

Postmodernism – Theoretical Perspectives

Dr V. Nithyanantha Bhat

It is generally agreed that postmodernism is a complicated term or a set of ideas which is not easy to define, describe or classify. It is hard to define especially because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, which includes art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, and technology. As an area of academic study, postmodernism emerged in mid-1980s. Some critics consider it a set of approaches which are closer to attitudes about the world and about the nature of knowledge. In *Studying Literary Theory* Roger Webster argues that “postmodernism and its antecedent – modernism, are problematic categories for a number of reasons.” According to him, “the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is itself rather blurred: it is difficult to define a clear boundary in chronological, aesthetic or political terms” (*Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 122). Some theorists and critics would consider the two movements as closely linked, others as quite antithetical. What can be said about both movements is that they are international – they transcend any strong national identification. The two movements embrace a wide range of creative activity from literature and painting to architecture and music – postmodernism going beyond the “high” or fine arts to include popular and consumer products. Another rather simplified way of viewing it is to see a developing relationship from realism to modernism to postmodernism: that is, from a predominating concern with an apparent truthfulness or verisimilitude to an apparent reality, to a preoccupation with the forms in which aversion of reality could be represented and a rejection of conventions of realism, to an increasing conviction that it is not possible to represent reality at all – there is no sense of a unified or underlying reality.

The nature of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is summarized in Jeremy Hawthorn’s *Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. According to this, both modernism and postmodernism give great prominence to fragmentation as a feature

of the 20th century art and culture, but they do so in very different moods. The modernist features it in such a way as to register a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority intact. Ezra Pound calls his major work *The Cantos*, a “rag – bag”, implying that this is all that is possible in the modern age, but also implying regret about that fact. In *The Waste Land*, too, the persona says, as if despairingly of the poem, “These fragments I have shored against my ruins.” In instances like these there is a tone of lament, pessimism, and despair about the world . . . For the postmodernist, by contrast, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief. In short, the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it.

For critic Ihab Hassan, postmodernism is one of the three modes of artistic change in the last hundred years – avant-garde, modern, and postmodernism. While modernism has been “hieratic, hyptactical and formalist,” postmodernism is “playful, paratactical and deconstructionist” (*The Postmodern Turn: Essay in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, 86). Hassan identifies indeterminacy (with its traits like irony, rupture and silence) and immanence as two major tendencies in postmodernism. As Christopher Norris remarks, most of the critics of postmodernism ... have opted for the “open-ended free play of style and speculative thought, untrammelled by ‘rules’ of any kind” (*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, 91).

Linda Hutcheon attempts to describe postmodernism thus:

In general terms it (postmodernism) takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight or ‘highlight’, or to subvert, or ‘subvert’, and the mode is therefore a ‘knowing’, and an ironic – or even ‘ironic’ – one. (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 1)

It is interesting to consider postmodernist attitudes towards the nature of knowledge.

“Postmodernism designates a set of attitudes towards the nature of knowledge – how we know things and how what we know is influenced by what we believe. It is mainly based on the idea that the world does not function according to rational laws and that the most challenging of human issues are beyond the grasp of scientific approaches. For postmodern writers, identity is not fixed, and ethical concepts, as well as the notion of truth itself, are not absolute but relative to circumstances and cultural values” (Sky Marsen, *Communication Studies*, 29).

The question of the organization of knowledge too is one of the concerns of postmodernism. In modernist period knowledge was equated with science. Science was contrasted to narrative, science being good and narrative bad and irrational. Education was the means of knowledge and educated person was considered knowledgeable. Postmodern society considers knowledge as something functional. Knowledge is acquired not for its own sake, but for its utility. Distribution, storage and arrangement of knowledge in postmodern societies are different from that of the societies during modern period. This is especially because the advent of electronic computer technologies has revolutionized the modes of knowledge production, distribution and consumption in the postmodern society (Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Web)

Postmodernism includes the following phenomena as enlisted by Sky Marsen (*Communication Studies*, 30):

1. A conception of personal identity as fragmented or dispersed (owing to our participation in many contexts – geographic dislocation, drastic career changes, etc.)
2. An abandonment of the search for origins, the original, universal or transcendental cause. This includes the dislocation of the modernist–romantic notion of genius, the inspired creator of the new. The original work displaced by inter-textuality (cross-reference), parody, self-parody, and acceptance of contradiction as having no resolution, and a strong use of irony.
3. A questioning of notions of linear reality and linear-causally-based narratives, opting for parallel universes or multiple realities.

4. Socio-cultural developments associated with the mass media, such as internationalization of information (through global channels) and a dramatization of information that tends to blur the distinctions between truth and fiction.

Postmodernists question notions of objective reality. Jean Baudrillard, a well – known postmodernist theorist, believes that “reality” cannot be known or accessed in an immediate fashion through the senses or through the intellect. Instead, we know it through its representations, especially through its media representation. Baudrillard uses the term “simulacrum” to describe the various artificial environments that mediate our perception of the world. He explains that as far as painting or sculpture is concerned there is an original work by an artist and there might be thousands of copies. But the original is the one with the highest value (particularly monetary). He contrasts this with CDs or Music records where there is no “original” as in painting; there are only copies, all of the same value. The concept of virtual reality is another version of Baudrillard’s “simulacrum,” – a reality created by emulation, for which there is no original; for e.g. computer games. What we know about reality is influenced by the way we know it – the media through which our objects of knowledge are represented and communicated. In this conception, signs function as commodities and operate in a universal code that generates, as Baudrillard says “nothing but a gigantic simulation model of meaning” (Sky Marsen, *Communication Studies*, 31). To understand this statement, he explains, one has only to think of how television channels compete with each other by advertising their news as the most interesting, compelling, up-to-date or accurate. It is, therefore, more a case of who presents the “best” news, rather than what the news actually is. For instance, crisis situations, such as the London underground bombings of 7 July 2005 or the 11th September 2001 attacks of the World Trade Centre in New York, have been presented by the media in a highly dramatized way, using techniques created in a film and the creative arts, and thereby casting doubt on the distinctions between reality and representation.

Models of reality (images that stand in for the real thing) have taken over in the postmodern era and produced a hyped up and contrived form of reality which Baudrillard calls hyper-reality, that is a reality

which is based on “simulation,” an imaginary image which in fact displaces or eclipses actuality. For Baudrillard, Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation. To begin with it is a play of illusions and phantasms: pirates, the frontier, the future world, etc. According to Baudrillard, hyper-reality comes to include even the Gulf War which he proclaims was not a real war, but a media war; undoubtedly the television images of the war were extraordinary, powerful and detailed but his denial of the material reality of the war beyond the surface images has provoked strong criticism of the postmodernist vision of the world consisting only of signs and ignoring or eclipsing lived experience.

According to the critic Jean-Francois Lyotard, the prevailing mood of our age is one of “incredulity towards meta-narratives.” According to Lyotard modernism accepted “grand Narratives” or “master narratives” – stories of a culture telling itself about its beliefs and practices. And through these narratives totality, stability and order are maintained in the society. For instance, Lyotard explains the story that “democracy is the most enlightened (rational) form of the government and that democracy can and will lead to universal human happiness” might be “a grand narrative” in American culture. According to Lyotard every belief system or ideology has its grand narratives. For instance the “grand narrative” for Marxism is the idea that “capitalism will collapse in on itself and a utopian socialist world will evolve.” Lyotard considers grand narrative as a kind of meta-theory, or meta-ideology – an ideology that explains an ideology. All aspects in modern societies, argues Lyotard, depend on these grand narratives. But postmodernism is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradiction and instabilities that are inherent in any social organization or practice (Mary Klages, *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Web). In other words, there is no longer any faith in the great belief systems of the past, in history, progress, or truth. Our capacity to hold such beliefs has been eroded by the constant bombardment of images and information available to us through the new technology and the mass media . . . We can no longer make sense of the world because there is no cohesive world to make sense of. Instead we occupy a state of what Baudrillard calls “hyper-reality,” an unreal

world of dreams and fantasy, of “simulacra” – the world of TV, of the shopping mall, of video games, of Disneyland. People have been reduced to mindless consumers, and the dominant language is the language of packaging and advertising. According to Baudrillard, there is no point in trying to resist the hyper-real, we should simply enjoy it.

Such a view has of course been criticized as being absurdly negative – apocalyptic even. But Joe Staines feels that as a cultural critique, though of an exaggerated kind, postmodernism functions best when it analyses the extremes of mass-consumerism and the media (“Postmodernism: the Beginning of the End?” *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Ideas*, 419).

Works Cited

- Hassan, Ihab. *The Post Modern Turn: Essay in Post Modern theory and Culture*. Ohio University Press, 1987.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London & New York: Routledge, 1989.
- The Hutchinson Dictionary of Ideas. Oxford: Helicon, 1995.
- Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Web.
- Marsen, Sky. *Communication Studies*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction : Theory and Practice*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Webster, Roger. *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*. London: Arnold, 1996.

The Antinomy of Exile: Ambivalence and Transnational Discontents in Tanure Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*

Uzoechi Nwagbara

Abstract

Shortly before the end of the twentieth century, exile literature emerged as one of the paradigmatic and innovative offerings of postcolonial Nigerian literature. The mainstay of this still emerging literary genre is its departure from the much-debated discourses on decolonisation, as well as excavation of Europe's imperial expansion. Thus, the emphasis of this literature is on elusive notions of home, exile and cultural identity. These factors are usually compounded by blinding subjectivities of globalisation and transnationalism, which occlude the true import of mass migration and global capitalist rhetoric. Consequently, Tanure Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* (1998) is steeped in delineating the architectonics of such inquiry, which is yet to be given critical attention in his art. So, the hypothesis of this paper is that the pressures of transnationalism emanating from the blundering promises of globalisation and Nigeria's national dissonance are a correlative of cultural ambivalence and antinomy – both are a cardinal trope in the poetry collection. Exile, meaning the relocation, fleeing or movement of people from one social space to another either willingly or forcefully and transnationalism, a social movement in response to heightened interconnectivity amongst nations, are paradoxical as they both engender cultural ambivalence and discontent in the exile.

