filler, continue the last language used (triggering), quote someone, specify addressee, qualify message: amplify or emphasize (“topper” in argument), specify speaker involvement (personalize message), mark and emphasize group identity (solidarity), convey confidentiality, anger, annoyance, exclude someone from conversation, change role of speaker: raise status, add authority, show expertise” (Grosjean 152). Auer (1995) offers a list of “conversational loci in which switching is particularly frequent” (120). Auer’s list is illustrated as follows, “reported speech, change of participant constellation, parentheses or side-comments, reiterations, change of activity type, topic shift, puns, language play, shift of key, topicalisation, topic/comment structure” (Auer 1995 120).

Taking into account the fact that not much attention has been paid to the functions of written code-switching the study discusses here some important typologies of spoken code-switching that have been applied to written discourse by scholars working in the area. Typologies such as those described above have been called into question in case of written code-switching. For example, Auer (1984, 1995) has strongly criticized such lists, claiming that they are inappropriate for several reasons. Two points in Auer’s criticism are especially relevant. First, there is the limitation that it will never be possible to write an exhaustive list of the functions of code-switching. Auer, therefore, claims that “it is a futile endeavour to give a closed classificational scheme for code-switching, for an indeterminate number of interpretations can be arrived at” (1984 3). He argues that “participants don’t just choose one type from some fixed set of alternatives” (3) and that, instead, the switching is “closely tied to the specific, never-identical circumstances in which alternation occurs” (3). The intent of this study is not to propose a view of literary multilingualism as fixed, stable, or static. On the contrary, code-switching is regarded as a fluid, dynamic and creative process. However, bearing in mind that it will never be possible to write an exhaustive, all-inclusive list of the functions of code-switching, we found it useful to build on such a list to describe some of the functions of literary multilingualism to create a mutual cognitive environment for the analysis of the novels.

It is also worth emphasizing that despite the criticism of typologies, the Auer’s Conversation Model (1984, 1995, 1998) and Myer-Scotton’s Markedness Models (1993) that have been included therein are none the less valid. In fact, Sebba admits that Auer’s global and local functions are not exactly clear in case of literary discourse. He further states that as the interaction is between a writer and

a distant reader, “its scope of the term code-switching to such text types could be extended for the change of language must be locally meaningful functioning as a contextualization cue for the reader” (2012 4). Consequently, the work explores functions of literary multilingualism in Indian Diasporic novels thereby adding a new perspective to the typologies/lists which often have been set up mainly to account for oral code-switching.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The fact that the novels under discussion are popular and have appealed to readers from all walks of life poses a challenge to any theory which aims to analyse the literary texts and the reason for their sustained popularity. Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson will be used to explain the popularity of the novels under discussion. The paper underscores the fact that insofar as the purpose of literary criticism is to develop interpretations or readings of texts and readings are generated by evidence from literary texts and contextual assumptions, Relevance Theory can enhance literary criticism by exploring how readings are arrived at and considering what given evidence there is to support a particular texts’ popularity. Further, Sperber and Wilson consider communication as an asymmetrical process wherein the discourse initiator has the complete responsibility of handling the communication in such a way that there is no misunderstanding between him/her and the discourse recipient. The discourse initiator within a mutual cognitive environment has insight into the discourse recipient’s possible interpretive processes and uses this knowledge to create the input in such a way that the discourse recipient obtains contextual information in order to interpret it. In defining the term “cognitive environment” Sperber and Wilson make the following proposition:

A fact [or, more generally, assumption] is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true. [Hence] an individual’s total cognitive environment is a function of his physical environment and his cognitive abilities. It consists of not only all the facts [or assumptions] that he is aware of, but also, all the facts [or assumptions] that he is capable of becoming aware of; in his physical environment...Memorized information is a component of cognitive abilities. (Sperber and Wilson 1995 39)

Thus, one can state that a cognitive environment for any individual is a group of assumptions that are valid to him/her because they are understandable and

distinguishable.

On this basis, a mutual cognitive environment is further defined as, “any shared cognitive environment in which it is manifest which people share it. In a mutual cognitive environment... every manifest assumption is mutually manifest” (Sperber and Wilson 1995 41- 42).

The model developed with the help of these assumptions is:

Ostensive Inferential Communication => [Discourse Initiator] E & [A, B, C...]  
 & Ostensive Stimulus (reformulation, insertion of Indian language words and phrases) = [Discourse Recipient] E  
 Where E= Shared Cognitive Environment  
 A, B, C...= Contextual Information

Now with the above model, it can be inferred the writers under discussion with their knowledge of the country and its multilingual setting, which forms an integral part of their cognition, during the process of writing give clues about their meaning by creating a shared cognitive environment (See. Chakravarty and Gaur, 2011). Thus, Relevance Theory can offer to literary studies an understanding of the use of literary multilingualism, and the ways by which a text is used to communicate the meaning of the author to the reader.

### **Analysis**

In the following section, Relevance theoretic analysis is used based upon the theory of Sperber and Wilson to illustrate how the Diasporic authors use language and the recurrent images in their novels to construct and vividly portray the characters and their lives. However, this analysis does not illustrate the complex relations and constant interaction existing between our cognition and its manifestation. Rather, it attempts to give a somewhat schematic idea of the potential sources from which information can be supplied during the process of communication, which takes place between the author and readers, and map the location of discourse internal information and its meaning within the broader picture of the plot of a literary text. By analysing the mutual cognitive environment created by Ghosh, Divakaruni, Desai and Mistry within the framework of the two categories (viz., Pragma-Markers and S Markers) identified earlier in this study the novels’ appeal to the readers is underscored:

1. Pragma-Markers: This category is created to classify the usage of literary multilingualism in the eight novels undertaken for study. These are being named

as pragma-markers as their functions are more pragmatic than syntactic. As research on word order of English states that English is a SVO language and Indian languages are SOV. The word order rule is followed more strictly in writing than in speech. However it is seen that in case of literary multilingualism the word order is not consistently maintained in the sense that the interspersing of other language elements include: fillers, exclamatory particles and reformulations. The examples used in this chapter appear in these texts as conversational discourse and general narrative discourse. Specifically, the mechanisms include the following two categories:

1.1) Exclamatory Particles and Fillers as Pragma-Markers: The non-canonical word order in speech or to reproduce a style of speech, creation of sarcastic, satirical or ironic tone and creation of an authentic tone. Researchers describe the canonical word order, SOV, is not necessarily maintained in conversational Hindi or Bengali. It is observed that in the literary texts taken up for study there is the occurrence of subjects, objects, and other constituents before the subject and after the predicate in a sentence. The study divides sentence constituents that are present before a subject or after predicate into two types. In the first type, it is considered to be motivated by factors such as thinking time; there is a prosodic break between the subject and the pre-subject element. Some examples from the texts are given below. For example, the use of fillers occur regularly to depict dialogue forms like in the examples below ‘Um’, ‘Uh-huh’. There is also a set of vocabulary that is associated mostly with speech (i.e. colloquial expressions) like ‘Hai’ and ‘Arey’. The differences between spoken and written in Hindi or Bengali language are not limited to these structural differences. However, this chapter is concerned with the structural differences and similarities and makes only brief references to these other types of differences. The literature that studies word order of Hindi or Bengali definitively states: sentence-final expressions such as final particles and tag-like expressions are considered to be part of the predicate. One way of ensuring that this flow of information is preserved is through the use non-canonical constructions, i.e. syntactic structure in which the canonical order of element (in English, Subject-Verb-Object) is rearranged. Chafe (1976) uses the term packaging to refer to this use of syntactic structuring to serve pragmatic functions. He further notes that by choosing to package information using one structure rather than another, a writer accommodates his or her writing to various “states of addressee’s mind”, which is nowhere more evident than diasporic writing (Stouck 7). Like in the writer’s use of interjections, fillers and sentential constructions of another language as in *Queen of Dreams* and *The Mistress of Spices* Divakaruni uses the category of Pragma-marker

with the help of fillers and exclamatory particles.

Um-what do you mean, special? Is that like an imaginary friend (QOD 74)?

In the first example from *Queen of Dreams* Divakaruni uses the filler Um as a pragma-marker to show how Rakhi takes time to think while discussing about her daughter Jonaki's obsession with her imaginary friend and it is portrayed in such a manner that it is like a real conversation. It also shows to the reader how she is worried that her daughter might get upset with her questioning and the hesitancy in her mind is made clear by the author with the filler *Um*.

The other two examples from *The Mistress of Spices* illustrate the use of exclamatory particles *Hai* and *Arre* as a pragma-marker.

Hai, you are talking like Ramu now, and his wife, that Sheela who brought up her girl too lax, never a slap even, and see what has happened (TMOS 85).

Arre baap, so what if this is America, we are still Bengalis, no (TMOS 85)?

In both the examples, the author with the help of these two pragma-markers expresses the contextual information about how Leela's grandfather is unhappy with the socio-cultural situation of America. He disapproves of the unbidden freedom that a young woman gets in the country. In the first example, he shows his disapproval with the help of the exclamatory particle *Hai*. In the second example, the use of *Arre* shows to the reader that his earlier depression about his son's behaviour has turned into irritation as it is now added with another exclamatory word *baap*. *Baap* as a word means father but when added to a particle like *Arre* it becomes an emphatic marker. The author with help of this particle provides the reader with ostensive stimulus as well as the background knowledge to convey the meaning.

Similarly Mistry too uses exclamatory particles as pragma-markers for building the "mutual cognitive environment". The instances of pragma-markers in both his novels are the particles *Arey*. The spelling of this particle in both novels changes with the change in the language background of the character.

Here in the first example from *Such a Long Journey* the exclamatory particle *Arre* is spelled in such a way as to represent the pronunciation of places like Mumbai in western India.

"Arre, no seth. Not like that, never" (SALJ 135).

The Gurkha in this example is disagreeing with Gustad's opinion that "he is sleeping all night without doing his duty." The guard tones down the negative quality of speech and adds the exclamatory particle. The particle *Arre* is making it possible to make the conversation run smoothly even in an uncomfortable moment. It provides the reader with the contextual assumption needed for the reader to create the author's intention.

In the two examples from *A Fine Balance* the particle *Arey* is spelt with a sound making the pronunciation nearer to Eastern India.

"Arey Chotu, not so loud," said Dukhi. (AFB 102) / "Arey father-of-ishvar, what did you do to my child" (AFB 103)!

In the first usage of the particle, the mother is light-heartedly asking the child to stop crying, and the particle provides the intention of the author that Dukhi is not upset with the sound. The next usage is where the particle becomes a part of a phrase which is an example of transliteration from Hindi. Both usages provide the reader with the information about the backgrounds of the speakers and this helps in building the "cognitive environment".

There is another set of particle that Mistry uses in his novels which validate the view that these writers are reflecting the spoken variety of Indian languages. The particle *bas* is used as a pragma-marker in two different positions, initial and final for different contextual reasons. In his novel *Such a Long Journey*, Mistry uses *bas* in both the situations.

Bas, it is too much for.... (SALJ 236)!

A glass of cold water for me, bas (SALJ 38).

In the first sentence *bas* occurs in the initial position as an exclamatory particle, it functions in a way that it gives the sense of "enough" in the sentence. The particular usage brings to life a scene in the novel wherein a person is giving a speech and how the rest of the colony is unappreciative of his opinion.

In the second example from the same novel, the position of *bas* is at the end of the sentence. In this occurrence, it functions as a confirming particle instead of an exclamatory particle and gives the sense of "that's all" in the sentence. Dinshawji declines Gustad's offer for a drink and asks for just water.

The second usage is from *A Fine Balance* in which the particle occurs at the

beginning of the sentence.

Bas I'll keep my mouth shut from now on and think quietly (AFB 471).

The pragma-marker in this sentence helps the reader to understand the disappointment and failure Ishvar feels when he could not convince Dina to get Om married and then stay at her place with his wife.

This particle has a finality attached to it and the author unlike his use of *Arey* uses this very rarely. Bas is not used by the other novelists in their texts. The reason behind this maybe that unlike Mistry who believes in keeping his novels' language as close to Indian language as possible the other authors experiment with other methods like translations etc. The use of particles like *Arey* is more natural because of its limited functions thereby making it more acceptable in the globalized society. In contrast, particle *bas* in Hindi or Bengali is multifunctional and thus has ambiguous meanings, which is not as easily incorporated in English as *Arey* can be.

The two examples that are studied here are from Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*. In this with the usage of *Aray* the writer represents similar conversation situation when we meet someone and show our surprise at the sudden meeting.

The first example is from *The Hungry Tide*

“Are tumi” (THT 19)!

Through the use of an expression like above *Are tumi* the author tries to interweave the diverse elements of age etc. that are eminently present in every human life and construct the social picture for the reader in the text.

Ghosh with the incorporation of *Aray* particle in the extract from *Sea of Poppies*, attempts to portray another aspect of that time when major socio-cultural changes were taking place in places like Bengal. In this kind of sentence, *na* is questioning particle coming finally.

It functions in such a way as to affirm the answer to be true of the sentence it is questioning “Arre Jodu na? Isn't that you – Jodu Naskar” (SOP 63)?

In the foregoing example, the inclusion of exclamatory particle intermixed with the negative particle enables the author to create the natural conversation like atmosphere vividly.