Keywords: Transnationalism, exile, antinomy, ambivalence, Tanure Ojaide; globalisation, Nigeria.

An exile may hanker after a sympathetic environment; one that trails an umbilical roots... In such an instance, the writer

reflects present reality, but deflects its
seductiveness through literary strategies
of a markedly different temper from
those that define or dominate the space
that has given him shelter.

— Wole Soyinka

Exile is a way of moving the writer from
the territorial confinement, where his acts
of resistance might ignite other fields into
a global 'exclusion'.

— Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

Introduction

A major thematic preoccupation of contemporary Nigerian literature is the subject matter of exile and transnationalism. The response of Nigerian literature to this type of trope is in view of the trauma of surviving in a foreign land that exiles consider their new home as well as alienation following such transition. In postcolonial literature, the question of exile or transnationalism in the wake of globalisation and contemporary global politics is very central to understanding the realities of a nation's political process, culture and governance. This is the case with Nigeria, where the pressures of living have forced people to seek greener pastures in foreign countries. The realities of globalisation, which have exile as their corollary, have enriched postcolonial Nigerian literature as well as contributed to the synergy of responses and attempts towards unearthing the ugly faces of globalisation and transnationalism.

The actualities and disequilibrium which literature of exile addresses animated the craft of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, an ideo-aesthetic reconstruction of the tragedies of globalised capitalist system of postcolonial Nigeria and its attendant malaise, which are the canvas of exile and transnationalism in the collection. Accordingly,

The feverish race towards planetisation or otherwise known as globalisation has generated and will continue to generate all

manner of debates... these debates and arguments are bound to elicit responses across institutional strata. Tanure Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* is one of such responses. (Olaluwa 2007: 242)

One of the sinews of the craft of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* as an artistic reconstruction that traces the trajectory of transnationalism is the manner in which it relates the phenomena of exile and transnationalism to globalisation, a major bane of many developing nations; it is behind the environmental, social, cultural and political contradictions that Ojaide narrates in the poetry (Olaluwa 2007: 242). Thus, in *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, Ojaide invites us to a debate on Nigeria's socio-political and cultural discourse with Orientalist temper that awakens our collective social consciousness towards apprehending the backdrop of the exile's very personal concerns (Korte 2000: 144) which throw up the thorny questions of cultural politics and national identity. In addition, the poetry collection is a part of an aesthetic ensemble on the African continent to

offer an important opportunity for global activists to move beyond the confines of Eurocentric and authoritarian political theories as well as providing a point of departure for anti-authoritarian activists to develop broadened insights into community-based resistance to the predations of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. (Shantz 2007: 122)

This is essentially why Ojaide asserts thus: "I believe in the artist's activist role. Action counts to remedy a bad situation. Being passive or apolitical will not change things" (1994: 17). The "action" Ojaide's comments foreshadow is that of possessing critical voice and creative vision capable of transcending the evils of globalisation and identity politics. It is on this score that Shantz sees Ojaide as probably "the finest of the post-Okigbo/post-Soyinka generation of Nigerian poets" (2007: 122).

Although Ojaide's tenor of narration is symptomatic of the Niger delta's ecological and environmental devastation, it also offers a panoptic view of the larger Nigerian society in relation to the need for

cultural re-affirmation, national identity and environmental sustenance, as well as a protection of the nation from the ruse of globalisation, inept governance and transnational pressures. Jeffrey Shantz's statement in his piece, "Beyond Socialist Realism: Glocal Concern and African Poetry," is relevant here; as he argues, the recent works of African (Nigerian) poets challenge us "to accept the validity of non-Western perspective and way of making sense of life" (2009: 110). This is in consonance with Ojaide's view about Africa losing its cultural soul in the wake of global identity politics, which blurs Africa's local identity (1994: 21). Ojaide further buttresses this point: "the shift from a celebration of the environment to a lamentation for its demise reflects the reality of my experience" (1994: 16) concerning the perils of globalisation and identity politics.

In his stimulating piece titled, "Migration, Globalisation, and the Recent African Literature," Tanure Ojaide brings to light the underlay of exile literature: "Migration, globalisation, and related phenomena of exile, transnationality, and multilocality have their bearing on the cultural identity, aesthetics, content and form of the literary production of Africans abroad" (2008:1). In this connection, Ulrich Beck's phraseology of "place polygamy" regarding Africans (Nigerians) living abroad and writing about Africa or African experience is not unfounded; the phrase resounds with the aesthetics of representing African diaspora, what Paul Gilroy calls "black Atlantic"; it is also an assessment of national drama unfolding in the exile's motherland. In this vein, Tanure Ojaide is one of the African writers and scholars who have allowed exile phenomenon, globalisation and multiculturalism to find expression in their works. This method of representing contemporary African (Nigerian) experience beyond the frontiers of nation-state rhetoric in the wake of the realities of globalisation and transnationalism is the hallmark of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. It is in this regard that Patterson and Kelley have remarked that

Notions of globalisation are everywhere. More and more we read or hear about efforts to think "transnationally," to move beyond the limits of the nation-state, to think in terms of border lands and diasporas. Indeed . . . several scholars have contributed to a rebirth of African diaspora studies. (2000: 12)

Thus, *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* is essentially one of such texts formulated as a refraction of African diaspora experience concerning the paradox and discontents inherent in global capitalism.

The consequences of homogenising world ideology, culture and political system so as to perpetually further underdevelopment project in the Saidian “Other” nations is behind the concept of globalisation and its ancillary systems. This is sadly implicated in exilic, transnational experience. The quest for homogeneity is what Onuka considers the “universalism of the world system” (2006: 2). The universalisation of the global system is a ruse perpetrated by the West to drive political instability in the exiles’ homeland: one of the reasons for the social movement that whets the exiles’ appetite to seek alternative social space on the heels of the pressures of existence in their homeland. On this score therefore,

In general globalisation involves a relativisation and destabilisation of old identities, whether of nation-states, communities or individuals . . . the creation of new hybrid entities, transnational phenomena like diasporic communities. (Albrow 1997: 93-4)

The above conjuncture resonates with what Olu Oguibe dubs the dialectic of “connectivity and the fate of the unconnected” (2002: 175).

Another source of exile representation is the *modus operandi* of governance in postcolonial Nigeria. A lot has been said, proposed, written and discussed regarding postcolonial Nigeria; attempts to delve into this subject matter will stifle the essence of this paper. However, Martin Albrow in his *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* offers a telling silhouette of the *raison d’être* behind exile experience. According to him, the “inability of the state to shape the aspirations of individuals and to gather them into collective political aims” (1997: 76) is a cardinal source of transnationalism and exile. Apart from the harsh living conditions that Nigerians face in their homeland, which make exile irresistible, the urgency of transnationalism, a form of globalisation that blurs the congruence of geographic and social space as well as increases national interconnectivity amongst nations and people for enhanced production process and benefits, is vital in this consideration.

In refracting diasporic identity politics and the Du Boisian “double consciousness” (Leonard 2009: 76), that stem from this practice, Nigerian writers have illuminated our minds about the position of race relations and place-based aesthetics in the canonical global ethnic politics and “perceptions about the modern world” (Gilroy 1993: 111). They have equally articulated the dilemma exiles face in foreign environments. The poetry collections that foreshadow the antinomy of exile, as well as subterfuge of globalisation in Nigerian literature include Tanure Ojaide’s *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* (1989), Chin Ce’s *Millennial* (2005), Toyin Adewale’s *Die Aromaforscherin* (1998), Joe Ushie’s *Hill Songs* (2004), Uche Nduka’s *Bremen Poems* (1995), Odia Ofeimun’s *London Letters & Other Poems* (2000), and Olu Oguibe’s *A Gathering of Fear* (1988) among others.

In contradiction to the aspirations of exiles, the new-found home, the transnational world, does not seem to offer succour or alleviate pains of social movement from the homeland to new environments, particularly the West. This motif suffuses the craft of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. Apart from the environmental and social disequilibrium that are dissected in the collection, a major focus of the poetry is the paradox of exile experience. In his important book on the phenomena – exile and transnationalism entitled *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Edward Said acutely summarises the antinomy of exilic experience through the manner in which the goals of leaving one’s home country have been damaged by “the loss of something left behind” (2001: 173). “A Song of Exile,” which Okunoye Oyeniyi refers to in one of his writings, makes the same point about the antinomy of exile and the quandary of the poet-persona:

I stand at the gates stranger and outsider I have journeyed away
from the sea into the desert the charm has crossed rivers the tongue
is blunt the songster has journeyed without his voice. (59)

The contradictions correlative to exilic, transnational movement as well as antinomy of such act as painted in the above poem find continuation in “A Question of Wholeness,” a verse in *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, which shall be quoted at length here:

I am thirty percent Native American
 I wonder what percentage
 of yellow, black, or white
 I carry in my brown face . . .

Taban says I have Meroitic draughts
 drowned in my bloodstream.
 I have for long lost my Bini relatives
 to the Ethiopie crossing
 That contorted my family name.
 The longer the distance here,
 the more confused the blend;
 black and white wear out.

I am fifty percent oppressed,
 sixty percent robbed of rights,
 seventy percent hungry for love,
 eighty percent a dog or drake.
 I am ninety percent native American.