The last examples in this category are of Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss*.

The first example is the exclamatory particle *Aray* with its spelling representing the pronunciation of Northern Indian language. “Arre, Sampathji, how could you

do that” (HGO 43)? The usage of *Arre* is generally for positive emotion, but in this case, the particle portrays incredulity and disbelief. The author builds the “cognitive environment” for the reader where he can get the author’s meaning with the help of the contextual information.

The example below is from *The Inheritance of Loss* portraying familiar formulaic expressions used in most spoken language.

“Owwaa”, she shouted... “Oooph” she said” (TIL 116).

“Hm. What long fingers. Little nails. But look, you bite them” (TIL 115).

The onomatopoeic exclamatory particle is used to represent surprise or pain, and the other interjection is used for disgust. Though the above sentence has no other, information except for these two particles, still it provides the cue to build the possible conversation situation and helps in the understanding of the author’s meaning.

The other example from the novel is an interjection used for agreement. It also shows a noncommittal approval in a situation where one is not ready to give direct opinions like in this interaction where Sai and her tutor are exploring about each other and yet not prepared to show their impressions clearly.

1.2) Reformulation as Pragma-Marker: Production of an element to redo any linguistic expression just produced. The practice of reformulation written in texts can be easily considered as features that represent the essence of spoken language reflecting the dynamic, interactive nature of speech. Thus, one would expect that writers cannot adopt these features because they are not engaged in ongoing, emerging interactions as speakers are. However, the Diasporic writers do attempt to utilize some of these crucial features of spoken discourse as shown below. In the first instance, this feature can be seen in Amitav Ghosh’s novels *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*.

To accurately portray Kusum’s character in the novel, Ghosh furnishes the clue for her role by using a simile like a storm, a jhor and emphasize with the reformulation. Moyna nodded. I’ve heard people say she was like a storm, a jhor (THT 137).

In this example, the reformulation of the simile has two functions first it helps in building a good rapport between Moyna and Kanai. The second function is to help the reader understand about the admiration that existed between a village girl like Kusum and a suave character like Kanai.

Further, from this reformulation, the reader becomes aware of all characters’

background as well as their view of each other. The example is from *Sea of Poppies*, “ka bhaile? What’s happening? He said at last in his hoarse unmindful way, and she felt sure now that if he’d ever had any memory of that night, his slow, simple mind had long since lost track of it. Ey-re kalua, she said, that man of mine is unwell at the factory; he has to be brought home” (SOP 60).

The preceding example from Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* facilitates explanation as it illustrates “emphasis through repetition”. The first question in Bhojpuri “ka bhail?” is just followed by the English translation. The pattern is of two or more sentences coexist in the construction as in speech we say something twice to provide the question of some importance. The character of Kalua is from the backward classes of the society, and as a person, he is timid so while talking to a woman and that too of a higher level this reformulation helps the reader to see the hesitancy in his behaviour.

The next examples of reformulation are found in Divakaruni’s novels *The Mistress of Spices* and *Queen of Dreams*. Unlike Ghosh who whose both novels are replete with these markers, Divakaruni uses reformulation as pragma-marker in particular instances. In *The Mistress of Spices* the reformulation is present only when Tilo the co-protagonist of the novel calls to her spices for help the names of spices are given in two languages side by side.

Adrak ginger, and so I called on ginger. Be with me...Root of gnarled wisdom, ada in your hide of banded brown, help me in this my seeking... (TMOS 123).

“The dry chilli, lanka, is the most potent of spices (TMOS 37).

Speak to me, fennel, mouri, coloured like the freckled house sparrow that brings amity where it nests, spice to digest sorrows and in their digestion make us strong (TMOS 106).

The above examples are all instances where Tilo is acting as the Spice mistress and calling onto her spices for some or other purpose. The reformulation in this novel alludes to real conversation situation. The repeated word helps to build the impression that this is a real calling ceremony hence adding to the mystic element of the plot.

The reformulation of “Chai House” is a very apt example to build the “cognitive environment” of cultural amalgamation insofar as the word chai connoting an Indian tea shop is conjoined with the English word house which is generally used in conjunction with the word coffee evoking images of Coffee Houses of yesteryears.

They have decided to transform the Chai House into an Indian snack shop, a *chaer dokan*, as it would be called in Calcutta (QOD 185).

The term *chaer dokan* repeated much later in the sentence could be seen as an ostensive stimulus from the author to the reader stressing the point that once you accept the “word for foreign food” of another cultural group you have broken the first barrier and are on your way to acceptance of a different culture.

The last example of reformulation as pragma-marker in the novels is from Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* wherein she writes about an Indian myth in a casual way.

... Thereby angering two snakes, *mia-bibi*, husband and wife, who lived in a hole nearby (TIL13).

The extract is taken from the part of the novel where the Judge's Cook is thinking about how he had broken into a snakes pit to use as a lavatory and the snakes were disturbed by this activity thus became angry. The author shares a very profound aspect of Indian culture, i.e. their various deities. The reference of the snakes as personified husband and wife and its reformulation in Hindi helps to create the ‘cognitive environment’ about cultural beliefs in a relaxed manner.

Rohinton Mistry in both his texts does not use reformulation of any kind. His instances of literary multilingualism are the usage of Hindi or Gujarati words and phrases without any translation such as, “Paan we don't chew only,” said Ishvar.” But sometimes we like to smoke a *beedi*” (AFB 9). but as can be noticed the sentence structure in the first part of the sentence is spoken Indian English and the reason maybe his plots are generally constructed in India thus he subconsciously places the reader of his tale in India and does not translate his literary multilingualism.

2. S-Marker: This marker is developed to classify a unique set of examples in literary multilingualism, which can be said to be grammatical. Following of plurality rules in any language generally decides whether construction is grammatically correct or not. However, sociolinguistic analysis of natural language, take an entirely different view. They opine that many words and structures are characteristic of, especially informal; speech need not follow strict rules of grammar or nonstandard spellings. Of this category, this study has found the plural rules of English being over-generalized in Hindi words.

The first instance of usage of S-marker is from Divakaruni's *Queen of Dreams* and *The Mistress of Spices*,

...Oh mom, not alu parathas again (QOD 31)!

They want fresh coriander seed, organic of course, or pure ghee for as karma free diet, or yesterday's burfis at half price (TMOS 67).

The S-marker at the end of *alu-paratha* in *Queen of Dreams* refers to the innumerable times that Rakhi has to eat it because her mother made her. In the other example too *burfis* provides the reader that it is an instance of continuous thought and that it is an informal situation. The grammatical mistakes also help in the illusion of a spoken situation wherein the informal quality of speech has been captured by the usage.

Ghosh in his two novels also uses the S-marker. His usage in *The Hungry Tide* reads as if it is an instance of spontaneous speech.

He spoke to the demons and ghostly ganas, the dainis, the pisachas and all the rakshasas (THT 381).

In the above example, Ghosh describes a situation where a jungle ritual is being performed by Fokir to invite all mythical creatures for protection. The S-marker helps in the creation of the illusion as to the huge numbers of these creatures.

In the example from *Sea of Poppies* among the group boarding Ibis she is the new *girmitya* who has this constant companion, a small bundle under her arm.

...Sarju, the midwife, had buried her face in her precious bundles and bojhas.... (SOP 354).

The word *bojhas* though alluding to a single bundle creates the picture of the huge uncertainty of the lonely woman who uses the bundle as protection from the outside world. Mistry in *A Fine Balance* and Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* uses the S marker in the word *chapati*. This word with the plural marker –s is present in most of these writers. Also, Desai like Divakaruni adds this marker to other bread forms like *puri* and *paratha*.

Om granted his affirmation, adding, chapatis are a little dry, not as nice as

yesterday. You didn't follow my method or what (AFB 613)?

"The judge ate even his chapatis, his puris and parathas, with knife and fork."  
(TIL 176).

The usage in both the authors is for slightly different reasons. In Mistry, the *chapatis* are used for the construction today's *chapati* as in yesterday's *chapati* was better than today's *chapati*. But in Desai's *chapatis*, *puris*, *parathas* it shows that nothing ever is eaten with hands.

Thus, all these authors use the S-marker as interlocutors and portray spoken language. These markers make greater use of shared knowledge like spoken discourse. Further, the S markers are also used to perform phatic functions, such as "creating a real experience" for the reader where unplanned and casual discourse helps in the overall appeal of the novels.

After analysing the examples from the novels following conclusions were drawn. These above examples give the real world knowledge as well as create a mutual cognitive environment for the reader. Of the structural differences between speech and writing, the features that are sometimes present in these four contemporary fiction writers' novels include Pragma-markers and S-markers. It is not be decided that the distinctions are not being used naturally. The pattern that is seen is that these writers strategically adopt specific features through these two markers and create "cognitive environment" for the reader. In other words, their writing includes fillers, exclamatory particles, reformulations etc. Their sentences may be repetitive with new spelling rules from English language used in Indian language constructions. This makes their literary discourses look like it may have gone through a dynamic process because it includes reformulation and fillers. Particularly when encountering the above structures, which have been 'created' by the author in the text, our imagination is aroused as to the place and time, we feel we are faced with a typical scene that we all know so well. On the other hand, the foreign reader can envisage the social reality in India and can visualize what occurs there thus giving them an idea of real-world knowledge. Therefore the novels, according to the principle of Relevance Theory, hint at the authors' intention and the readers decide on the interpretation of the fictional work which satisfies all questions resulting in the completion of the communication cycle.

## Discussion

This analysis has investigated the functions of literary multilingualism in selected novels of four India Diasporic novelists. By what was found in the novels with the

help of two categories referred to as Pragma-markers and S-markers, it is suggested that the following are the functions that literary multilingualism perform. The use of pragma markers like *Arey*, *Hai* etc. are generally due to lack of proper translation of such expressions in English. In case of fillers as pragma-markers, there are no English specific markers present.

The use of such expressions, reformulation, and plural elements provide a better understanding of the text by the reader. It also allows authenticity to the characters and makes the plot more believable for the reader. Following the examples from the texts, one saw that some contemporary writers are adopting various characteristics of spoken discourse in their writing. The study contends that these writers are taking spoken language features for forming a distinctive style. Scholars like Suzuki argue that these writers are influenced by the style of communication situation around the world. To summarize the argument of the paper, I would like to draw upon views from literary critics and linguists.

Amitav Ghosh's work introduces a number of "languages", including those of the Indian folktale, the Mahabharata, journalism, and the memory pattern of the extended family, radically deconstructing traditional novel forms (52).

Here Louis James highlights the view that scholars have noted the variety of languages present in these authors' novels. Further critics like Tapan Ghosh discuss other linguistic features such as exclamation marks, use of capital letters, unpunctuated words that often reads like a breathlessly long sentence in Desai (76), thus showing that the critics are conscious of the choice of a different style of writing in these authors. He also cites another example from Desai:

Banana friter pineapple friter apple friter applesurprise apple charlotte apple betty b read and butter jam tart caramel custard tipsy pudding rum tumpudding jamaroly poly-ginger steam date pudding lemon pancake egg custard orange custard coffee custar straw berry custard trifle...." (64), employment of slang and swear words (181,190), Hinglish jingles like Shopping keliye jayenge, bh helpuri khayenge...dollars me kamaenge, pumpumpum (298), lines from Islamic prayer (136), Bollywood film songs (51,53) and advertising doggerel (194)

The above quote further shows that critics are aware of the writer's choices of features of spoken discourse. Considering this, it is interesting to read Aijaz Ahmad's commentary. As Aijaz Ahmad has noted, English is the language most

removed in its cultural ambience (or discursive affinities, regarding this book) from other Indian languages. While Aijaz Ahmad notes this “difficulty” in the context of using English as the language in which the knowledge of “Indian” literature is produced”, this gap between the “ambience and structure” of English and other Indian languages creates at least two major problems for the Indian English writer—the problem of dialogue and the problem of mapping (99). By acknowledging the problem of the conventional style of writing, Aijaz signals to the reader about the reason for the adoption of a non-conventional stance. He further states that the problem of dialogue can be seen to be solved by,

“...at least two major writers (Desani and Rushdie) solve by trying to evolve a seemingly pidgin Indian English that develops the tradition of literal translation into a type of artistic eco-language, a language sounding un-English and Indian while remaining English and not being literally Indian. This last effort is, of course, not unique – in the sense that many other attempts at a careful replication of real dialogue (or dialect) (Mark Twain, Thomas Hardy, Emile Bronte, George Eliot in Adam Bede) can be shown to be a selective and stylized version of the dialect being copied” (100).

Similarly, the writers who incorporate features of spoken discourse into their literary writing may be doing so for creative as well as linguistic purposes. Additionally, to being creative, the writers of this style of writing have motivations related explicitly to features of spoken discourse. To discuss the fundamental differences between speech and writing in general, Chafe (1982) says the following:

[...] the speaker is aware of an obligation to communicate what he or she has in mind in a way that reflects the richness of his or her thoughts – not to present a logically coherent but experientially stark skeleton, but to enrich it with the complex details of real experiences – to have less concern for consistency than for experiential involvement. The situation for the writer is fundamentally different. [...] the writer is less concerned with experiential richness, and more concerned with producing something that will be consistent and defensible when read by different people at different times in different places, something that will stand the test of time (45).

This may mean that those Diasporic writers who adopt features of spoken language are looking for experiencing the pluralism present in India. Griffiths, Ashcroft and

Tiffin argue that language and characterisation go a long way in emphasizing the “ethnic pluralism” of Indian life and are reflexive of the multiculturalism of the nation in the text (215). When the reformulation and filler examples were discussed, it was mentioned that such reformulation in speech can be attributed to the notions of afterthought and repair. Though writers have time to plan their writing, the conventional sense of repair and afterthought does not apply when such examples occur in writing. On the use of reformulation and fillers as Pragma markers in the novels one can refer to the quote by Chafe above. In addition, as this study has denoted these features as Pragma-markers this can be corroborated by Clancy (1982) who writes that one aspect of the “involvement” characteristic of spoken discourse is that writers feel they should try to convey some of the rich, experiential detail, which is more lifelike in their context building, rather than simply narrating events in the novels. It is seen that these are present in the authors’ works like: Ghosh with reformulated phrases like “ka bhaile? What’s happening?” (SOP 60). It is because different reformulated and filler constructions impose constraints on the familiarity level, which in turn can assist the reader in constructing a coherent discourse representation thus helping in its interpretation. The S-markers i.e. the plural -s markers like *parathas* from Divakaruni’s *Queen of Dreams* and the other authors provide rich, experiential aspect to the sentences too. However, the spoken style features are strategically placed in the novels.

Further, finding out these specific places where they use the speech like features might reveal their purpose. The purpose as apparent from the writers’ texts device ways to add flavor to their writing through the use of Pragma-markers and S-markers.

Evidently, these writers use these features of spoken discourse because they want to involve their readers and make them feel more connected to their texts. Thereby, appealing to their sensibilities.

As mentioned earlier, Tabish Khair writes about the problem of mapping providing justification that the Indian English writer confronted,

...the problem of writing in English about a country whose physical and cultural geographies are yet to be comprehensively mapped by and in (Indian) English. Moreover, given a country where English is not widely spoken, the first problem leads, whether we like it or not, to dilemma of translating speech from spoken Indian languages to a remote (predominantly textual) language such as English (101).

In other words, writers use spoken discourse features in their writing when they want to involve and engage readers without confusing them with the above mentioned problems. The novels with this kind of language are quite emotive and interesting. There is ample proof provided by monolingual writers who use conversation like features to connect with their readers. Mostly, this kind of effect is realized owing to spoken style writing.

Lakoff (qtd. in Suzuki 604) describes naturalistic representations of conversation in fiction where one can see that by using conversation like features such as ellipses, fragments, expletives, dialectal and colloquial forms in their main (that is, non-dialog) texts writers' connect with their readers.

Taking another aspect in her examination of Indian English writers, Spivak notes that in this planned, speech-like features are the declaration of their diversity in the globalized world. Her study focuses on the authors simulating the processes, structure and dynamism of an everyday conversation, by which they attempt to involve readers in order to control and manipulate them.

In the wake of swiftly changing global cosmopolitan identities riding the foam on waves of diversified Diasporas, what was an upper-class, upwardly mobile or upwardly aspiring private relationship to a vernacular in national peripheral space is literally "re-territorialised" as the public declaration of ethnic identity in the metropolitan space of the newish migrant writer... ( Khair, 102).

A similar conclusion is reached by Meenakshi Mukherjee when she opines that "recent Indian English fiction appears to be assuming the transparency of Indian English much more readily and unproblematically than the generation of Rao and Anand did" (Khair 110).

In connection with the use of words and phrases of Indian languages with or without English translations that are also sometimes italicized in Kiran Desai, Tapan Ghosh discusses the rationale behind such a usage:

Such audacious mixing of English and other lexical items lends a diasporic feel to her language and makes it a suitable medium to evoke the multicultural and polyglossic reality that the novel depicts...for example: "No ghasphoos, no twigs and leaves", Angrezkatarah. Like the English" (78).

Desai's characters continually deploy literary multilingualism, to portray the movement in person and the mind, for instance, the judge lying awake at night

while reminiscing about his experiences in Britain. This can be substantiated with the views given by Tejinder Kaur,

Thus, we find that Desai foregrounds the idea of home not as a fixed but as in transition ambivalent location by portraying different migrants relating differently to the concepts of home, homeland and the lands of adoption as per their situation, settlements and attitudes. She further writes that in the text through the multiple experiences and situations located in India, Desai has also shown that the Diasporic experience is linked not only with the transnational land, across political borders, rather it is more a matter of what Jan Mohammad calls, “the positionality of the subject” during the historic political clashes of power politics between communities and races (134).

In the extract quoted above Kaur investigates the use of conversation-like features in texts of present day Indian English writers. It can be argued that fiction containing dialogic features may be grouped under the general label of an involving and persuasive text type. Novels’ using exclamatory expressions of both Hindi and Bengali and interrogatives such as “Arey?” allows the writer to construct the intended reader’s cognitive environment, simulate the interaction with him/her, create a discourse where the reader is given an implicit message and thus involved as a participant in the authors explicit message. This, in turn, contributes to the creation of reader involvement. In this way, other studies in English concur that writers who use exclamatory particles are motivated by the intention to increase the texts’ involvement with the readers.

Further, it is noticed that social interaction has moved from rules of written discourse to more oral structure. As Lakoff says, “As a culture we are contemplating — if we have not taken already — a leap from being written-oriented to being oral-oriented” (qtd. in Suzuki: 605). It is apparent in this globalized world that this is prevalent in Indian society as well. It has further established that Desai, Divakaruni, Ghosh and Mistry are using various structural characteristics of spoken discourse in their writing. Specifically, they place Hindi, Bengali before an English sentence or use exclamatory particles freely, follow spelling rules of English into Hindi and Bengali words. Moreover, these writers reformulate their sentences. This kind of usage makes their literary discourse looks as if it were constructed dynamically and spontaneously.

It can be said that the major reason why the novelists taken up for study reflect spoken discourse in their literary discourse in this manner is that this style of

writing is an endeavour developed by the writers to engage, involve, and connect with their readers. In today's world in any form of communication the boundary between spoken and written discourse is not as strongly marked as it was earlier. Specific places where they use spoken style writing indicate that the use of this style is not accidental but it is consciously used in order to create a mutual cognitive environment for the reader to comprehend. Thus, these authors may be reflecting as well as expressing contemporary society wherein freer language rules are viewed without contempt and "orality" provides better opportunities for learning and understanding a language.

### Conclusion

To conclude one can say that analysing the manifestations of literary multilingualism was of great interest and significance to understand the overall 'effects' of the Diasporic writers such Ghosh, Divakaruni, Desai and Mistry. Moreover, it is a topical issue, which led to very noteworthy results. The proposed analysis of three different manifestation of 'literary multilingualism' within a Relevance Theoretic framework positioned the selected novels as multilingual texts reflecting the language situation in a globalized world. The conclusion drawn from the textual evidence showed that use of literary multilingualism in specific places in the texts produced communicative effects vis-à-vis understanding of the texts. A different manifestation lead to a different communicative effect i.e. Pragma- Markers and S-Markers produced 'cognitive environment' for the reader to understand and appreciate the text. Further, the analysis of the eight texts selected for this study with the help of Relevance Theory and Sociolinguistics and Cross-Cultural approaches explicated that the selected use of literary multilingualism infused element of reality into the novels. Thus, the present work established that literary multilingualism adds to the overall readability of these novels.

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# Ishmael Reed's Mimicry of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Formation of Neo-HooDoo Slave Narrative in *Flight to Canada*

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**Abstract** Postmodernism has as its major tenet the eradication of master-narratives in favor of marginalized voices. In so doing, it puts forward various strategies which, though different in methodology, are all critical of the dominant exclusionary discourses. Parodic mimicry is one of these subversive strategies which allows the anti-establishment artist to employ the discriminatory discursive practices and skillfully turn them on their heads. African American novelist Ishmael Reed adopts the postmodern technique of mimicry to severely criticize and puncture the racist structure of the United States. In his Neo-HooDoo slave narrative *Flight to Canada* (1976), he takes to task the traditional historiography, showing how a so-called anti-slavery novel like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* employs racial essentialism to reinforce the stereotypical representations of blacks and distort history to the benefit of white dominators. Through a parody of Stowe's canonical work, Reed's novel provides a space for the black consciousness to serve as an agentic subject and re-narrate the history of slavery, abolitionism and the Civil War. This paper aims to depict how Reed manages to rewrite the history of slavery in *Flight to Canada* via mimicking Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

**Key words** *Flight to Canada*; *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Harriet Beecher Stowe; Ishmael Reed; mimicry

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## **Introduction**

History has always been a moot point for postmodern thinkers. The traditional

view of history as a linear, teleological and progressive movement would not certainly appeal to the disgruntled postmodernists who denounce any homogenous presentation of “facts” as spurious and power-laden. Before the rise and popularity of deconstruction, it was not conceivable to undermine the authority and legitimacy of history because its overbearing authenticity, sanctioned by the establishment, granted meaning not only to the past, but also to the present and the future. However, the advent of the postist zeitgeist in the mid-twentieth century dethroned history and all other “official” perceptions of the world, and paved the way for the emergence of the marginalized accounts which were hitherto either simply overlooked or brutally silenced (McCullagh 5-7; Hutcheon 182).

History (and historiography) found a new significance in the Enlightenment era when the concept replaced theology, for long the sole donor of meaning, and turned into a legitimizing factor itself. But why did history come to play such a consequential role in the period? The Age of Reason with its overemphasis upon Deism, scientificity, rationality and empiricism, would need an alternative discourse to justify its fledgling spirit of progress. Basically addressing the “natural” course of civilizational progression, the discourse of modernity presented history as a linear movement which had started in the Orient and would reach its full culmination in the West. Such a Eurocentric conception of civilizational history was of grave importance in the era of modernity which was witnessing the unprecedented expansion of the Western empire. As a result, it is no exaggeration to say that the empiricist, modernist historiography transformed into an effective instrument in the hands of the Western imperialist to legitimize his expansionist agenda. This notorious complicity between historiography and power was highlighted to a great extent in the postmodern thought which has as its priorities the decentralization of conventional power structures and the reclamation of suppressed peripheral positions (Southgate 27-31).

African American novelist Ishmael Reed is one of the postmodern figures whose preoccupation with history is evident in most of his novels, particularly in his neo-slave narrative *Flight to Canada*, first published in 1976. Reed and lots of other postmodern writers such as Pynchon, Barth, Doctorow and Roth were skeptical of what was presented as historical reality and also the verisimilitudinous mode of its representation (Bergmann 200). According to Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, Reed is vehemently against reading signs as representing “a given reality” (112), an oppositional gaze which makes the novelist a staunch critic of Eurocentric historiography.

Reed is well aware of the fragile shaky position of his race in the

discriminatory United States. As a mode of resistance, he opts for a third choice other than the two widely employed strategies of assimilationism and Pan-Africanist nationalism, and hence goes for what Homi Bhabha, the Indian postcolonial thinker, calls “mimicry” or “sly civility.” Reed, a postmodern author, knows that the total repudiation of black heritage and the absolute rejection of the white culture are both detrimental to African Americans’ quest for freedom, and will only strengthen the dominant racist structure’s grip on power. He thus steers away from direct confrontation, à la the Black Power Movement, in favor of a less costly and more expedient strategy. Similar to those whom postcolonial critics denigrate as “brown sahibs,” “house negroes” or “captive minds” (Marandi and Pirnajmuddin 23), Reed seemingly remains within the limits set by the dominant order by choosing to write in such Western genres as detective fiction. Nonetheless, he resorts to parody as a powerful instrument which effectively undermines the racist atmosphere with its sharp satirical edge. This means that he intentionally and consciously uses the master’s tools to turn the dominant discourse on its head and raze the master’s house, hence the ultimate liberation of the “house negro.”

In his other novels *Mumbo Jumbo* and *The Last Days of Louisiana Red*, Reed mimics such genres and concepts as detective fiction and the Arthurian quest for the Holy Grail. Nevertheless, the list of items parodied in *Flight to Canada* includes not only literary genres (such as realism and traditional slave narrative), but also canonical books and writers (such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*), political figures (such as Abraham Lincoln) and historical events (such as the Civil War). Earlier in the paper, it was discussed that the postmodern thought rejected the official historiography for its disregard of the “unofficial” accounts of events. Reed’s Bhabhaesque revisionist strategy also falls within this category. He not only rejects the conventional political history of the Civil War and its acclaimed hero, Lincoln, but even undermines the literary history and its practice of canon formation by criticizing Stowe and her renowned anti-slavery novel. Below is provided a brief analysis of the mid-nineteenth century abolitionist school and also of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The discussion aims to shed light on the problematic aspects of her novel which despite its alleged support for the emancipation cause, was still imbued with the racist zeitgeist of the age.

### **Abolitionist School and Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***

The Abolitionist literary school appeared during the period of mounting political tension in the mid-nineteenth century United States, and is mostly known today by Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, first published in 1852. The school, which was in

fact the literary wing of the anti-slavery movement, depicted blacks as the victims of white slave owners' brutality and racist maltreatment. According to the *official* political and literary history, the abolitionist school, and particularly Stowe's novel, helped mobilize the northern opposition to slavery which ultimately resulted in the Civil War (Washington 18).