It's a question of wholeness -. (101)

The antinomy expressed in the above lengthy lines, finds counterpart in another versification: "American Fred," where Ojaide touched on this point with piquancy: "I will never escape Africa's fate/ from my American home" (102). The paradox intrinsic in mass migration is further given expression in another poem, "Caravanned":

Dry or wet,
 something is coming
 to tear into shreds
 our short expectations
 of waiting.
 We are still fugitives;
 and here is neither home
 nor the journey's end . . . (89)

The dangers of paradox of exile sketched above are located within the confines of a weak Bhabhain "cultural hybridity," which is neither

an antidote to essentialism nor a solution to “the belief in invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity” (Fuss 1991: xi). Moreover, the problematic of this antinomy makes the Bhabhain rhetoric of “third space” prostrate in the sense that it does not diminish the weight of jaded existence, which is the mental fixation of such exile for changing his social space; it rather heightens his trepidation and crisis. Thus, even though the “Third Space” is a site which does not pander to the whims of cultural fixity or monolithic origin, and which is “neither the One nor the Other but something else besides” (Bhabha 1994: 28), it does not still offer fulfilment to the exile as Ojaide illustrates in the collection. In his “The Paradox of Exile in Poetry: A Reading of Eight African Poets,” E. E Sule considers the antinomy imbedded in the poetics of exile poetry in Africa, particularly Nigeria:

[. . .] the images in these poems create a paradoxical discourse which is that somebody goes on exile to seek for comfort, to seek for rest of mind, or, even, to seek for security for his life, but paradoxically ends up not having it, but instead encounters something that may be worse than what he has escaped from in his homeland. (2006: 16)

Thus, the trope of exile touches off “the good we have lost” (Ojaide 1996: 133) following the aftermath of the twin evils of globalisation and national tyranny, and serves as mnemonic snapshots of the futility and travails of escaping the homeland in the Saidian “age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration” as well (2001: 174) and Third World’s (Nigeria’s) frenzied bid to flee Oguibe’s “unconnectivity” rhetoric.

“Immigrant Voice”: Poetics of Antinomy and Culture Shock

The voice that pervades the universe of *When It No Longer Matters Where you Live* reverberates with culture shock, a process that measures exile-persona’s disappointment with his new environment. A consideration of the genesis and development of the concept of culture shock, as it relates and forms a major facet of this study, is vital. The phrase culture shock was first used by Cora Dubois in 1951 before it was

systematically applied in anthropological studies in the 1960's by Kalervo Oberg, the Finnish cultural anthropologist, who identified basic factors used in identifying culture shock. The stages or processes of culture shock are not discrete rather overlapping (Irwin 2007: 6). In this study, the emphasis is on the three first stages of culture shock, which technically apply here. Thus, in Oberg's view, culture shock is "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (Oberg 1960: 177). Basically culture shock entails the impact of moving from a familiar culture or environment to one which is relatively alien; it is the shock consequent upon new movement across disparate cultures or social spaces. Within Oberg's paradigm, there are three phases of culture shock, which are the honeymoon phase (initial stage), negotiation phase (second stage), and adjustment phase (third stage). The antinomy that wrings wet in Oberg's sequence is the natural corollary of disillusionment following spatial deracination: a transition from happiness to angst. The culture shock experienced by the poet-persona is piquantly surmised here:

Back home to here na long long way.
 The picture of here from home is so different
 from the wilderness I see night and day.
 This na America with homeless for every corner
 that I think I de a numberless world?
 Where all the fine fine things in that picture:
 Everybody dress kamkpe that I think
 na angels, Hollywood Heaven they misspell? . . .

I come back from work so dead I can't eat or sleep
 and before dawn I don get up to begin another slave day.
 when I reply their letters from home saying
 here no be what they think they see for their minds,
 they no de gree with me and call me lie-lie man: . . .

America na big photo-trick for me. (105)

The stylistic felicity of the above extract echoes interior monologue or stream of consciousness through which the exile's state of mind is uncovered thereby adumbrating his true condition. The exile-persona in the above instance uses a medley of pidgin and Standard English

to demonstrate clinically his state of mind, which vacillates between optimism and despondency: a movement from joy to pain. The poet narrator is shocked as he realised that what America, a symbol of one of the best transnational movement, could offer is not what he expected; America is rather a “photo-trick,” a sheer illusion.

The honeymoon phase noticed in another poem “Safe Journey” as well as “Home Songs: IV” morphs into discontent and total chagrin of the poet narrator in the wake of global capitalism’s negation of positive values of humanity through “blundering interference and cynical indifference” (Shantz 2007: 121) to the exile’s cultural identity. Also in another poem, “Home Song: VI,” the “misery” and “gluttonous appetites” (59) of the political class in the poet-persona’s homeland have rather been exacerbated by his experience in the new-found world:

[. . .], Tayo, the world from here is unreal –
 the suffering in a lost paradise can only be
 to rebuild it out of rubbles of broken dreams!
 In this season of seeing what cannot be reached,
 hearing what cannot be confirmed,
 and taunted by a mirage of treasures still there,
 I am fuelled by double love to sing and dance. (63)

The above verse suggests a nostalgic feeling for the exile’s homeland: his paradoxical acknowledgement of globalisation is largely within the remit of the universal depiction of the condition of living of the Spivakian subaltern all over the world. Thus, even though the exile has escaped “suffering” in his homeland, he is going through mental and social atrophy as well as lack of self-fulfilment in his new social space, the New World. The oxymoron of “insomniac dreams” is a rhetorical device that resonates with the exile’s “broken dreams.” The sense of nostalgia painted above reinforces the exile’s disappointment over leaving his motherland for possible greener pastures in another country. This instance captures in a bold relief a sense of antinomy informed by notions of risks and difficulty associated with adapting to a new set of symbols and norms that constitute the cultural currency that is shared by everybody in the exile’s new environment (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982: xix).

The last segment of culture shock is the adjustment phase, which has to do with the exile's acclimatisation to his new environment. In the poem "American Fred", Ojaide's poet-narrator's sense of glee as he sits at table to feast dramatises his ability to get used to his new social ambience and by so doing begin to enjoy its largesse:

I will never escape Africa's fate
 from my American home.
 When at table I didn't stuff myself
 to choking point or frittered away boiled potatoes,
 grandma winced before me and the leftovers:
 "Remember those starving Ethiopian children".
 I imagined multitude of rickety bones collapsing –

In the above poem, the poet-persona is rather enjoying the goodies of his new environment. This sense of satisfaction and adjustment to the exile's new home finds a foil in another verse, "Grandmother Song," where the he remembers his motherland with disdain and discontent:

In grandmotherly hands,
 we spent all without bank
 rupting our fortunes! (100)

The atmosphere captured in the above lines is that of disgruntlement and displeasure about the homeland; this is a sharp contrast to the exile's new space, where he can afford to send money home. This is unavoidably the case with the exile's adjustment phase irrespective of the trauma that beleaguers him in this new social space – the New World.

In addition, in her *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (1999) May Joseph offers a telling portrait of migration, which is oftentimes caused by the pressures of living:

Migration has become a way of life in the latter part of the twentieth century. The large scale displacement of people from rural to the urban or across nations has heightened the precariousness of arbitrary boundaries while fuelling contemporary identifications with ossified national identities. (154)

Similarly in his piece, “From Multiculturalism to Immigration Shock”, Paul Lauter argues in the same vein regarding the global urgency of immigration: “In fact, immigration is an international issue: three percent of the world’s population, 191, 000, 000 people, now live in countries other than those in which they were born” (2009: 2). In the thinking of Toyin Falola *et al* this process occurs in diverse patterns “including forced and voluntary paradigms” (xi). Be it forced or voluntary migration, the undercurrent of this nature of social movement is underpinned by removing the “catfish” (87) “... out of the Niger’s waters” (87), a metaphor for depriving the fauna, flora and man their rightful place in the Niger Delta, a microcosm of Nigeria.

It is worth noting that irrespective of argument in favour of the ideals of transnationalism, there is however serious contradictions inherent in it. This sort of antinomy – an aporia of a sort realised in a distant land is arguably what Lauter calls “immigration shock” (13). Ojaide captures graphically the unavoidable sense of paradox and social pariah that becomes the lot of his poet-persona in the poem “In Dirt and Pride”:

Now that rage begins to strangle me,
I hurl bolts from my guts –
I must recover hope from dire predictions.

I am branded on the forehead
with a painful scar by the country I love
for damming young and old alike...

The world suspects me from a distance,
but I do not blame my despisers. (75)

Ojaide has in the above poem delineated the contours of the paradox of exile as well as relayed the impacts of social exclusion. The imageries like “branded on the forehead” and “rage begins to strangle me” prefigure the harbinger of antinomy of exile; they also exemplify the irony of leaving the homeland, which its realities inflicted “a painful scar” on the poet-narrator.

Furthermore, Ojaide is a realist, political writer, who channels his artistic dart towards engaging, topical issues of the day bogging

humanity. If there is any abiding message in the aesthetic and philosophical credo of Ojaide's art, it is the ability to use his art to interrogate the *zeitgeist* – the spirit of the time. According to Tijan M. Sallah, the fervour of Ojaide's art is anchored in the following lines:

If there is a persistent and unifying theme in most of his works, it is a single-minded detestation of tyrants combined with an obsessive commitment to social justice. (Sallah 1995: 20)

In Ojaide's turn from depicting environmental tragedies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, a crucial source of his poet-persona's exilic experience - the helicon of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, to his preoccupation with the ruse of globalisation, the bitter-sweet experience of exiles constitutes a sense of ambivalence, which shall be looked at presently. This is largely part of the mainstay of *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, an artistic response to the tyrants referred to in "Dateline: Abuja" as "...vultures that took over the airspace" (43) of Nigeria, a social space responsible for Ojaide's poet-persona's transnational movement. The poet-persona's social space is Ojaide's native country, the Niger Delta – a geographical space which delineates a penumbra of Nigeria's inept mode of governance. The activities of the "vulture" (43) in "Dateline: Abuja" are further extended in "For Fela," a poem in which Ojaide brings to the fore other reasons responsible for the death of Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the maverick Nigerian musician and activist. Firstly, the verse eulogises the political activities of Fela; and secondly, it is more of a panegyric for political prisoners in Nigeria (including Ojaide himself), who through their works, voices, and activities unveil and criticize the bungling, corporatist Nigerian political landscape for societal advancement:

Fela, I know the other diseases that killed you:
the lethal poison of zombies and their retinue of civil dogs
that you sang so loud to embarrass and drive from the
landscape.
You did not prostrate before their brass shoes
you did not partake of their coveted bush meat,
you did not shut your mouth to their naked dance.

You invoked the people's power to exorcise their evil...
 The corruption you fought so hard to cleanse infected you!
 disabled, you feared no foreign ambush
 to foreswear your faith in the Afro spirit –
 [...] Fela, the Nigerian disease cannot kill your voice
 that still leads an ensemble chasing out the evil ones. (65-6)

The phrase “foreign ambush” brings to light global capitalist oppression; it is a sort of metonymy for global identity politics.

“When It No Longer Matters Where You Live”: A Silhouette of Cultural Ambivalence

“When It No Longer Matters Where You Live” is the title poem in the collection, *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. The poem inheres in the concept of ambivalence, which is a major sub-text of the collection. The trope of cultural ambivalence is richly incarnated in this poem; it also dramatises the intertextuality of Nigerian exile literature. The concept of intertextuality, which underscores the re-writing of consistent, identifiable literary trope (Eagleton 1983: 192), is depicted broadly in Olu Oguibe's *A Gathering Fear* (1988) and *A Song from Exile* (1990); it is also made manifest in Uche Nduka's *The Bremen Poems* (1995) and Odia Ofeimun's *London Letters and Other Poems* (2000): these poetry collections buttress the same point that Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live* intimates about cultural ambivalence.

This characterisation amounts to the Gatesian thesis of tropological revision in relation to West Indian Literature, which also gauges the rhythm of cultural deracination of West Indians as well as their exile experience as much as Nigerian exile literature does. For Gates, this is “the manner in which a specific trope is repeated with differences, between two or more texts” (1988: xxv). The contradiction that Nigerian exiles face resonates with Ulli Beier “a disgust of reality”. This is the same with their Caribbean counterparts as well as other peoples with similar historical reality. As the Boisean “double consciousness” was a canonical feature of African-American literature, Nigerian exile literature is steeped in cultural ambivalence, an antinomy of a sort. This ambivalence is what Soyinka sees as “... a state of tension where the

mind simultaneously embraces an anchor in alien territory yet ensures that it stays at one removed from that alien milieu” (2000: 63).

Even under the rubric of pain and continual yearning for one’s homeland, there is a tinge of rejection of assimilation and unbroken struggle for identity seen in the exile- persona in the poetry. This portraiture in transnational movement however, inverts the exilic social/cultural relations of transnationalism and globalisation. This argument dovetails with Odile Ferly’s assertion that “exile necessarily brings about some cultural adjustment, an adaptation process that leads to a redefinition of identity” (Oha 2005: 14). Ojaide’s reaction to the question of ambiguity, ambivalence, duality and Manichaeism surrounding globalised spatial displacement finds ample expression in the title poem, “When It No Longer Matters Where You Live”. Ojaide adumbrates:

Wild fires have consumed barks and herbs –
What are the chances of catching the lion alive?

.

The rumours of war days blaze memory
with harmattan drought – always beware
of falling from the spider-web’s height.

Except in returning to libate the soil
with the Cock of Abuja’s blood,
for all its refuge, the foreign home
remains a night whose dawn
I wish arrives before its time.

There’s no such hurt at home
who forgets the pain outside –
That’s the persistent ache one carries
until home’s safe to return to,
when it no longer matters
where you choose to live!

I don’t want to go home
with hands over head. Nor
raised in supplication or surrender.

I will take a drum home –
 I know what music and dance
 we deserve after the ban.
 I want a drum to banish fear.
 I will take a drum home. (77-8)

The above versification is quoted at length to underwrite Ojaide's response to the issue of exile and pressures of transnationalism, which are speckled with serious ambivalence that detonates through palpable imageries ensconced by ironic mindscape, atmosphere of trepidation and joy. The morbid vacillation from pain to joy by the exile-persona leaving his homeland is at the heart of the above poem.

In another poem, "In Dirt and Pride", Ojaide brings to the fore the salencies of exile experience and identity problem surrounding mass migration and exile. Let us here the poet-persona:

Now that rage begins to strangle me,
 I hurl out from my guts –
 I must recover hope from dire predictions.

I am branded on the forehead
 with a painful scar by the country I love
 for damning young and old alike.
 Lost in the labyrinths of self-indulgence,
 "where is the way out?" they ask,
 who came to this depth with fanfare.

Hardship has smothered the firebrands
 that once blazed a liberation trail.
 The land smothers every flower . . .

Before the cockerel's flung at the sacred crocodile,
 let the rage smash the corrupt baron –

The world suspects me at a distance . . . (75)

The above lines are enmeshed in ambivalence; the title of the poem is rather ambivalent – a melange of Jane Austen's pride and prejudice (good and bad). Here, the poet narrator is at the crossroads: his new

found home “suspects” him; and there is “a painful scar” inflicted on him by the country he loves – his homeland. It could be gleaned that the exile is happy that he left his homeland, which “smothers every flower,” but on the other hand, the rage which stems from lack of integration and recognition in foreign land puts him in a sort of identity crisis as well as makes him a social pariah.

The ambivalent twist to the discourse of exile and transnationalism is further given expression in another poem, “Deportations,” where Ojaide illustrates pains and trauma of cultural deracination with poignancy:

From the way
 these great-grandchildren of migrants
 talk of deporting newly arrived immigrants,
 calling them illegal and other stinking names,
 you would think
 they don't know their family tree,
 don't know their fathers,
 and where they came from.
 They won't accept they are bastards! (107)

The image painted above is that of intra-cultural crisis, a race fighting itself. Here the “great-grandchildren of migrants” see “newly arrived immigrants” as people without roots. This situation again engenders harrowing realities of social exclusion which Ojaide's poet-narrator faces; he is not even accepted by people of his own colour, clime and origin in his new social space. Thus, the “peace” (92) of mind for leaving his homeland is truncated by mental, social and psychological torture stemming from the ill-treatment from the people the poet-persona thought would offer him solidarity and warm embrace. This is a clear case of ambivalence: a situation that moves from joy to sadness. This oxymoronic scenario is further given resonance in these lines from the poem, “Pacific Love”:

I think of you Ocean as always full,
 your body forever saltsprayed fresh . . .
 Before this daily visit to wash my feet,

I have had my share of troubled waters.
I seek pacific favours to douse home fires.

Even in your peace, thunder clashes –
peace is not a still pose on canvas.
life's a struggle for you too, but more(92)

“Home fires” a metaphor for “the trouble with Nigeria”, to use the Achebean popular parlance, which the exile thought he could extinguish via moving from his home country on the heels of the promises of transnationalism do not seem feasible, hence, “thunder clashes” in the midst of this seeming “peace”, the ultimate rationale for his transnational movement.

In “Empress of Silence”, Ojaide hones in on the question of ambivalence with a sense of nostalgia and punishment, which the poet-persona experiences as a result of migration that he thought would be an escape route to better life. Thus, the “memories of flagellation” as well as “the flagellation of silence” (125) – both ambivalent conjunctures, brings him a sense of homesickness concerning his roots; it accentuates his serious longing not to allow his “...remembering to run/into ghosts of slaughtered wishes...” (125), suggesting his hunger for his homeland. On the other hand, the exile’s “memories of flagellation” cannot undermine the punishment “silence” and solitude have wrought on his psyche. Also, the exile’s “... sun/flower face” (125), an emblem for the reason for migration is being besmirched by punitive reminiscences. The poet-persona is in this instance locked in the grisly world of ambivalence, trauma and hunger for the “music” (125) of his homeland, a metaphor for Nigeria’s heydays before “her blow” (125), which Ojaide sees as “loss” (123) in another poem, “The Floods Ago”. The coexisting opposing stances that shape the exile’s mindscape as he left his motherland for better opportunities in a foreign land in the wake of transnational exigencies constitute another tinge of sense of ambivalence in the collection, *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*.

Conclusion

To reformulate the essence of this paper, it has been argued that transnationalism, globalisation, migration, exile and related

phenomena have a rectilinear relationship with the ideo-aesthetics, form and content of Tanure Ojaide's *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, which questions the legitimacy of mutual sharing of global resources informed by global capitalist rhetoric. One of the major foci of this paper is that exilic experience is basically a function of the paradox of transnationalism, one of the ugly faces of globalisation. Thus, mass migration on the heels of the promises of global capitalist system is full of ambivalence and antinomy; hence, exiles are locked within the politics of exclusion and identity crises in their new environments.

Therefore, the fate of the Saidian "Other" is the same irrespective of geographical space. Ojaide's main concern in the collection as argued here is that beyond the veneer of globalisation and ancillary practices, there are complex issues that confront exiles, particularly those from the Third World, whom have gone on exile to better their life following the realities of national politics, and more importantly given the urgency of global capitalism.