Stowe's principal purpose in the novel was to convince her readership that the institution of slavery was corrupt and evil, and thus must be eradicated. However, although Stowe sympathized with the slaves, at least on the surface, her commitment to disrupt the concept of black inferiority was frequently undermined by her own employment of racist stereotypes (Piacentino 135). She assigned the eponymous character a number of quite degrading attributes which were associated with the presumably intrinsic features of his racial identity and essentialized blackness (Robbins 44). Impersonating "the soft, impressible nature of his kindly race, ever yearning toward the simple and the childlike" (Stowe 192), Uncle Tom is shown to receive the Gospel with enthusiastic meekness and be satisfied with his conversion by saying "what a thing 't is to be a Christian!" (Stowe 545). An image of total subservience, he refuses to defend himself or to escape after being heavily tortured on Legree's plantation. Surprisingly enough, Tom tells Legree, who has come to murder him, that he is ready to sacrifice even the last drop of his blood if it would help to salvage Legree's valuable soul: "Mas'r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save ye, I'd give ye my heart's blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I'd give 'em freely, as the Lord gave his for me" (Stowe 537-538).

Serving as a Christ-like figure, Uncle Tom docilely embraces suffering, endures the blows of racism and does not assault back, forgives the people that torture him, worries about the endangered souls of white slaveowners and ruthless overseers, and even converts the savage slaves Sambo and Quimbo like a dutiful messiah. For these reasons, the protagonist is far from a realistic character; he is rather a stereotypical package of virtues (Otter 19-20), who seems palatable to Stowe's white audience because he can never pose a threat to their sense of powerfulness and superiority. As Trudier Harris maintains,

The image of the harmless darky came to epitomize the black man who was socially and psychologically emasculated. Hand-me-down hat in hand, baggy pants slightly torn at the knee, stooped shoulders, head bowed, without sexual consciousness or ability, eyes forever on the tip of the master's shoe, a 'yessuh' forever on the tip of his tongue, this character soothed white consciences and

justified their claims to superiority. (29)

Notably, Tom is not the only character in the novel whose representation echoes demeaning stereotypes of the time. It seems as if Stowe could not eschew the detrimental influence of the racist images of popular minstrel shows and characterized some of the novel's male personages based on the minstrelsy "types" which were firmly established in the nineteenth century American culture (Cimprich 207-208; Richards 204). For instance, in the middle of the tragic occurrences of the novel which invited the audience to sympathize with the predicament of George Harris, Harry and Eliza, Stowe all of a sudden lets in the shuffling, happy-go-lucky, comic characters of Sam and Andy. As a result of the caricatured portraits, the reader's empathy for the fugitive slaves was, at least temporarily, upset by the distancing effect of such minstrel-tinged comic reliefs (Robbins 45). In fact, the characterization of black characters in line with the minstrel tradition is significant in that it inculcates in the mind of the white readership that slavery is not after all a distressing and macabre situation. As Piacentino puts it, Stowe's adoption of minstrel stereotypes was her conscious attempt to pander to southerners' degrading perception of blacks and in this way, to appease their anger at her writing an anti-slavery novel (135).

Stowe's affirmation of colonization was also explicitly interwoven into the plot of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a stance which further reveals the hegemonic and racist implications of the novel. At the end of the story, Stowe notoriously uttered her view about colonization in the form of a letter written by George Harris to one of his friends. This letter clearly shows that to Stowe, blacks, no matter free or enslaved, had no place in the so-called progressive United States and had to return to their ancestral homeland. Totally hopeless with the prospects of emancipation in the United States, Harris comes to view repatriation as the only remaining way to get rid of America's prevalent racism and hence calls for the creation of an African country with a Christian destiny, i.e., an Americanized Africa, by which he meant the colony of Liberia (Otter 20). Having totally accepted white America's cultural and religious superiority, he concludes that

to the Anglo-Saxon race has been intrusted the destinies of the world, during its pioneer period of struggle and conflict. To that mission its stern, inflexible, energetic elements, were well adapted; but, as a Christian, I look for another era to arise . . . I trust that the development of Africa is to be essentially a Christian one. If not a dominant and commanding race, they are, at least, an

affectionate, magnanimous and forgiving one. (Stowe 565-566)

Although many African American leaders and intellectuals, such as William Still, William Wells Brown and Frederick Douglass, acclaimed the novel's contribution as propaganda to the anti-slavery cause, there were many others, including Martin Robison Delany, George T. Downing and William G. Allen, who critiqued *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its degrading depiction of black characters and the racist attitude underlying Stowe's stance with regard to colonization and repatriation (Robbins 106). To these critics, Stowe's characterization "simply replaces one racist stereotype with another that is equally condescending and unacceptable" (Charles Johnson, qtd. in Allen xviii); in other words, although Stowe's plan to promote black American characters to leading roles in a work of art was unprecedented and groundbreaking considering the overpowering Negrophobia of her age, she deserves criticism for her replacement of classic racism with what can be called romantic racialism (Otter 20).

It can be asserted that the characterization of Uncle Tom was a defense mechanism created by white America as a reaction to its own doubts and fears, a reflection of "its own mawkish tears and its own mawkish laughter over the black man, incarnation of its sentimentalized version of slavery" (Slide 26). That was why black activists of the early twentieth century, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright, rejected "Uncle Tomism" in favor of a more active and assertive position; as Wright (1965) stated in the epigraph to his renowned collection of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children*, released around eighty five years after Stowe's work, "Uncle Tom is dead!" (1).

### **Reed's Mimicry of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Promotion of Neo-HooDoo Slave Narrative**

Reed uses Stowe's novel as the background for his postmodern satire, mimicking both its content and style only to subvert whites' cultural hegemony and undermine their negative representation of blacks. He knows that Stowe's work turned over time into the touchstone against which blacks' accounts of slavery, known as slave narratives, were evaluated and received. That is to say, following the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, only those slave narratives which abided by the novel's stereotypical representation of blacks were deemed as veritable and legitimate by the white-centered literary canon. The critics maintain that the novel, in spite of its putative attempt to liberate blacks and put an end to slavery, chained them now within the shackles of a demeaning representational strategy, thus another form of enthrallment. Consequently, Stowe's novel, and her representation of Uncle Tom as the epitome of the "good" slave became the yardstick which regulated the

production and reception of all upcoming slave narratives written by both blacks and whites. So the work, which allegedly endorsed an emancipatory cause, mutated into an instrument of surveillance, manipulation and confinement, catering to and reinforcing the white cultural hegemony at the end of the day (Carpio 581). It can be stated that, using Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's critical terminology, black slaves, and by extension, all blacks, were never allowed to rise up and speak for themselves; they were always "spoken for."

As Christian Moraru states, Reed notes "the interplay of literary history and the history of 'subject formation'" and sets out to rewrite the former in order to redeem the latter. This means that *Flight to Canada* functions as a "rewriting machine" which challenges and revises the metanarratives, metadiscourses, historical figures and canonized literary works to shed light on their *constructedness* and highlights the urgent necessity to purge them of their naturalized, neutralized halo (99). By casting serious doubts on Stowe's centrality as a white activist for black freedom and also on her novel's canonicity as the ultimate paragon of such a supposedly altruistic political and ideological movement, Reed relentlessly pursues "the symbolic relocation of the subjects that history itself has marginalized" (Moraru 101).

To Reed, Stowe exploits the black slaves' history and silences their authentic voice because "she does not even conceive of the possibility of slaves themselves writing their own stories." For this reason, she regards her narratorial voice as "the only appropriate scribe" to recount and convey the black message (Levecq 286). Moreover, Reed accuses Stowe of stealing the plot of her renowned novel from Josiah Henson's slave narrative *Life of Josiah Henson: Formerly a Slave*. He later admits that the allegation is unfounded: "I was having fun with Harriet Beecher Stowe, saying that she took her plot in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from Josiah Henson. You know, they did meet when she was four" (qtd. in Walsh 186). However, the point is that to Reed, Stowe's agency as a white novelist to address black material while black themselves are deprived of such an opportunity is an incontestable example of theft and unlawful confiscation.

It is worth mentioning that Stowe's opportunistic representation of blacks did not go unanswered as very many writers of the period set out to parody Stowe and her *Uncle Tom* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reed imputes this retribution to the power of "spirits" who saw Stowe's prosperity and Henson's extreme poverty, and decided to wreak vengeance on her. That is, Reed's *Flight to Canada* falls within the category of vindictive (re-)writing against Stowe and other like-minded white activists and writers who used black material only to serve their

narrow interests (Moraru 102). As the novel reads, Guede, the loa of death and fertility, “got people to write parodies and minstrel shows about Harriet. How she made all that money. Black money. That’s what they called it. The money stained her hands” (9; italics original).

Moreover, the postmodern novelist knows that employing tragic elements in a slave narrative would allow the white abolitionist to enter the equation and “patronize the slaves for their helplessness,” so he opts for satire, parody and comedy as unorthodox, but subversive, choices to disrupt the paternalistic agency of the white culture. As a result, instead of using pathos and sentimentalism à la Stowe to portray black slaves living in abject misery and thereby evoke sympathy and catharsis in the readers, Reed depicts blacks as agents which actively participate in and even change the state of affairs, and in this way, frustrates the reader’s typical expectations of a slave narrative (Bergmann 203).

By undermining the Stowesque representation of blacks and replacing it with a postmodern slave narrative, Reed audaciously rises against any portrait of the black life as homogenous and monolithic, and thus dislocates the presupposed relationship between the signifier and the signified. That is to say, by writing a postmodern slave narrative, he provides a view of the institution “from the other side of the whip,” and besides, employs a style that has not hitherto been exploited by white monopolists, a style which can capture the black experience in all its diversity (Rushdy 115).

To mimic and parody Stowe’s generic and representational strategies, Reed got help from his native culture without which the process of postmodern, postcolonial appropriation would remain abortive. Cognizant that a realist abolitionist novel and slave narrative is forever stained with Stowe’s racist essentialism, he employs Voodoo, an African religious practice which has as its main tenet the conjuration of the spirits of the dead and their perpetual influence on the lives of the living. However, the novelist is also aware that like all other religious and spiritual rites and sects, Voodoo can be manipulated by the opportunistic and the wicked who would misuse its supernatural power and turn it into black magic to satisfy their insatiable lust for power. The consequence of such a draconian manipulation is the zombification of the living which makes them metamorphose into soulless, vegetative beings with no independent existence of their own. In stark contrast to the absolutely dependent zombies, there are people who are “possessed” and guided by the spirits and thus can garner unique advantages unavailable to the ordinary untouched people (Carpio 564-565). In *Flight to Canada*, Reed portrays both zombies and possessed souls to demonstrate how the powerful grip of racist stereotypes on blacks can be countered through the Bhabhaesque “sly civility.”

Reed's obsession with the rites and practices of the black culture, and specifically Neo-HooDoo, the domesticated version of Voodoo among African Americans, gives rise to "a new cultural field at once appropriative, multivocal, and constantly in flux." He contends that Neo-HooDoo is a unique form of African American creative and artistic expression as it is the upshot of the confluence of the African mores and the black slave culture in the United States. Being syncretic, Neo-HooDoo allows for an incremental accumulation of knowledge from a wide and diversified variety of cultures which are all regarded equal and valuable (Mielke 4). This polyphonic ideology, which was primarily a religious mode of seeing and interpreting the world, was employed in Reed's oeuvre to satirize and dethrone different kinds of Western "monisms" which systemically prioritized the white discourse over Otherized worldviews. So for the novelist, Neo-Hoodoo is not merely a means of religious expression, but also an effective strategy "to marry his artistic and his political imperatives" (Rushdy 113).

In addition, the novel's shift of point of view is in line with Reed's preoccupation with the "spirit possession" as one of Hoodoo's integral aspects. The story starts with Raven's first-person interior monologue which is supplanted after around five pages with a third-person omniscient point of view, hence a sign that Reed, as the novelist, or Raven, as his alter ego in the story, were "possessed" by Hoodoo spirits who helped these resistant figures to develop an insurgent text in terms of both content and style (Rushdy 131-132).

Before we get to the analysis of Reed's parodic mimicry of Stowe's novel, we had better provide a synopsis of the story. As its name suggests and closely similar to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Reed's novel describes the lives of three fugitive slaves who flee the unbearable atmosphere of a southern plantation in the hope of finding salvation and liberty in the North. The main plotline of the novel concerning the runaway slaves, and its subplot about the lives of black slaves and their master, Arthur Swille, in the plantation, presents a number of black characters who adopt different survival strategies in the face of prevalent racism, discrimination and white cultural hegemony.