Works Cited

- Albrow, Martin. *The Golden Age: State and Society beyond Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Bhabha, Homi. "The Commitment to Theory". *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Douglas, M and A. Wildavsky. *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*. Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1982.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Falola, Toyin et al. *Migration and Creative Expression in Africa and the African Diaspora*. North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2008.
- Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Gates, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey – A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London And New York: Verso, 1993.
- Irwin, Rachel. "Culture Shock: Negotiating Feelings in the Field". *Anthropology Matters Journal*, 9.1(2007): 1-11.
- Joseph, May. *Normadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*. Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Korte, Barbara. *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations*. Basingtoke: MacMillan, 2000.
- Lauter, Paul. "From Multiculturalism to Immigration Shok". *Journal of Transnational American Studies*. 1.1(2009): 1-20.
- Leonard, A. M. "Goin' to Nature to Reach Double Consciousness: A Du Boisian Methodological Journey to Graves of the Formerly Enslaved". *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 1.2(2009): 76-91.
- Oberg, Kalervo. "Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environment". *Practical Anthropology*, 7(1960): 177-182.
- Oguibe, Olu. "Connectivity and the Fate of the Unconnected". David Goldberg and Ato Quayson (eds.), *Relocating Postcolonialism*. USA Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Oha, Obododimma. "En/countering the New Language of Exile in Uche Nduka's *The Bremen Years*". *Portal Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies*, 2.1 (2005): 1-19.
- Ojaide, Tanure. "Migration, Globalisation, and Recent African Literature". *World Literature Today*. 1.43 (March-April, 2008): 20-35.
- . *When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press, 1998.
- . "New Trends in Modern African Poetry". *Research in African Literature*. 26.1 (1994): 4-21.
- Okunoye, Oyeniyi. "Exilic Consciousness and Self-Inscription in L. S. Senghor and Olu Oguibe". *The Journal of African Travel Writing*, 8.9(2001): 151-166.
- Olaluwa, Senayon, S. "From the Local to the Global: A Critical Survey of Exile Survey of Experience in Recent African Poetry". *Nebula: A Journal of Multidisciplinary Scholarship*, 4.2(2007): 223-252.

- Onuka, A. O. U. "Nigerian Management Manpower Development in the Context of Globalisation: An Evaluation". *International Journal of African and American Studies*, 5.1(2003): 11-21.
- Patterson, T. R. and Kelly, D. G. "Unfinished Migration: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World". *African Studies Review*, 43(1):11-45.
- Sallah, Tijan, M. "The Eagle's Vision: The Poetry of Tanure Ojaide". *Research in African Literature*, 26.1(1995): 20-29.
- Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Shantz, Jeffrey. "Beyond Socialist Realism: 'Socialist by Tendency' in the Poetry of Tenure Ojaide and Wole Soyinka". *NAWA Journal of Language and Communication*. 1.2(2007): 121-133.
- . "Beyond Socialist Realism: Glocal Concern and African Poetry". *Literary Paritantra (Systems)*, 1.1&2(2009): 110-112.
- Soyinka, Wole. "Exile: Thresholds of Loss and Identity". *Anglophonia/Caliban*. 7(2000): 61-70.
- Sule, E. E. "The Paradox of Exile in Poetry: A Reading of Eight African Poets". *Journal of African Poetry*, 4(2007): 70-85.

Meaningless Poetry and the Music of Meaning

Dr V. S. Antony

Gerard Manley Hopkins and Stéphane Mallarmé without knowing each other's work were striving to attain an ideal of poetry in the direction of the semiotics of music. Both of them were doing revolutionary things in poetry, one in English and the other in French during the same period. Michael Sprinker observes that the similarity of their work became known when Paul Valéry, the great disciple of Mallarmé, happened to come across the works of Hopkins (39). Valéry conveys his admiration and wonder in these words:

I discover this morning on the table that serves as a night table, a volume of poems by a certain Gerard Manley Hopkins—with notes by Robert Bridges. I open it and decipher a bit with a vague grudge and without sensing that I am about to find “twenty minutes” of light. The preface by Charles Williams seems to me ordinary or absurd—at first—then it wakes me, and I grope through the poems and the notes by Bridges. Then I see clearly how all this suits me, situates me. An excellent guide that justifies my idea of poetry—which now comes clear to me. I understand also the Englishman's contempt for our poetry, all the poverty of the French way of teaching language—total negligence of the element of music. (Qtd in Sprinker 39)

In the new poetic scheme of Hopkins, Mallarmé, and Valéry meaning, interpretations, and ideas of poetry take a back seat. It is form and formlessness of resonance that foreground. The idealistic, logocentric, Platonic theory of form becomes “decentred form,” which is “similar to contemporary deconstructive theories of interpretation, which are admittedly not at all new in the Western tradition” (Sprinker 24).

Hopkins, from his student days, was preoccupied with the aesthetic principle of form, though he considered this thinking as eccentric and

solitary. However, the French Symbolists were also moving in the same direction. Even before Mallarmé crystallized his ideas on form and formlessness, Hopkins had completed his undergraduate essay, “On the Origin of Beauty: a Platonic Dialogue” containing a systematic presentation of the aesthetic principle of similarity and difference, which brought forth great admiration from Roman Jakobson later. The principle of beauty in similarity and difference found in a seminal form in this essay develops further in his aesthetics and reaches the ideal of music in his mature poetry. Sprinker comments on this: “Form does not radiate from a center but arises spontaneously from the comparison and differentiation of separate and distinctive parts within the whole” (25).

For Hopkins the possibility of rhyming exists between not only similar but also dissimilar things in nature, art, and language. He finds that “any two things however unlike are in something like” (*Sermons* 123). In music, “two strings not tuned to the same pitch may still be in resonance, as are middle C and the octave above, or as are C and G. Such notes are harmonic chimes of one another, bound together by a subtle mathematical relation in their vibrations” (Miller 90). Hopkins was convinced that “all forms of beauty, in nature and in art, are different versions of the relation which holds between unlike things which are similar” (*Journals* 105). He adds further: “Likeness therefore implies unlikeness . . . , and unlikeness, likeness” (*Journals* 105). As Miller says, “The fundamental method of Hopkins’ poetry is to carry as far as it will go, into every aspect of his verse, the principle of rhyme” (93).

Hopkins’s elaborate and subtle discussions on diatonic and chromatic principles of beauty in the essay, “On the Origin of Beauty” have elicited penetrating analysis by several critics, the most illuminating being by J. Hillis Miller. The successive repetitions of chromatism are brought into the differential structure of diatonism opening up the dialectics of similarity and difference. Differences in rhythmical structure do not shatter the unity of a work; on the contrary, such differences give the work diatonic beauty (Sprinker 26). As Hopkins says:

And in everything the more remote the ratio of the parts to one another or the whole the greater the unity if felt at all, as in the circle and ellipse, for the circle is felt to be more at one and one thing than the ellipse, yet the ratio of its circumference to its diameter is undiscoverable, whereas there must be one ellipse in which it is 3:1 and any number of others in which it is any ratio we like to take between π and 2. (*Journals* 283)

One can read and enjoy Hopkins's poems even when the meanings remain elusive. The interpretations, however subtle, cannot get at the soul of his poetry. As Hopkins says,

Poetry is speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing or speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning. Some matter and meaning is essential to it but only as an element necessary to support and employ the shape, which is contemplated for its own sake Poetry is in fact speech only employed to carry the inscape of speech for the inscape's sake—and therefore the inscape must be dwelt on. (*Journals* 289)

Mallarmé discusses the autoreferentiality and independence of words, and how they form structures and patterns in poems:

I think that once we have perfectly defined poetic form, our principal aim should be to make the words of a poem self mirroring (since they are sufficiently autonomous to begin with and need no outside impression) to such an extent that no one of them will seem to have a colour of its own, and all of them will be merely the notes of a scale. (93)

Once freed of referentiality, words attain their true nature, which is pattern or inscape of speech of poetry. Words assume the quality of music, or the movement of dance, and become instruments of a kind of ideal or pure poetry for which Mallarmé, Hopkins and Valéry strived. As Miller observes:

What is important in poetry is neither the expression of the inner self of the poet, as some romantic poets had thought, nor the

imitation of something in the external world, as Aristotle had said. Poetry, like music, is an autonomous art. Music makes patterns of sequences of tones. Poetry makes patterns of sequences of words. The notes in a piece of music tell us nothing about the external world, and the meaning of a word in poetry is also part of its substance, no more related to the outside world than its sound. (93)

The path to the aesthetics of Mallarmé, Valéry, and Hopkins is through the aesthetics of music, in which patterns of sound and resonance play the leading role, neither logocentric commentaries nor deconstructive strategies can do full justice to their poetry. According to Sprinker:

The ideal goal of a language or a poetry identical with the “condition of music” is the vanishing point of aesthetic speculation for Hopkins and Valéry. For poetry is always *in* language, hence, it is always written. Such an “absolute” or “pure poetry” envisioned by Valéry, Mallarmé, Stevens, and Hopkins stands at the limits of language itself, at that point where language ceases to be itself and passes into song. (42-43)

Geoffrey Hartman has commented on “the irreducible tension in Valéry’s poetics between language and the desire to transcend language through music” (244). He finds a “prolonged hesitation” between sound and sense, or formal and referential values in Valéry (246). Sprinker concludes that this “prolonged hesitation” leads to the vanishing of any “referential values” whatsoever in the poet’s recognition that his language can speak nothing but its own being (43). According to Marylou Motto, in Hopkins’s poetry “the language is falling together . . . the words collapsing in on themselves” (69). The reflection of art on itself, words on themselves, produces allegory and “it can be argued that the double reflection of allegorical meaning finally constitutes for Valéry (and for Hopkins and Mallarmé) the poem’s *only* meaning” (Sprinker, note 43).

The new concept of writing introduced by Derrida to challenge the Saussurean privileging of speech over writing may be compared to

Hopkins's privileging the inscape of speech over the logocentrism of speech. This does not mean that Hopkins's poetry can be "spoken." But it should be spoken, not as words, but as sounds, rhythms, rhymes, alliterations, and resonances. Then it points to the truth that you can never "speak" any text; you can speak or utter only sounds. It is this uttering of sounds of words in his poems, not speech as such, that Hopkins privileges over the logocentrism of reading his poetry aloud. The present paper argues that Hopkins made logocentrism's steady and reliable production of meaning secondary to the inscape of speech in poetry long before Derrida's critique of logocentrism.

Even before Saussure developed the revolutionary concept of language, Hopkins was acquainted with the thoughts of Georg Curtius, the teacher of Saussure (*Further Letters* 193), and also with the theories of Karl Brugmann (*Further Letters* 272). In fact, as Sprinker says, Saussure criticizes the very theory explained by Hopkins in his letter to Baillie (Sprinker 69). Hopkins's theory of poetry "over and above meaning" was an attempt to go beyond the limitations of referential meaning schematized by Saussure later. In his notes on "Poetry and Verse" Hopkins observes:

Poetry then may be couched in this, and therefore all poetry is not verse but all poetry is either verse or falls under this or some still further development of what verse is, speech wholly or partially repeating some kind of figure which is over and above meaning, at least the grammatical, historical, and logical meaning. (*Journals* 289)

Hopkins is trying to take poetry to the realms of meaning beyond the discursive and logical, the argumentative and interpretative, to the sphere of pure poetry and music, and the semiotics of speech sounds.

Even when recommending the loud reading of poetry, we can hear Hopkins's silent derision of such an activity. He mocks and admires it at the same time. While recommending his own version of logocentrism, he also wants to deconstruct it. He continued to produce odd, obscure, and eccentric poetry while recommending that his poems would become all right if read or sung aloud, hinting at the poverty

and richness inherent in such an approach, thus avoiding the pitfalls of pure poetry such as abstract poetry or nonsense verse.

Joseph J. Feeney in his recent article in *The Hopkins Quarterly* describes the effect of “performance” of Hopkins’s poetry. In fact, Hopkins himself wanted his poems to be “performed.” In a letter to his brother, he remarks that “poetry (is) the darling child of speech, of lips and spoken utterance, it must be spoken, till it is spoken *it is not performed*, it does not perform, it is not itself” (*Selected Letters* 218). Feeney describes the extraordinary effect of a performance of Hopkins’s poems by Theaterwork group in Santa Fe, New Mexico on 20 December 2009:

The rest of the program followed the same pattern: poems by Hopkins, interspersed with music, dance, and response-poems. The ending, strikingly unusual, began with parts of “The Golden Echo” performed by the young boy; then came “Heraclitean Fire,” done by the same actor as the opening “Pied Beauty”; finally, for exactly seven seconds and as if in a chorus, each actor spoke a few words of his or her performance-poem, creating a disturbing, unexpected, magical flash of dissonance that puzzled and troubled the audience until we realized what was happening: the ear-assaulting verbal music at once proclaimed the poet’s originality, summarized the play’s four strands, *and* showed how Hopkins’s startling sounds might have disturbed a Victorian ear. A grand *coup de theatre*, this dissonance unified the evening and brought a storm of stunned/puzzled/enthusiastic applause. (I might add that, by the time this article appears, Theaterwork hopes to have “something from the event” on their website, www.theaterwork.org. (121)

Music becomes the ideal of poetry. But, this produced despair and aridity in Hopkins and Mallarmé, as they were aware of the difficulties involved in this approach. In order to attain this poetic ideal, the self gets isolated from reality and a form of depersonalization appeared in Hopkins and Mallarmé. However, this alienation enabled the poet to peep across the void into the mystery of being. In the poetry of Mallarmé and Hopkins we can catch glimpses of this, or in other words,

hear the music of the mystery, and its ultimate meaning, the meaning beyond meanings.

Words stop to be routine signifiers, they attain independence and stand for themselves, as self-mirroring sounds signifying primarily nothing but their own being, as notes in music. Then they chime, rhyme, harmonize, support, and collaborate in a pattern. Words attain meaning, by an emptying of meaning, in standing for something other than what they were standing for, for themselves, and for their patterns. The routine work they were doing down the centuries is discarded temporarily. It is something like getting back their selves, a selving of words. They exult in their sounds, alliteration, consonant chiming, rhyming, and they celebrate their being, freed from the burden of carrying alien meanings imposed on them. Poetry can “perform” this magic very well. Mallarmé and Hopkins and later Valéry attempted to do this adventure at the risk of despair and alienation.

The ideal of poetry Mallarmé, Hopkins, and Valéry aimed at was pure poetry, which needs no interpretation, producing only the silence of tasting and revelation. It is like drowning in music that reveals the mystery of being. Sartre towards the end of *Nausea* comes to a strange realization of the ability of music to reveal the mystery of existence:

Now there is this tune on the saxophone. And I am ashamed. A conceited little suffering has just been born, an exemplary suffering. Four notes on the saxophone. They come and go, they seem to say: “You must do like us, suffer in strict time.” Well, yes! Of course I’d be glad to suffer that way, in strict time, without any complacency, without any self-pity, with an arid purity. (247)

Deconstruction revealed to us the unreliability or instability of meanings in any text including poetry. Hopkins and Mallarmé tried to explore another dimension of meaning in poetry accessible through resonance, rhythm, alliteration, and chiming. They explored the music produced by the choice of words and its pattern and the way they are uttered with intervening silence. Through the spoken words they were creating a form of text. They anticipated the view of Derrida that every speech presupposes a text, and added that every speech also produced

a text and its peculiar meanings. The door opens to pure poetry and pure music of meaning in poetry.

Transcending the realm of ideas and referentiality poems open up allegorical meaning explored by Mallarmé, Hopkins and Valéry. When the text unwinds, logocentrism is at an end. The text may be silent and eloquent at the same time. Then we begin to listen to the music of the text. One should attain the austere quality to listen to the music of the text revealed through the music of words. The inadequacy, the inconsistency, and the poverty of meanings and interpretations point to this music of the text. To learn about this Hopkins suggested visiting his text after some thirty years. It required Mallarmé and Valéry, Hartman and Miller, Heidegger and Derrida to convince us of this.

According to Valéry a poem begins as a haunting melody before any abstract thinking envelops the mind of the poet. Hopkins has mentioned about a melody that haunted him before writing “The Wreck” (*Correspondence* 14). Hopkins pushes back the origin of poetry not only to music but also to dancing and the synthesis of visual, aural, and body movements. (*Letters to Bridges* 119-20). Both for Hopkins and Valéry the principle of beauty in poetry arises from the rhythms of music and dance. Hopkins in a letter to Bridges affirms the similarity between music, painting and poetry: “. . . as air, melody, is what strikes me most of all in music and design in poetry, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling ‘inscape’ is what I above all aim at in poetry” (66). Miller says that “the meaning is there only as a necessary support for the pattern. The design of a piece of verse would be just as visible, perhaps more visible, to someone who did not know the language in which it was written. Such a person would be better able to recognize the precise sound-shape of the words” (94).

Hopkins travelled a new path into the mystery of being by bypassing the signified of traditional concepts. As Miller says, “If words are arbitrary labels for things, they give no substantial possession of the things they name, but are only signs pointing in the direction of their meaning. An onomatopoeic word imitates in its substance and inscape the substance and inscape of the thing it names” (97). Words reveal the mystery of being not by pointing to its meanings but by

imitating. As Miller says, “words are the dynamic internalization of the world” (97).

Hopkins frequently used a coinage called “sake.” It is the being a thing has outside itself, like the image of a face in a mirror. Very often “sake” reveals the being of an entity better than that entity itself. What can help us to understand our face better than its image in the mirror? So an image reveals the essential being of a face more than the face itself. This is true of poetry also. The being of a poem may be captured not through interpretations alone but through resonance and rhythm, and the music of words as Hopkins and Mallarmé did. Then speech surrenders to its primitive mother—rhythmic sounds, and silence, and then there will be understanding without meaning, and flashes of insight into being leading to ecstasy.

Works Cited

- Feeney, Joseph J. “Hopkins on Stage, Sumptuously, in Santa Fe.” *The Hopkins Quarterly* 36. 3-4 (2009): 119-22. Print.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Including His Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. London: Oxford UP, 1956. Print.
- . *Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Catherine Phillips. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990. Print.
- . *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters*. Ed. Catherine Phillips. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990. Print.
- . *The Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. London: Oxford UP, 1935. Print.
- . *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Eds. Humphry House and Graham Storey. 2nd ed. London: Oxford UP, 1959. Print.
- . *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Ed. Claude Colleer Abbott. 2nd rev. imp. London: Oxford UP, 1955. Print.
- . *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Christopher Devlin. London: Oxford UP, 1959. Print.

- Hartman, Geoffrey. "Valéry's Fable of the Bee" in *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975. Print.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Selected Prose Poems, Essays and Letters*, trans. Bradford Cook. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956. print.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "The Univocal Chiming." *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth Century Writers*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1963. *Hopkins: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1980: 89-116. Print. Twentieth Century Views Series.
- Motto, Marylou. *Mined with a Motion: The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1984. Print.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. Trans. Robert Baldick. 1965. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983. Print.
- Sprinker, Michael. *A Counterpoint of Dissonance: The Aesthetics and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. London: The Johnson Hopkins University Press, 1980. Print.