On the one side, we find characters like Mammy Barracuda (the name clearly denotes her subscription to the "mammy" stereotype), and the fugitive slave Stray Leechfield who entirely assimilate white cultural norms and disregard their own distinctive ancestral traditions. There is also 40s, another runaway slave, who resorts to weapon to maintain his newly found freedom and repel the attacks of notorious slave hunters. And most notably, Reed introduces Uncle Robin, named after Stowe's Uncle Tom, who acts out the role of a faithful, selfless and submissive

house negro in the presence of whites, but is in fact surreptitiously practicing sly civility to ruin the white mastery and save himself and all other slaves toiling in the plantation. Befuddled and disgruntled among all these contradictory survival skills is the protagonist Raven Quickskill who, unlike Uncle Robin, refuses to stay in the plantation and escapes with Leechfield and 40s only to find out that the northern United States and Canada are not so much different from the racist South, a revelation which makes him return to the plantation at the end of the novel, then bequeathed to Robin after Swille's death.

A close reading of the above-mentioned characters' responses to the questions of slavery and freedom would shed light on where the novel stands amidst this irreconcilable array of choices. For one, Leechfield Stray, upon finding his freedom in the North, falls prey to the capitalist scheme and gets involved in the pornographic industry. Blindfolded due to the irresistible lure of financial prosperity, he just replaces the chattel slavery's objectification in the South with the capitalist commodification of love and sexuality in the North. In a passage reminiscent of the way minstrel actors played to appeal to the whims of the white audience, Reed explains how Stray posed for pornographic shoots: "Leechfield was lying naked, his rust-colored body must have been greased, because it was glistening, and there was ... there was – the naked New England girl was twisted about him, she had nothing on but those glasses and the flower hat ... And then there this huge bloodhound. He was licking, he was ..." (71).

As his first name and surname imply, Stray has totally deviated from the right path of self-recognition and self-esteem, and now lives like a parasite (leech) which feeds the popular white fancy and is, in return, fed by the wealth coming from the whole demeaning enterprise. As an agent and victim of capitalism, Leechfield thinks nothing of perpetuating the prevalent negative stereotypes about black sexuality since economic profit is the only thing that matters to him at the moment (Carpio 577-578). He even brings himself to earn money as a sex slave, releasing ads reading, "I'll Be Your Slave for One Day ... Humiliate Me. Scorn Me" (80).

His total recapitulation to and assimilation of the dominant order is further highlighted in his conversation with Raven who has come to inform him that slave hunters are in the city to find and return them to the South upon Swille's order. There, he reassures Raven that he has accumulated enough wealth to be able to buy his freedom. Raven protests that paying the ransom money is tantamount to demoting oneself to the level of a tradable commodity: "It's not that simple, Leechfield. We're not property. Why should we pay for ourselves? We were kidnapped." However, he nonchalantly answers, "I sent the money to Swille. I

bought myself with the money with which I sell myself. If anybody is going to buy and sell me, it's going to be me" (73). As a "thing" totally dissolved and absorbed in the racist and capitalist order of the American society, Leechfield fails to bring about any practical change with regard to his low status as a black object. Moreover, he does not care about what happens to other members of the black race since he basically has no racial consciousness. To him, blackness is merely a chromatic denominator of difference with which he can titillate and appease white sexual fantasies.

It goes without saying that the main feature of chattel slavery was its "reification" of the human subject. So the assumption that the process of desubjectification and nullification of human agency ended with the official declaration of the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century is certainly fallacious because as Reed demonstrates via the character of Leechfield and his profession as a priceable sex slave in the pornographic industry, reification and objectification still take place on a daily basis even in the postmodern era (Bergmann 203; Carpio 563).

Reed's characterization of 40s further depicts how a revolutionary and anti-establishment African American worldview, as reflected in the Black Power Movement, can expedite the process of zombification of blacks which started with the inception of the slave trade. While Raven is a poet and wishes to change the world through his art, 40s succumbs to another stereotype which depicts black men as aggressive and violent. Clearly having the black nationalists of the mid and late twentieth century in mind, Reed shows 40s as so implicated in racial hatred and violence that he is totally inseparable from his gun: "I got all these guns. Look at them. Guns everywhere. Enough to blow away any of them Swille men who come look for me" (78-79). Raven censures 40s's attachment to weaponry and violence, reminding him as a writer that "words built the world and words can destroy the world" (81). But 40s does not take him seriously, a motion which demonstrates the widening schism among different African American political and ideological groups: "You got to be kiddin. Words. What good is words? ... Well, you take the words; give me the rifle. That's the only word I need. R-i-f-l-e. Click" (81).

The protagonist was strongly obsessed with the hegemonic process of objectification and zombification by the ascendant ideology and its complicit agents such as Stowe. He notes that "books title tell the story," thus her novel, which was originally titled "The Man Who Was a Thing," can by no means be the harbinger of racial equality (82). Vigorously critical of Stowe, Raven believed that the novelist addressed the plight of black slaves not to improve their living conditions, but

to derive economic profit by prostituting the mid-nineteenth century abolitionist vogue: “*Harriet made enough money on someone else’s plot to buy thousands of silk dresses and a beautiful home*” (9; italics original). The postmodern slave narrative frequently emphasizes that Raven has been trying to find a way to become an active, agentic subject rather than a passive, obedient object like Mammy Barracuda and Leechfield who seem to be irredeemably entangled in the restrictive molds of clichéd stereotypes: “Quickskill thought of all of the changes that would happen to make a ‘Thing’ into an ‘I Am’” (82).

Realizing the futility of his facile optimism about racial equality in the northern United States and its neighbor Canada, Raven eventually comes to this conclusion that freedom is not bound to and conditioned on one’s place of residence, but as stressed in the novel, is “a state of mind” and can be realized only if one manages to liberate his consciousness from the chains of dominant restrictive conventions (Weixlmann 42).

As mentioned earlier, it is one of the main features of both postmodernism and postcolonialism to disrupt the linear pattern of historicity and replace it with a volatile timeframe in which the past incessantly informs the present. This concern with an uninterrupted flow of time is also reflected in Reed’s novel in which he tries to imply that slavery, oppression and freedom are NOT antiquarian issues belonging to a remote past. On the contrary, Reed treats them as contemporary problems which still plague the human society and interpersonal relations because he contends that although the age of chattel slavery is over, the intellectual bondage is still powerfully in place. To notify the readership of the applicability of the slavery/freedom debate to the contemporary society, Reed skillfully and extensively takes use of anachronism to displace the traditional conception of time and place: Raven flies to Canada on a jumbo jet; he and his mistress Quaw Quaw watch the scene of Lincoln’s assassination on television; the characters have access to telephone, car and Xerox machine; etc. All these instances help Reed’s rendition of historical and political events to find cogent and contemporary relevance (Weixlmann 42). By setting history originally in the nineteenth century and then extending its implications to today’s world, Reed is in effect relocating history “from within” (C.W.E Bigsby, qtd. in Rushdy 114). So it can be asserted that he not only rewrites the history of slavery to shed light on its neglected aspects, but also traces its legacy nowadays (Carpio 563). That is to say, Reed’s parody of Stowe and her submissive protagonist along with his frequent employment of anachronism serve “to negate the sense of history as a linear evolution, a measure of progress, and to undermine the war’s conventional significance as a watershed in Afro-American history” (Walsh

58).

Though a classic slave narrative (like those of Stowe and other black writers who followed her example) recounted the black slave's difficult but successful struggle to move out of the hands of the white master and win freedom, Reed's novel has its protagonist return to his place of enslavement and objectification, a gesture conducive to the fact that Reed is presenting a metaphorical reading of slavery and freedom. This figurative interpretation thus nullifies the conventional view of slavery as an extinct nineteenth century edifice and provides a "contemporary frame of reference" for the events of the novel which seemingly take place around the American Civil War (Walsh 59).

By portraying the war as a battle over economic profit and political power, Reed deliberately cuts through the American national identity which has been self-assuredly viewing the final outcome of the war as the victory of the philanthropic, altruistic North over the racist, supremacist South. He was well aware that "the development of a national identity depends on the offsetting of whiteness against otherness through a supposed process of transcendence", so he set out to show that the myth of the white race's "transcendence" (i.e., natural superiority) over all other racial groups had been launched and popularized only to serve capitalist and imperialist purposes. So through showing the limitations and prejudices of history, Reed shatters the possibility of national self-confidence (Levecq 281). Moreover, the white race, represented in the novel by Arthur Swille, supposed to be a replica of King Arthur, the mystical father of the race, is depicted as lasciviously indulging in the same objectionable qualities that were for a long time imputed to blacks: hypersexuality and lechery.

Swille is a sexually pervert slave-owner who sleeps with black women, eats two gallons of slave mothers' milk each morning, practices incestuous necrophilia by having intercourse with the corpse of his dead sister, Vivian, gets sadistic pleasure by watching the films of the torture of black slaves, and is addicted to opium. By demystifying the myth of whites' moral superiority and blacks' sexual and ethical degeneracy, Reed is in effect exposing the bankruptcy of any kind of racial essentialism, promulgated either by Stowe or his contemporary black nationalists. Reed's struggle to stay away from racial homogenization can also be detected in his representation of black characters who unlike those "type" characters advertised by the black exponents of racial uplift, are not flawless and immaculate, but are subject to diverse vices like any other racial group.

Reed's reconstruction of the concept of slavery enables the writer to replace the supremacist white American national consciousness with "a new global vision,

epitomized by Canada” (Levecq 281). The point of note here is that Canada, as a country with the prospect of racial equality and economic prosperity, turns out to be a mirage because the black slaves who went there were the butts of ruthless racist attacks, hence their great disillusionment and dissatisfaction. While in Canada, the protagonist meets Carpenter, another black expatriate, whose “head was bandaged” and “walked with the assistance of a cane.” The wounded man tells Raven how “some mobocrats beat me up” and “left me in the street unconscious” when “I was going back to the hotel after being denied this room I wanted to rent” (159). When Carpenter notices Raven’s disbelief and consternation at the occurrence of such assaults in the so-called free land, he points to the close relationship between capitalism and racism, citing that Canada is no different from the United States in that it is similarly governed by large companies, and moreover, is under the considerable sway of its southern neighbor: “Of the ten top Canadian corporations, four are dominated by American interests. Americans control fifty-five percent of sales of manufactured goods and make sixty-three percent of the profits ... Man, Americans own Canada. They just permit Canadians to operate it for them” (160-161).

With the collapse of the vacuous image of Canada as a free promised land and the later recognition by the protagonist that Canada, as the emblem of liberation for black slaves, is a state of mind rather than a physical tangible entity, Reed touches upon the pointlessness of the concept of nation as a geographical, segregating demarcation. It is exactly for this reason that Levecq calls *Flight to Canada* a “post-national” novel which rejects “race-based nationalism” in favor of “a form of internationalism less bent on national sovereignty than on social equality” (281). In other words, while the novel is strongly particularist, in the sense that it is basically embedded in and tied to African American weltanschauung, it also transcends racial essentialism in favor of “internationalism” and “multiculturalism,” which harkening back to Bhabha’s theories, make possible the symbiosis of differential structures and positions (Levecq 296).

The dénouement of the novel is of grave significance as it demonstrates how Bhabhaesque sly civility benefits a black slave who behaves like an Uncle Tom, but at the same time aspires to white power and authority. Undermining the mentality of Uncle Tom whose subservient and passive demeanor towards the white master makes him an easy target of injustice and discrimination, Uncle Robin “symbolizes the slave whose apparent submission to Master and Church ... is an elaborate and profitable ruse.” Unlike Raven who decides to pursue freedom elsewhere, Robin stays in the notorious place under the veneer of an obsequious loyal servant and at

the end of the day, wins the whole plantation (Mielke 4).

Robin deals the final blow to Swille's legacy and the entire white race when he manipulates his master's will in such a way that the whole plantation is legally bequeathed to him. Interestingly enough, Stowe once again appears at the end of the novel where she telephones Robin to ask for permission to write the story of his lofty rise from rags to riches. Aware of Stowe's exploitative and opportunistic background, he dismisses her offer and when she insists that she needs the money because she wants to purchase "a new silk dress," he hangs up the phone on her (174). Robin has in fact commissioned Raven to compose his story because unlike Stowe, who zombifies characters into fixed stereotypical clichés, the protagonist provides panoramic and polyphonic accounts of the black community and its diversity. The noteworthy and distinguishing feature of Raven's story is that its originality and syncretism makes it impossible for white opportunists to steal and exploit it as they did in the case of Henson's slave narrative.

### **Conclusion**

According to Mielke, "resourceful artists can harness stereotypes for their own purposes" (4). In line with this subversive spirit, Reed managed through his mastery to prove that "the dispossessed can manipulate stereotypes, turning them into weapons with which to destroy those who impose them" (Carpio 577). In other words, it is via his artistic juxtaposition of fact and fiction, historical figures and literary myth, realism and parody, and verisimilitude and exaggeration that Reed draws our attention to the preposterousness of absolutist modes of thinking and their limitations (Bergmann 200).

One might construe Reed's employment of Western genres like detective fiction or texts of conventionally monologic nature like the slave narrative as the evidence of his dependence on the mainstream culture. However, Reed's relationship with the power structure is totally different from that of Leechfield and other assimilationist characters of the novel because his seemingly imitative aesthetic strategies are devised from the beginning with the intention of puncturing the very imitated genres and by extension, the discriminatory atmosphere of the racist and capitalist American society. As Moraru states, it is true that Reed "parasitizes" on the Western "host" culture, but he does it with the purpose of "subverting it as another, apparently paradoxical 'master narrative'" (101); Reed is the real mimic man.

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# A New Perspective of Narrative Studies: A Review of *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** This article is an introduction to the thematic monograph *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction* by Professor Fang Ying. This monograph begins with a brief overview of “the spatial turn” and recent studies on the spatial narrative in the West and in the East, and then the bulk of the monograph devotes to explicating the major contents of the spatial narrative theory, namely: spaces in the literary narrative, the “spatialization” of fictional narrative, the time-space relationship in the spatial narrative, and the implication expression of the model of spatial narrative in fiction. This article deems that Fang’s new monograph plays a vital role in the perfection of narrative studies and the academic exchange between Western and Chinese literary studies, for it offers a new and amazing perspective of narrative study. Therefore, Professor Fang’s monograph is an essential read for those scholars who have interest in the narrative theory in general and in the theory of the spatial narrative in particular.

**Key words** Fang Ying; *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction*; spatial narrative; new perspective

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In the “Introduction” of *Teaching Narrative Theory* (2010), David Herman, Brian McHale and James Phelan point out that “the last two decades have seen a burst

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of renewed interest in narrative theory across many academic disciplines”<sup>1</sup> (David Herman, Brian McHale and James Phelan 1), undoubtedly, today’s narrative theory has already penetrated into almost every field we can recognize, and equally noteworthy, it has fledged into the combination with other fields or disciplines, in other words, narrative theory has developed into the plural “narratologies” not merely the singular “narratology”<sup>2</sup> (Ansgar Nünning 249-256). Just as we notice that the cognitive narratology, feminist narratology, rhetoric narratology, and unnatural narratology and other branches of narrative theories have sprung out in recent decades. In addition, narrative theory pays more attention to its internal parameters, such as narrator, character, progress, plot, time, setting, space and the like, and there are many monographs aiming at these facets. Though many theorists touch on the spatial issues in their research, however, almost no one devotes attentively to the spatial narrative studies, in particular, to a monograph involving merely with fiction. Scholar Fang Ying’ new monograph *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction* (2017) is nothing short of a typical case in point concerning the “spatial agents” in fiction.

For the most part, this monograph circles around such four aspects as “space in the literary narrative”, “narrative spatiality”, “relationships of chronotope in the spatial narrative”, and “meanings of the spatial narrative”, systematically elucidates the “spatial theories” in fiction. Beyond all doubts, Professor Fang’s new monograph expands and deepens the contemporary narrative theory to a large extent and offers a great perspective or a luminous narrative mode for the studies of literature, especially, for the theoretical fictional research and textual criticism.

This article attempts to help introduce the main contents of the monograph, to illustrate the core concepts and feasibility of this theoretical construction, and to interpret its values and influences on narrative theories or narrative criticism and literary studies.

### **Introduction to *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction***

*On Spatial Narrative in Fiction* was published in 2017, and the whole monograph consists of four chapters with the exordium and epilogue. In the exordium, Professor Fang shrewdly seizes the integral “spatial turn” in the flourishing narratology and even the whole fields of philosophy and social sciences (42) and further introduces

1 David Herman, Brian McHale and James Phelan et al. *Teaching Narrative Theory*. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2010.

2 Ansgar Nünning, “Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Usages of the Term,” *What is Narratology? Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory*. Eds. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH Co., 2003): 239-275.

its rise, development, achievement and problems of the research on “spatial narrative”. Grounded on *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (2005)<sup>1</sup> by David Herman, Fang emphatically illustrates the thought-provoking contributions of those influential theorists on the spatial narrative, such as Henry James, Joseph Frank, M. Bakhtin, Michel Foucault, Fredric James, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Edward Sojia, Seymour Chatman and Gabriel Zoran, etc.. Fang firmly deems that the mainstream research on the literary spatiality in the west includes such branches as “literary cartography”, “literary geography” and “Geocriticism”, and so on (7). What’s more, it is worth noting that Professor Fang also comparatively spares no effort to explore the status quo of research on the spatial narrative in China. She, for example, refers to Shen Dan, Cheng Xiling, Hu Yamin, Cheng Pingyuan, Long Diyong, Pu Andi, and Lu Yang etc., just name a few.

In chapter one, based on the introduction to both “spatial turn” and “spatial narrative” in the academia home and abroad, Fang mainly tries to define, investigate and distinguish between “literary space” and “narrative space”. After drawing the developmental contour of the “spatial concept” in the west from the ancient Greek period to the 20th century, Professor Fang emphatically explores the “literary space”, in particular, the space in the narrative fiction. The author insists that the literary space is a construction of relations, a space in the world of literary works, constructed with language as the media, through the interaction between the author, the text and the reader. It is the assemblage of the relations of time, position, hierarchy, power, value, etc., and the result of the language construction, mental construction and cultural construction.. Additionally, the space in the narrative fiction is the subspace of the literary space, which consists of three groups of concepts: 1) in terms of content, primarily the physical, mental and social spaces; 2) the spatial complementation, intersection and bordering, which are important spatial states and often point to the thematic meaning of literary works; 3) the different levels and sections of space, the division of which is not only possible, but also necessary for the studies on spatial narrative.

In chapter two, Professor Fang devotes with all her heart to explore the laws and characteristics of the spatial narrative. In the beginning, she draws a very concise definition that “the spatial narrative” is “a certain type of narrative mode”, which in essence is the “spatialization of narrative” (75). Then, Fang illustrates this from the following two aspects, namely, the expression level and the content

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1 David Herman, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

level. Specifically, the expression level means that the fiction fulfills its narrative nonlinear development through the three-dimensional characteristic of “lump narrative”, which embodies three aspects: 1) juxtaposition of narrative elements; 2) fragmentation of plots; 3) the “labyrinthization” of the lines of narrative (80-88). On the other hand, the content level means that the fiction centers the content of space, and the fiction focuses primarily on the contents of spatial description, spatial construction, spatial relation and spatial meanings, which embodies another three aspects: 1) space as the narrative foreground; 2) space as the organizer of narratives; 3) space as the major source of meanings (93-109).

In chapter three, Professor Fang tries to elucidate the relationships between time and space in the mode of the spatial narrative. Based on the universality of the relationship between time and space, that is, space must be in a certain time and alters as the time flows, and meanwhile time and space are also defined as “chronotope” by M. M. Bakhtin (qtd. in Fang, 119) and cannot be spilt, Fang creatively puts forward that space is in the time and contains the time as well. To be specific, time as the narrative background, temporal stagnation, and temporal segmentation are the typical characteristics of the spatial narrative. In a word, the spatialization of time is to manifest the time through space, and spatial logic, spatial order and spatial element are the leading centers in the spatial narrative.

In chapter four, Professor Fang explores the latent meanings of the spatial narrative. As the global market and relevant techniques develop, a sort of phenomenon of “global time” and “simultaneity” springs out, which fundamentally leads to the mankind’s feelings of chronotope. The feeling of chronotope has a profound influence on the literary creation, and one of the influences is that “the narrative mode of classical fictions or the verses of traditional poetry all are to blame” (qtd. Holga Nowotny in *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction*, 147), which means they should be replaced by various revolutionary and innovative forms. As Professor Fang puts, “to a large extent, the mode of spatial narrative accords with the characteristics and people’s feelings on its chronotope in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can conclude that the spatial narrative has a certain metaphorical association with the times and humans’ living conditions”....In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “modernity could be the core and pointcut to analyze and probe the spatial narrative” (147-148). Since the spatial narrative is about today’s people and their living conditions, to be specific, Fang believes that the spatial narrative contains the following three aspects: 1) occasionality of life; 2) momentariness of reality; 3) spatiality of existence (149). All of above is to discover unprecedentedly close and complicated relationship between today’s people and space, responding to the fragmentation of modern

society and the anxiety of today's people. On the whole, the three aspects above are the core problems of today's people and the core contents of the spatial narrative mode.

In sum, the spatial narrative is one of the common narrative modes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is closely related to the philosophy, literary trends, and the real modern life and interacts with each other as well. Through this narrative mode, as Professor Fang mentions in her monograph, the fiction writers “don't focus their attentions on characters, the growth history of a certain character or the representation of outside world, but focus on the construction of space” (198), from which the fiction reveals the complicated relations between humans and space and the real status quo of the existence of today's people as well. The spatial narrative, however, is not perfect and flawless, and it has its own weaknesses and problems as Fang puts in the book. “First of all, the spatial narrative very often contains blurred plots, chaotic narration, reversed time-order and unintelligible content. Second, the spatial narrative may be somewhat unreadable because it puts more emphasis on the spatial construction than the plots and stories. What's more, the spatial narrative is a highly challenging read, which is, therefore, more popular with scholars than ordinary readers” (199).

### **The Critical and Practical Significance of *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction***

With resourceful research documentation, insightful analysis and strong practicality, Professor Fang's monograph plays a vital role in the perfection of narrative studies or narrative criticism and in the academic exchange between Western and Chinese literary studies as well.

To begin with, just as Brian Richardson repeatedly declares, his monograph *Unnatural Narrative: Theory, History, and Practice* (2015) “is not to deny, overthrow or replace existing mimetic narratology but to add, extend or expand the current theories, and ultimately to construct a poetics of unnatural narrative or of the other literary ‘Great Tradition’”<sup>1</sup> (Li Minrui 694). Generally speaking, Professor Fang's monograph is also to add, extend or expand the current narrative theories and to urge the contemporary theories to be more thorough, encompassing, and comprehensive in scope. Fang puts in the book that “the spatial narrative as a narrative mode is an attempt of the Russian formalism and a defiance or resistance to the stereotype and convention as well” (197). In other words, the spatial narrative

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1 Li Minrui, “Constructing a Poetics of the Other Literary ‘Great Tradition’: A Review of *Unnatural Narrative: Theory, History, and Poetics*,” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 4 (2016): 689-695.

theory triggers readers to transfer their attentions from plots, characters, linear time and cause and effect of the story, etc. to the spatial agents of the fiction and meanings of the spatial narrative. Therefore, the spatial theory to a great extent expands and enriches the current postclassical narratology and offers an exciting perspective for the narrative scholars and a very valid critical tool for the literary lovers.

Moreover, Professor Fang's monograph creatively constructs a poetics of the spatial narrative. Specifically speaking, Fang focuses on the literary space, in particular, on the spatial agents in the fiction. She believes that the literary space is mainly about the relations and constructionism, the spatial narrative usually is involved with the spatiality in the expression level and in the content level, and the relationships of chronotope in the spatial narrative, etc.. In addition, just as Professor Shang Biwu's academic viewpoint of "narrative means, ethical ends"<sup>1</sup> (Shang Biwu 11), Professor Fang points out in the book that the spatial narrative has its own meanings or ethical enlightenments too. That is to say, Fang in her monograph puts forward a set of complete, scientific, rational, and convictive spatial narrative theory, which in a nutshell is simply a poetics of the spatial narrative and adds a new layer to the spectrum of narrative studies.

Furthermore, if we read prudently the monograph from head to foot we can surprisedly discover that Professor Fang offers us a great number of literature reviews from the selected fictions to the influential theories, from those overseas writers and critics to the domestic novelists and commenters. As a young scholar or a lover of literature, beyond all doubts, this monograph is "a fantastic reference book and is of much help for both Chinese contemporary narratology and literature, theoretically and practically"<sup>2</sup> (Zheng Hongxia 353).

Last but not least, Professor Fang shows an amazing talent at the understanding and analysis of the spatial narrative. She demonstrates her gifts not merely with her thought-provoking ideas about the spatial narrative but also with her unique expression pattern through beautiful and spiritual poems. At the very beginning of each chapter, Professor Fang offers readers a poem, which expresses her personal analysis of a certain issue and demonstrates her exquisite and unique understanding of it. Of course, sometimes those poems reflect her puzzlements and sudden enlightenments as well.

Admittedly, *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction* is not perfect or flawless as

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1 Shang Biwu, "From 'Two Turns' to 'Two Criticisms': On the Rise, Development and Cross Vision of Narratology and Ethical Literary Criticism," *The Academic Forum* 2 (2017): 7-12.

2 Zheng Hongxia, "From 'Spatial Turn' to 'Spatial Narrative': A Review of *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction*," *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature* 2 (2018): 347-353.

Professor Fang mentions in the monograph. Compared to its rigorous logic and structure, rich examples of the spatial narrative, and refined diction and lines, a few minor problems are that “the spatial concept itself should have been deeply explored, the spatial functions need to be expanded, and some textual examples are repeatedly used” (qtd. Hu Yamin “Prologue” in *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction*, 4). In addition, some spatial narratives such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *Red Sorghum Family* (1985) and *L’amant* (1984) are “not boring but so highly readable and full of narrative spatiality” (199), which also should have been explored in depth.

From what has been discussed hereby, it is absolutely certain that Professor Fang has produced an insightful and suggestive monograph that invites future probes into the spatial narratives in fiction. The monograph by all means anticipates a better future of the contemporary narrative criticism and a new wave of scholarly exchange between China and the west in literary studies. In light of all these above, Professor Fang’s new monograph *On Spatial Narrative in Fiction* is an essential read for those scholars who have interest in the narrative theory in general and in the theory of the spatial narrative in particular.