Beyond Dialectics: Bataille, Foucault And Postmodern Transgression

Dr Varghese C. Abraham

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.

William Blake

The incursion into the universal and the eternal by the individual and the contingent is one of the distinguishing features of postmodernity. Universal discourses are viewed with suspicion for their proclivity for totalizing and for the way they legitimise the authoritarian by displacing dialogue and by enforcing closure. Postmodernism is, in many ways, an attempt at an alternative—the impetus of which could be traced back to the Sophists in their parodic contestation of Plato’s rational discourses and to the Nietzschean repudiation of the Western canons of Apollonian authority and enlightenment rationality. The Cartesian systematisation of the Platonic dialectic had put in place, during the enlightenment age, a transcendental and objective logos that presumably officiated the rational world as a *fait accompli*. Hegel elaborated on the Cartesian binaries to formulate an epistemology based on dialectical methodology in which all differences, except the overriding one of the conceptual, were eliminated for the sake of the rational system. The Hegelian legacy lurks within the core of Modernity even as it purports to rebel against the traditional and constrictive structures, the binaries of Structuralism being a case in point. Jurgen Habermas, himself an ardent modernist and a zealous critic of postmodernity (as his squabble with Lyotard testifies), observes: “Hegel inaugurated the discourse of modernity. He introduced the theme—the self-critical reassurance of modernity. He established the rules within which the theme can be varied—the dialectic of enlightenment” (51). The “self-critical reassurance of modernity” could be easily translated as the totalizing, unproblematic and rational discourse that engages the “other” in a binary after positioning itself as the legitimate centre and its claims to self-criticism boil down to attempts at self-preservation. The result of this, in literature, was the emergence of

artificial categories like high brow and low brow (locked in a binary where the high brow legitimises itself and the lowbrow is forever doomed to be a lack—the absence of literature) and the insistence that modernist experimentations were the means to purify the dialect of the tribe. Literature was regarded as an enterprise reserved for the serious author who created a world of substantive literary experience for an exclusive group of cognoscenti (the writerly text). John Docker exposes the hypocrisy of the modernist culture in *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*. He observes wryly:

A kind of puritanic rationalism does become important in modernist cultural criticism, the necessity of “severe thought” about the plight of the epoch, last bulwark against the pleasures, the dissipating distractions, of the deluge of bestsellers, newspapers, film, broadcasting, advertising [. . .]. Important too would be the dislike of pluralism. (21-22)

In fact, Habermas himself is aware of the dictatorial proclivity of modernism when he concedes that:

The parties that have contented about the correct self-understanding of modernity since the days of the Young Hegelians all agree on the point: that a far-reaching process of self-illusion was connected with the learning processes conceptualized in the eighteenth century as “enlightenment.” Agreement also exists about the fact that the authoritarian traits of a narrow-minded enlightenment are embedded in the principle of self-consciousness or of subjectivity. (55)

Postmodernism rejects the absolutization of any discourse and advocates multiplicities, differences (as substitute to binaries), self-reflexivity and polyphony. The imperious centre appearing as the unified ‘I’ who observes and records, the uncomplicated text amenable to a designated set of readings, the language of representation capable of conveying conclusive and objective meaning, and characters who are the unproblematic representations of real people are all dissolved and in their place postmodernism posits shifting perspectives, differential readings and problematized language in search of the liminal. Lyotard,

with aplomb, declares: “Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name” (82).

Through an active engagement with Hegelian philosophy, George Bataille attempted to subvert the meta-narratives of identity and absolute knowledge through transgressive laughter and parody. Transgression can be best understood as a going beyond, or a shattering, of moral boundaries in pursuit of a greater experience of truth, wholeness, or divinity. It is a stepping across (from *transgredi*: “trans” meaning across and “gradi,” to step) of the boundaries, the behavioural and attitudinal limits, of a culture. Transgression has been defined etymologically as the process of crossing-over, of moving from an ordered and rational state to an unordered and irrational state. In the Western Judeo-Christian cultural tradition, it has also acquired moralistic tones of judgement. Adam “infringed” a sacred law through his pursuit of forbidden knowledge and was punished for his transgression. The concept has become important to postmodernist thought because of the complex nature it harbours. It is at once an ambiguous and shifting concept that demarks and defines the boundaries it crosses. It would articulate the parameters of the centre while insistently occupying the margins. Most critical reviews of Bataille suggest that his entire oeuvre was concerned with articulating a theory explaining the relationship between the sacred and the profane. Suzanne Guerlac says:

Bataille elaborated a notion of transgression most explicitly in “L’Erotisme” (1957); an essay that reworked material from a previously unpublished piece, “L’Histoire de l’erotisme,” and that harks back to a study of “erotic phenomenology” projected as early as 1939(11).

Writing in both fictive and non-fictive genres Bataille attempted to outline how the literary text could serve as a means of expressing the boundaries of the modern subject. In Bataille’s formulation, individual subjectivity was constituted through, according to David B. Allison, “the interstices of social, economic, ethical, religious, moral, sexual and linguistic encoding”(7). It was only when the self traversed any of these

interstices that it became aware of not only the delineated line but also its own interior experience. For Bataille, transgression was therefore not a state of being but rather a process that occurred through the act of crossing over. Understanding of the self came from the “jouissance” (the joy) of passing from an ordered reasoned territory to an unordered and irrational one. According to Catherine Marchak: “The joy of transgression is an elation, an exuberance that results from the letting go of all the vestiges of reason and rationality” (361). This was for Bataille as close as understanding could get to articulating the transgressive experience. As one of the original Surrealists, Bataille’s project was intended to be literary rather than theoretical. It was only the use of his work by the individuals of the journal *Tel Quel* that moved his work on transgression from the literary realm to the theoretical. As Suzanne Guerlac has suggested, Bataille was the only author to be important to both the pre-war and post-war French literary movements. She asserts: “He belongs both to the generation of *Tel Quel*, who reinvented transgression, and to the decades he shared first with Breton and then with Sartre”(5). Bataille’s work on transgression was important to the theorists of *Tel Quel* because of its double meanings. The post-modern theorists of *Tel Quel* wanted to signal a radical theoretical break with previous generations and to set a post-modern agenda for intellectual inquiry. Suzanne Guerlac calls this break a “Copernican revolution introduced by post-structuralism”(13). Bataille’s notion of transgression fulfilled both of these needs. Bataille’s transgression therefore became very important to all of the post-modern theorists, specifically post-structuralism. As Suzanne Guerlac has stated, “poststructuralist theory could not do without”(11) Bataille’s notion of transgression. The proof of his importance lies in the works devoted to him by the theorists of *Tel Quel*. Indeed Michel Foucault wrote an entire article on Bataille’s notion of transgression “Preface a la transgression” in 1963. In this article, Foucault articulated a notion of transgression, which was more expansive than Bataille’s own queries about literature and individual subjectivity. Bataille saw individual subjectivity constituted as the upshot of successive acts of boundary crossing. Foucault regarded transgression as operating individually and culturally. According to Michael Richardson, the difference between Foucault and Bataille was also how and where they saw transgression

as a force: “For Foucault transgression is a crucial element of contemporary society whereas Bataille believed it was being systematically excluded and that it was impossible for transgression to be anything but impotence within the society in which we live” (6). For Foucault, Bataille’s concept became an articulation of social repression and limitation, concerns very near to his own work. The individual and collective selves were formulated only by the boundaries illuminated by acts of transgression. Foucault’s interpretation of Bataille’s concept reflected postmodernism’s own theories of how subjectivity was constituted.

For Foucault and other postmodernists the secure Cartesian subject position of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could not explain postmodern subjectivity. The postmodern, destabilized subject exists on manifold levels because it is essentially a site constructed on multiplicities. For postmodernism, selfhood was constituted not only through acts of boundary transgression but also through the separation between the individual and the “other” in a non-dialectical relationship. Individual and collective subjectivity were conditional upon the delineation of proper values and the transference of inappropriate values to the “other” that lived within the boundaries of the self itself. The “other” in postmodernism defined the self through its very difference even as it was an unalienable part of the self.

According to Allan Stoekl, Georges Bataille defines excess as that which challenges a closed economy (built on utility, production and rational consumption) and foregrounds the experience of the “inassimilable waste products” of the body, society and thought - excrement, madness, poetry, the bums and the vagabonds of society (xi). It views all unities as delusive and calls for the individual to reach lower, more essential human drives. Foucault holds that knowledge is gained only through the critique of knowledge. Thinking, therefore, is a continual transgression of established norms of truth. It is a political act in that these norms are socially constructed and maintained.

Foucault’s notion of transgression offers a valid explanation for the prevalence of extremes, of excess within contemporary literature, art and other cultural practices. “A Preface to Transgression” states that

sexuality is “perhaps the only source of division now possible in a world emptied of objects, beings and spaces to desecrate” (70). Foucault is emphasizing the need for transgression in art, the proliferation of extreme, explicit, transgressive material in an era when it is apparent that many of the old battles, the conflicts of the established dialectical paradigms have been fought and won/lost or finished. Certainly, Foucault’s description of transgression as the appetite and drive for profit of the already materially satisfied (*A Preface to Transgression*”, 85) describes the postmodern condition of the age of excess.

Bataille and Foucault express a transgression beyond all labeling and rules. The latter argues that transgression must be detached from any association with ethics or with the scandalous. Transgression is there purely for the sake of it, and has no specific or manifest purpose as such. It is against all use because if one were to exist it can no longer be truly transgressive. In this sense, it becomes a critique of Hegelianism and the logic of enlightenment.