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# A Different Picture of Unnatural Narratology: A Review of Macro Caracciolo's *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction*

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**Abstract** Since the advent of the new millennium, unnatural narratology has raised a upsurge in Western academia, which reaps widespread attention and arouses enormous controversies. In *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters*, Macro Caracciolo attempts to bypass the typology contest between "natural" narratology and "unnatural" narratology by putting forward the concept of "strange." Caracciolo adopts the cognitive perspective of reader-response to explore unusual narratives in contemporary literary works, which offers a different picture of unnatural narratology and deserves scholarly attention.

**Key words** unnatural narratology; strange; reader response; recognition

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## Introduction

Since the new millennium, unnatural narratology has fully flourished to be one branch of postclassical narratology, keeping abreast with feminist narratology, rhetorical narratology, and cognitive narratology. It must be pointed out that "unnatural narratology is not a unitary theory school, but an integration of multiple perspectives and methods." While attracting widespread attention, it incurs a large number of controversies due to its innate "diversity" and "hybridity" (Shang, "Unnatural Narratology" 96). Unlike most unnatural narratologists who are

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confined to the typology contest of natural narratology and unnatural narratology, Macro Caracciolo bypasses it by adopting an innovative approach toward the construction of unnatural narratology. In *Strange Narrators in Contemporary Fiction: Explorations in Readers' Engagement with Characters* (hereafter referred to as *Strange Narrators*), he examines the phenomenon of strange narrator from the cognitive perspective of reader-response. This unique perspective results from Caracciolo's longtime of academical accumulation. His works mainly focus on the phenomenon of narrative, literary cognition, structure of experience in literary works and other media, as well as reader's engagement with character, especially strange and unusual character such as narrating animal, serial killers, cyborgs, etc. In *Strange Narrators*, Caracciolo draws on the merits of diverse narrative theories, including natural narratology, unnatural narratology, cognitive narratology and so on, to scrutinize unnatural narrative from the perspective of reader's cognition, which displays a different picture of unnatural narratology.

### **Narrative Unnaturalness and Enactivist Experientiality**

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Western literary world has ushered in the radical cultural movement of postmodernism. A large number of unprecedentedly extreme writings and anomalous narratives come into being, with striking plots and narrative skills of novelty, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, etc. However, continuously dominant is natural narratology led by Monika Fludernik, which claims that narrative is an imitation of realistic events, "a retelling of a story in certain way, or a representation of events" (Shang, "Unnatural Narratology" 96). It is a pity that natural narratology ignores the phenomenon of unnatural narrative in contemporary fiction. In this situation, a group of narratologists headed by Brian Richardson take the lead in exploiting the field of unnatural narrative. They call for the construction of unnatural narrative poetics by examining unnatural, anti-anthropocentric and antimimetic narratives, so as to make "a radical extension of and addition to that performed by Monika Fludernik in her *Towards a "Natural" Narratology* (1996), where she follows out the paradigm of conversational natural narratives to its limits." (Richardson 392). In contrast with "mimetic" of natural narrative, Richardson sets "antimimetic" as the primary attribute of unnaturalness to describe the "events, people, scenes and frameworks" that violate the realistic conventions (389). Jan Alber uses "impossibility" as a yardstick for examining unnaturalness, as opposed to "possibility" of naturalness (Alber 436, 439). Stefan Iversen specifies unnaturalness as an irreconcilable conflict between story world and narrating principles (Shang, "Unnatural Narrative" 98).

Different from the aforementioned unnatural narratologists, Caracciolo, in *Strange Narrators*, tries to study unnatural narrative of strange narrators, particularly those in contemporary novels, from the cognitive perspective of reader-response, combined with corpus-based empirical analysis. He explains that the selection of contemporary works as samples of analysis indeed has a realistic factor - contemporary works are more likely to have a large number of book reviews on the Internet for corpus study, but the deeper reason is that the characters in the post-war fiction “are likely to appear particularly strange or unusual to readers” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* xv). Among these characters, Caracciolo pays particular attention to character narrator who possesses dual identities, one as a narrator at the discourse level and the other as a character at the story world.

The strong rise of unnatural narratology does not declare the decline or demise of natural narratology. Instead, natural narratology still plays an important role in interpreting unnaturalness of narrative works. As one of the leading figures of unnatural narratology, Jan Alber, advocates cognition-oriented naturalizing reading strategies. As Shang Biwu comments, “although in terms of the research object, Albert seems to deviate from natural narratology initiated by his academic tutor Fludernik and instead engages in the study of unnatural narrative, yet regarding research method, he draws close to Fludernik, trying to naturalize the unnaturalness of narrative to make them ‘readable’ through cognitive approach” (“What is Narrative ‘Impossibility’” 136). Likewise, Caracciolo absorbs a helpful concept — “experientiality” — from Fludernik’s natural narratology and hereby innovatively adopts the perspective of reader’s cognitive experience to study the unconventional narratives in contemporary fiction. It is worth noting that the cognitive perspective emphasized by Caracciolo is actually far distinct from the cognitive approach adopted by Albert. Albert’s cognition refers to a cluster of real-world knowledge stored in general readers’ cognitive frames and scripts, while Caracciolo’s cognition highlights “experientiality,” meaning the cognitive responses made by the specific reader during the course of his reading experience. The former is static, but the latter is dynamic. Caracciolo points out a metaphoric image of spider web in the opening pages of *Strange Narrators* as an argumentative support for his calling for the angle of reader’s reading experience. In his saying, “just like a spiderweb, narrative fiction is carefully arranged in a pattern that is meant to ensnare prey (or readers) through its exquisite workmanship” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* xiv). Narrative fiction begins with the author but do not end with the author. Reader’s reading engagement and interpretive response made during the engagement play an important role in the construction of narrative. Therefore, Caracciolo invests numerous words in analyz-

ing reader's reading experience in the book.

Caracciolo's emphasis on the reading experience is not groundless but based on the concept of "experientiality" that Fludernik introduces in constructing natural narratology. She first proposes the concept in *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (1996), arguing that narrative is "the quasi-mimetic evocation of real-life experience" (12). In her view, the essence of narrative is "the communication of anthropocentric experience," which involves "drawing on fixed patterns of behaviour as well as conveying thoughts and feelings, and depicting perceptions and reflections." On the contrary, the genre of academic history is not a narrative, because it refers to factual materials only to make an argument, "not depict human experience (The emphasis here is on academic: much historical writing is quite novelistic in structure and tone.)" (Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* 59), and lacks "the dynamics of experientiality" (Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* 28). It can be seen that in the natural narrative theory of Fludernik, the dynamic process of representing human experience is the key to the constitution of a narrative. She also poetically compares life to a journey made of narration: "Throughout our lives, things frequently happen without prior warning and bring about radical changes in the course of events, for example the first unexpected meeting with one's future partner. In reconstructing our own lives as stories, we like to emphasize how particular occurrences have brought about and influenced subsequent events" (*An Introduction to Narratology* 1). In one word, "experientiality" emphasizes two characteristics of narrative: anthropocentrism and dynamic process.

Despite of his premiere presence in European academia, Caracciolo has made a fruitful study of Fludernik's narratological theory since his post-doctoral period, attaching great importance to the issue of experientiality and experience. He has published several papers and two monographs devoted to the experientiality and experience of narrative<sup>1</sup>. However, it is worth mentioning that although Caracciolo's experientiality derives from Fludernik's, he has integrated his own insight into its specific referential scale. The "representation" and "communication" functions of narrative make experientiality somewhat ambiguous in its reference. Does it refer to

1 Regarding the experientiality and experience of narrative, Mark Caracillo has published the following monographs and journals: *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach*, *A Passion for Specificity: Confronting Inner Experience in Literature and Science*, "Notes for a(nother) Theory of Experientiality," "On the Experientiality of Stories: A Follow-up on David Herman's 'Narrative Theory and the International Stance'," "Beyond Other Minds: Fictional Characters, Mental Simulation, and 'Unnatural' Experiences," "Playing Home: Video Game Experiences Between Narrative and Ludic Interests," "Those Insane Dream Sequences: From Distorted Experience to Experientiality in Literature and Video Games."

narrative's intrinsic experientiality made by imitating real-world human experience, or reader's psychological experience when interacting with texts during reading? The former focuses on character's anthropomorphic experience conceptualized by Fludernik, while the latter turns to David Herman's cognitive narratology, which focuses on reader's reading experience. Combining the views of the predecessors, Caracciolo takes both text and reader into consideration, to critically apply Fludernik's experientiality from the perspective of reader-response. In *The Experientiality of Narrative: An Enactivist Approach* (2014), Caracciolo proposes the concept of enactivist experientiality. Caracciolo believes that experience is not limited to in-text context. "Instead, we should think of experientiality as a kind of network that involves, minimally, the recipient of a narrative, his or her experiential background, and the expressive strategies adopted by the author. At the root of experientiality is, then, the tension between the textual design and the recipient's experiential background" (Caracciolo, *The Experientiality of Narrative* 49). In this case, narrative is the product of the mutual interaction between its author and its reader. Thus, it is not difficult to understand that Caracciolo advocates a steadfast turn to reader-response in *Strange Narrators*, using cognitive reception theory to engage in unnatural narrative, with an attempt to provide a complementary research tool for previous text-oriented analysis method. Cognitive reception theory never negates the value of textual cues, but adopts a brand new perspective — reader's view — to analyze the clues of text and treats reader as an interpreter who actively performs a dialogue with text. This kind of dialogue is physically embodied in the idea exchange between the two minds of the text, the character's and the reader's brains. In *Strange Narrators*, Caracciolo applied his enactivist experientiality to study reader's experience, that is, how reader's mind engages with the spiritual world of character during his reading process, and the psychological and cognitive reactions generated by the engagement.

Besides the aforementioned enactivist update of experientiality, in *Strange Narrators*, Caracciolo extends "experientiality" from Fludernik's natural narratology to unnatural narratology in order to use it to analyze the unconventional narratives in contemporary fiction. From the perspective of reader's experientiality, naturalness and unnaturalness are no longer a set of irreconcilable oppositions but overlap and intersect to some degree. This is why Caracciolo chooses a broader concept "strange" rather than "unnatural" to work on unnatural narratology (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 2). Arguably, we can say that, heavily inspired by Fludernik's experientiality, *Strange Narrators* is such an innovative monograph that adopts the cognitive perspective of reader-response made during reading experience to explore

the unnatural phenomenon of contemporary novels.

### **Reader-response and Cognitive Interpretation**

In response to the frequently appearing unconventional narratives in contemporary novels, Caracciolo in *Strange Narrators*, interprets this “strange” phenomenon from the reader’s perspective — including reader-response and cognitive interpretation. He believes that narrator’s strangeness comes not from the narrator itself, nor from the isolated text, but from the “experiential and interpretative negotiation” between the specific reader and the particular text (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 1). The introduction of reader’s perspective into the study of unnatural narrative has both a realistic basis and a theoretical support. On the surface, strangeness is a personal feeling of reader. A thousand readers seem to have a thousand different strange experiences, and its diversity makes this issue difficult to predict or study. However, in realistic reading process, “readers within a certain interpretive community — or within neighboring communities — tend to share a large number of cultural assumptions and templates for defining ‘normality’” (1). Likewise, the identification of strangeness is based on common cultural values. Therefore, reader along with his cultural background is key issue of studying strange phenomenon of literary works. For another, Caracciolo quotes a theoretical support from Phelan’s theory of character. Phelan divides characters into three categories: “mimetic,” “synthetic” and “thematic” characters (Phelan 2-3). The concept of mimetic character, as the name suggests, refers to the characters created as the copy of real people, understood as the embodiment of human entity, while synthetic character goes to the other extreme — completely neglecting the factors of reality and mimetics, it is seen as a product of pure textual mechanism, with emphasis on its textuality and fictionality. The concept of thematic characters challenges the polarized opposition between the former two types of characters. It is considered to have thematic functions, used to represent a certain thought, or a group/class as an embodiment of meanings of reality. Caracciolo thinks that both mimetic and synthetic characters have drawbacks. He points out that because readers’ reading context and life attitudes are quite different, to what extent readers perceive characters to be imitated and fictional are totally different, which causes readers to oscillate between these two extremes. Based on Phelan’s “thematic” view, however, Caracciolo understands character to be “usually play[ing] into readers’ meaning constructions...and they become entangled in broader interpretations” (Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 5) . In *Strange Narrators*, the narrators are uniformly character narrators. According to the thematic view of character, we can see that, due to their additional identity

of being a character, the images of such narrators are formed in reader's meaning construction. Therefore, it is theoretical convincing for Caracciolo to argue that reader's perspective is the key to analyzing the strangeness of character narrators in the book.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of introducing reader's perspective, Caracciolo also values the dynamic process of reading. He believes that strangeness is not a consequential ramification, but what is being generated during the course of reading experience. Therefore, he introduces a large number of narratological and psychological concepts to examine reading experience from perspective of reader-response, including readers' engagement, character-centered illusion, defamiliarization, empathy/empathetic perspective taking, cognitive dissonance, folk psychology, and imaginative resistance. I will combine these concepts to illustrate how strange reading experience goes on.

In Caracciolo's view, there are three stages involved in the interaction between reader and text: character-centered illusion, cognitive dissonance and interpretation. In the first stage, character-centered illusion comes from what Werner Wolf calls "aesthetic illusion," which means that the novel brings reader an effect of fiction: "feeling of being recentered in a possible world as if it were (a slice of) life" (qtd. in Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* 8). Reader feels that he engages in or enters the spiritual world of character. This illusion has its authenticity established based on the realistic "folk psychology." According to folk psychology, in a specific social and cultural community, people have a "set of cognitive capacities which include — but are not exhausted by — the capacities to predict and explain [other people's] behavior" (18). Under this precondition, reader can cognitively engage with character. However, reader's engagement is not only limited in "predict[ing] and explain[ing] behavior" as an outsider, but, more thoroughly, will deepen to empathize with character. Regarding empathy, two are three blind spots to be clarified: First, empathy is a kind of prosocial behavior, but it is not equal to selflessness, which means that reader empathizes with character without being assimilated by character and instead still maintains his own subjectivity. Second, empathy is different from sympathy. Compassion is an emotion, while empathy is an "imaginative, simulative mechanism" (39). Reader imagines that he is the character and imitate the character to "act." Reader's character-centered illusion is reflected by the two points of empathy, that is, reader engages with character without losing himself. It is caused by the mutual interaction between text clues and the reader's "predispositions, interests, and perceived similarity to the character" (40). In other words, reader's character-centered illusion is actually an empathic encounter of the reader in the real world with the

character at story world.

However, when some contradiction or conflict happens during the encounter, reader will enter the second stage — generating cognitive dissonance, which can be emotionally expressed as strangeness. It should be pointed out that cognitive dissonance and strangeness are an perception of dynamic “oscillation.” In the process of reader’s engagement with character, reader’s and character’s worldviews may conflict with each other. If the reader closes the book right now, giving up continuing to read or refusing to empathize with the character, the sense of dissonance or imbalance will disappear. But, if the reader along with the conflicts continues to engage with the character, he will enter the gray zone of defamiliarization, oscillating between “imaginative resistance” to the character and “tentatively ‘trying it on’.” (48) The so-called “imaginative resistance” refers to “the impediments we seem to encounter when we are asked to imagine moral judgments sharply divergent from those we ordinarily make” (45). Caracciolo thinks that although imaginative resistance intensifies the difficulty of empathy, it does not completely prohibit empathy. Since fictional world provides a safer zone for reader and character to interact than the real world, reader might overcome imaginative resistance and painstakingly empathize with the characters. To be more specific, reader condemns the immoral behaviors of character on the one hand, but on the other hand, experientially and imaginatively engages in character’s mind and acts. The reader himself becomes a hub replete with tension, cognitively perceiving dissonance between the internal fiction and external reality, and thus emotionally feeling unfamiliar and strange. This intense state is described by Amy Coplan’s “self-other differentiation” concept to be an in-between situation, that is, “when we empathize with a fictional being (or a person, for that matter) we don’t imaginatively become him or her. Rather, we learn to see the story world through the narrow gap between being ourselves and being another.” (46).

Reader will not linger in the stage of cognitive dissonance forever. They may enter the third stage — interpretation. By adopting proper interpretive strategies to explain the abnormal behaviors of character and hereby rationalize them, reader reduces his strange feeling and regains cognitive balance. Caracciolo summarizes four types of generative interpretation: existential readings, metacognitive readings, categorizing readings, and reflective readings. These four strategies respectively refer to the four ways that the reader deals with the abnormal behavior or thoughts of character, such as induce them into the totality of human existence, understand them as sample of studying mental process of human totality, incorporate them into a category of realistic individuals, analogize them with reader’s realistic experiences

for him to reflect on. Reflective interpretation means that reader moves from one-way involvement to two-way interaction, that is, the reader not only examines the text, but also has to face the scrutiny of the text in turn. Thus, as the third stage of interpretation progresses, the reader's self-correction deepens and cognitive frames get expanded. As a result, the initial strange feelings are conventionalized as the normal.

### **Reader Cognitive Perspective: Values and Limits**

*Strange Narrators* has a broad scale of theoretical basis by drawing on concepts and research methods from different critical theories and interdisciplinary science. For example, in the field of literary criticism, Caracciolo borrows from Russian formalism the “defamiliarization” concept, reader-oriented theory, reader response, and learns from cognitive narratology and unnatural narratology. As for interdisciplinarity, Caracciolo employs the empirical research of natural science, the corpus study of linguistics, and cognitive analysis of psychology. In this sense, the book transcends the barriers both within the discipline of narratology and those between narratology and other disciplines, displaying its compatibility and interdisciplinary merit. Besides, it is enlightening for the prospective academic research, especially on unnatural narratology and cognitive narratology, forging a bond of mutual complementation between the two branches of postclassical narratology.

Reader cognitive perspective adopted by Caracciolo makes a major breakthrough in the study of unnatural narratives — it helps define unnaturalness. Since Brian Richardson initiated unnatural narratology, the definition of unnaturalness has been a thorny issue. In 2016, the fourth issue of *Style*, published a special issue on the construction of unnatural narratology. Concerning the definition of unnatural narrative, Richardson points out, “each theorist of unnatural narratives tends to define the field slightly differently” (Richardson 389). As a pioneer of unnatural narratology, Richardson believes that “the unnatural consists of events, characters, settings, or acts of narration that are antimimetic” (389). Thus, antimimetic becomes a core attribute of the unnatural. Whereas, a new contradiction emerges in the discussion of the definition of antimimetic: how come a supernatural novel such as a fairy tale, does not bring forth the unexpected effect of unnaturalness. Faced with this interrogation, Richardson explains with “conventionalized,” which is conspicuously a cognitive concept. Caracciolo's three-step decoding of reader's strange reading experience helps to demonstrate why and how conventionalization is formed: from the initial character-centered illusion, to cognitive dissonance and to

the adoption of interpretative strategies, readers' cognitive frames get expanded so that initial strangeness is perceived to be understandable, during which the original unnaturalness gets conventionalized during the course of reading process. As Albert says, "Some of them have already been conventionalized, that is, transformed into cognitive frames we are now familiar with (such as that of the speaking animal in the beast fable or time travel in science fiction), while others are currently being conventionalized (such as the impossibilities in postmodernist narratives)" (Alber 435). Therefore, the definition of unnaturalness is dynamic and should incorporate the reader cognitive perspective to help procedurally verify itself. The unnaturalness is constantly diluted as the reader's cognitive interpretation proceeds. It is even reasonable to say that, upon being discussed, unnaturalness begins its destined of being conventionalized. Perhaps it is in this sense that Albert declares, "Richardson's approach of merely enjoying the unnatural for the sake of the unnatural does not take us very far" (440). Therefore, it is greatly significant to introduce reader-response perspective into unnatural narratology, because it can help explain what unnaturalness means to readers and will inspire us how to literarily treat unnaturalness.

Furthermore, the reader-response emphasized by Caracciolo is equally instructive for the development of cognitive narratology. Caracciolo and cognitive narratologists led by David Herman, both get inspired by cognitive psychology to take narrative as the object of cognitive interpretation, thus paying attention to the cognitive process of reading. However, they have different understandings of reader. A type of reader can be named as "genre reader," that is, a group of reader sticks to a particular literature genre. They are categorized by the criteria of literature genre, so they "enjoy the same genre convention and the same genre's cognitive assumptions, expectations, models, scripts, frames and schemata" (Shen Dan, Wang Liya 223). Cognitive narratology focuses on such readers, "exploring the commonality among the readers' perception of the narrative structure of a certain genre and examining the prescriptive narrative context and the conventionalized reader" (224). We can see that cognitive narratology theoretically accepts readers but practically puts readers aside when analyzing the cognitive process in a specific case, because genre readers' cognitions are conventionalized, common and mutual psychology. Such psychology is unconsciously taken by cognitive narratologists as a precondition for all cognitive analyses, and thus is certainly unnecessary to be mentioned. In this way, cognitive narratology seems to go far away from its original aim, and the "invisibility" of individual readers causes cognitive narratology shifts its research object to in-text characters. For example, when Herman analyzes the short story "The Dead" in *Dubliners*, he mainly examines the character's cognitive states

in the story world, while the readers become passive recipient functioning to test the effect of narrative. He believes that we “must take into account the cognitive and emotional states and processes of the characters as they act and interact in the story world; these states and processes must be construed as integral to the core events or “gist” of the narrative” (Herman 247). Compared with Herman, Caracciolo seems to go further in the cognitive study of narrative. He not only pays attention to the cognition of character, but also keenly notices how reader recognizes the cognition of the character, making cognitive analysis further complete. In other words, reader-response highlights two aspects of cognitive analysis, the cognition in the text (especially those of character), and additionally reader’s cognitive process when getting engaged with the text (especially with cognition of character). Such readers do not belong to any genre but come from the social and historical context of reality. They are no longer readers of a specific genre, but individual readers with flesh and blood. Thus, Caracciolo takes into account reader’s background — middlebrow — when selecting the online review database for the case study in *Strange Narrators*.

Of course, *Strange Narrators* has some problems and shortcomings both in theoretical construction and case study. First of all, the core concept of the book “strange” lacks a clear definition. In fact, “strange” derives from “defamiliarization” first invented by Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, meaning “*ostranenie*: making strange.” The concept is used to refer to an rhetorical device in poetry, that is, “to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Selden et al. 32 ). However, Caracciolo does not give a clear definition of “strange” in *Strange Narrators*. Who is the owner of this “strange”? The title of the book, “Strange Narrator” seems to imply that strangeness comes from narrative discourse, but the strange emotions mentioned in the author’s demonstration is a kind of feeling made by reader. Caracciolo fails to clarify the two concepts — defamiliarization of text and the strange feelings of reader — but rather mixes them to generally refer to a strange reading experience where characters go against “readers’ expectations” and “folk psychology” ( Caracciolo, *Strange Narrators* xv). It leads to the problem of referential ambiguity when decoding a specific reading process. To solve this problem, I suggest that the first step should be to distinguish the strange effect of text and the strange feeling of reader in their referential scales, and then the next step is to illustrate the totality of their both belonging to reading experience. Furthermore, Caracciolo shows that “strange emotions” refers not to its “experiential traits,” but to the attributes of “psychological structure that underlies them. This structure is, at the same time, situational, phenomenological,

and cognitive” (xvi). This assertion creates a conceptual confusion, so the relationship between strangeness as experiential trait and strangeness at the psychological level needs a further clarification. Are the two exclusively opposite or intersective with each other during reading process? How can readers avoid the experience of emotions and merely involve psychology or cognition at the scientific level? In addition, there is a certain gap between this book’s practical demonstration and ideal plan. The introduction part claims that a major feature of this book is to use the empirical method of the online commentary database to study reader’s reaction, but this research approach has not been implemented consistently. Except for the first two chapters involving detailed online reviews, the following case study in the other chapters rarely mention online corpus. Another problem of the book is the confusing mixture of the two distinctive concepts of character and narrator. The first-person narrator discussed in *Strange Narrators* are all character narrators, who intrinsically have dual identities, being a character at story world and being a narrator at discourse level. One of distinctive traits of narrator from character is that narrator has “telling” function to make a narrating act (Shang, “What is Narrative ‘Impossibility’” 136). Thus, the study of strange narrators must be firmly anchored in the strangeness caused by his narrating act. Unfortunately, Caracciolo unconsciously mixes the study with the strangeness generated by his another self of being a character in story world.

### **Conclusion**

Caracciolo’s exploration of the strange narrators in contemporary novels from the cognitive perspective of reader-response, opens up a brand new research route of the study of unnatural narrative, which displays a different picture of unnatural narratology. Richardson points out that “the goal of any narrative theory should be a theory of all culturally important or resonant narratives, not a single subset...It would be bad enough if unnatural narratives only existed in a few countries over a couple of decades; But new forms of unnatural figures, techniques, and worlds keep appearing...it is essential that we are able to theorize these narratives...We cannot expect fifty- or sixty-year-old models to be able to effectively handle a new world of narrative literature without some significant reconceptualization” (Richardson 403). Caracciolo’s *Strange Narrators* echoes Richardson’s calling for “new form” and constant “reconceptualization” of unnatural narrative. He innovatively adopts the concept of “strangeness” to revisit unnaturalness, successfully avoiding the thankless typology contest of natural narratology and unnatural narratology, and fruitfully outlining the dynamic strangeness of unnatural narrative from the

perspective of reader's reading. In terms of his prospective study, I list the following points to be further probed: first, to make an explicit definition of "strangeness," including its subjects (whose strangeness?), modes (including but not limited to emotional strangeness and cognitive strangeness), and functions (for rhetorical effects, ethical interpretation and so on); second, considering reader's engagement in narrative includes involvements with narrator at discourse level and that with character story level, it is necessary to distinguish these two levels in case study; third, the generating of strangeness consists of three stages, whose relationship with one another need to be examined. Do they proceed in turns or in an overlapping manner, once for all or circularly? By answering these questions, we can help to define the border between the natural and the unnatural in a dynamic way, and meanwhile offer a more scientific theoretical tool for analyzing unnatural narrative.

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