Transgression is not rebellion. It does not seek to break down boundaries or tear away limits. In fact, the limits are deemed as a necessary and reciprocal element of the act. Transgression and limits cannot exist without one another. When a limit is transgressed, there is only the uncovering of a new limit. Transgression does not want to surpass the limit, but “forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes [. . .] to experience its positive truth in its downward fall” (“A Preface to Transgression”, 73). This, for Foucault is a movement of violence, not because it destroys, but because it reveals. It does not shine from the outside, but is inside. Transgression is its own limit, denies its own limit, and reveals its own limit. Before the death of God, the Limit was possible. All things rushed towards the finality, the result of their being. In the infinite space of the nothingness, there still existed the hope of a Limit, the hope that language would reach its limit, and end interpretation. However, the death of God denied self “the limit of the Limitless [. . .] in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently to an experience which is *interior* and *sovereign*. (“A Preface to Transgression”, 71). There is no longer any external reality towards which text may strive. The experience with the word has to be interior—

there is no exterior. This is also, why transgression is act cast upon itself. There is nothing to desecrate and nothing to oppose. However, there is another paradox. With the death of God, the infinity of interpretation, the limitlessness of body-text-self, is transfigured into absolute limit. The infinity of interpretations is its own limit. Its infinity is a limit because it is bound by the search for the absolute referent. This is why, for Foucault (and Bataille), God must stay dead. The only way to overcome the limit that the infinity of interpretations creates is to overcome the absence of God is, according to the "Preface",

to kill God to liberate life from this existence that limits it, but also to bring it back to those limits that are annulled by this limitless existence - as a sacrifice; to kill God to return him to this nothingness he is and to manifest his existence at the center of a light that blazes like a presence - for the ecstasy; to kill God in order to lose language in a deafening night. [. . .] and this is communication (72).

This interrogation of the self is an interrogation of the limit and a movement towards recapturing the self, without God. Nevertheless, this movement involves taking the self to the limit, which is where madness exists. The self becomes the schizophrenic body in which there exists the possibility for finally liberating our language from the need to seek external definition. This is the most precarious of places to be. To try to prevent the word from seeking its reference is to risk losing self. However, transgression hopes to discover the identity of the subject, which is the identification of the sacred, without God. This can only happen through taking self to the limits of the text. The word demands interpretation, for it can only reveal its identity through a hermeneutical process. The limit of this demand is what transgression seeks to surpass, and in so doing, brings the text to its own limits. According to James Miller "madness, the dream, and erotic delirium" (143) lurks there. The language of transgression is a language that seeks its own limits in a strange suicidal scurry. According to the "Preface" there is no death, only the "place where language discovers its being at the crossing of its limits- the post-dialectical form of philosophical language"(84). Derrida's revealing comments on Bataille, in *"From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve"*,

And yet, in privileged moments that are less moments than the always rapidly sketched movements of experience; rare, discreet and light movements, without triumphant stupidity, far from public view, very close to that at which laughter laughs: close to anguish, first of all, which must not even be called the negative of laughter for fear of once more being sucked in by Hegel's discourse. And one can already foresee, in this prelude, that the impossible mediated by Bataille will always have this form: how, after having exhausted the discourse of philosophy, can one inscribe in the lexicon and syntax of a language. (*Writing and Difference*, 252-253)

sums up the essential paradox of the postmodern situation.

The main impact of Hegelian dialectical thinking was that it established the positive integrity of absolute meaning through the confrontational dichotomy with the "other." The negativity of non-sense is obliterated by the affirmativeness of sense (common sense or reason) as an obligatory stage in the legitimisation of meaning. Non-sense has to be overridden by the master narrative and should be made to serve reason for the preservation of the all-important positivity of being.

For Foucault, the dialectic of reason, in Hegel, amounts to the appropriation of the "other" (non-sense) by the commanding element (reason) in the binary. Though reason is put through tests and questions in the passage through the dialectic, its ultimate trajectory is humanism and enlightenment. The dialectic is anchored in a "progressive" and finalistic version of history and a humanistic praxis that subordinates the operation of meaning and the working of sense, in general, to anthropomorphic interests. The logic of enlightenment regulates the deployment of meaning. As a writer, engaged in capturing the interface of representation of reality and the self-representation of thought, Bataille challenges the inherent totalitarian logic of the system of representation. What he holds possible is, according to Mark C. Taylor, "profitless play," in which "the levity of comedy replaces the gravity of tragedy"(15). There is no longer surface; it has given way to a terrible and absolute depth, which can never be filled or transcended. Words never resolve themselves either to the reality of the nothingness, the finality of meaning, or to a dogma of language. However, Taylor believes

that one can stay on the surface, as long as play becomes the object of the wanderer: “In the absence of transcendence, interiority and depth give way to a labyrinthine play of surfaces. When nostalgia is gone and waiting is over, one can delight in the superficiality of appearances” (16). In this way, the text, in which the word has enmeshed itself, hiding and waiting can renew its own surface without giving into Foucault’s warning of dogma. The surface does not have to hold the weight of anything any longer. Its depth still lurks below, but like a stone skipping over the calm skin of a lake, the words may play along the surface of the text, in a celebration of eternal wandering. In this act of transgression, language finds itself at its own limit, where the depth seeks to rip open the surface. The text no longer seeks interpretation, because there is no depth to expose; there is only surface. Therefore, the text transgresses its self, for by the very nature of it being text it attempts to dive below its surface. In “Nietzsche, Freud, Marx” Foucault explains that, for Nietzsche, the interpreter must descend and be “the good excavator of the underworld” (62). Yet, for Nietzsche, the excavation reveals that there is really no depth at all. “As the world becomes more profound under our gaze, one notices that everything that exercised the profundity of man as only child’s play” (62). By bringing language to the surface through the act of transgression the writer takes language away from its incarceration within the dialectic. The paradox is that the language of the surface is actually the loss of language, insofar as language is defined by its dialectical certainty. However, the loss of language is not the destruction that the writer seeks. Rather, it is the inversion of language, a language that cannot be spoken, but experienced. “The Preface” suggests:

Perhaps this “difficulty with words” that now hampers philosophy [. . .] should not be identified with the loss of language that the closure of dialectics seems to indicate. Rather, it follows from the actual penetration of philosophical experience in language and the discovery that the experience of the limit, and the manner in which philosophy must now understand it, is realized in language and in the movement where it says what cannot be said. (86)

For Foucault, a feasible methodology capable of subverting the Hegelian dialectics and activating the disintegration of representation

ensues with the advent of postmodern literature. In "The Thought of the Outside" he relates this to an internal disturbance arising within language and a shift that puts language out of itself. As a result, the entire space of representation is appropriated by an action that apparently strikes from the outside but in actuality takes place within the most private recesses of that space. Postmodern literature is equated with the development of this transgressive writing. It brings about a radical difference to the space of representation by reconfiguring the relationship of the self with the "other". Liberated from the closure of the dialectic and stimulated by the freedom of infinite difference, postmodern literature re-inscribes disparity within identity, the universal within the singular, and the infinite within the finite. The subservience to dialectical epistemology is repealed and the production of meaning and knowledge is consummated within the larger configuration of post-dialectical differentiation.

Postmodern literature shows that the Hegelian epistemology achieves closure and actualizes its own identity through an act of conceptual difference or absolute passage into the "other." It has to create an object, a distinct "other," outside itself to institute itself as a full-fledged being. Being inscribes itself only in opposition to non-being. The self then becomes the centre and is expressed as the logos through the language it uses. Postmodern literature epitomizes the elimination of this Hegelian unified self and its passage into language. This transgressive act of writing disinters the bizarre intimacy that exists between the self and the word and is, in turn, instrumental in engineering the rupture of the self.

Hegelian dialectics legitimises the dialectical transaction between the personal and the impersonal, between absolute reason and absolute madness. It is privileged by the concepts of reason and representational language. Derrida calls the kind of writing based on dialectical epistemology "minor writing" which, according to him, puts forth conceptual difference in accordance with the laws of organic representation. Diametrically opposite of this restricted writing, but appropriating and exceeding it, is the practice of "major writing" (257-258) which could be equated with postmodern literature. Major writing

tries to eschew the strictures of conceptual difference and embraces the more democratic course of the real difference.

According to Derrida, otherness is recognized and mastered and the possibility of self-presence based on the model of the same established, in Hegel's narrative, through "the work of the dialectic" (265). The phenomenological framework of identity thus produced promises the system of representation the endless retrieval of self-presence at all the points of its progression towards infinity. Here, writing is involved in the recovery and perpetuation of a space that has always already been written. At the same time, writing is also enslaved to this model in that it is forced to function as the transparent medium of an essence that has already been constituted prior to it. In this metaphysical model, writing misses the immanence of truth and reality, as they had been constituted before its inception. Thought relegates writing to a secondary status so that the possibility of self-presence and infinite self-representation are ensured. Vast regions of what is not thought continue to be conceptually filled with thought's own expanding self-understanding. All future representations are thus predictable and could be replicated. Their meaning could be ascertained and their contents made to function independently of their form.

Western thought had to objectify itself as a fixed and tenable object to bridge the gap between thought and its expression and to be adequate to its own self-representation as the subject. It is thus involved in an act of exteriorisation mediated through inscription. In order to actualise itself it has to know and represent itself. This operation demands the process of differentiation. Thought should be able to identify and fix its own difference in opposition to what it is not. The Hegelian dialectic of absence and presence is at work here, immanence or presence being affirmed by a negating absence. Such a positive inscription of thought requires minor writing which functions dialectically and has the ability to trace conceptual self-difference all the while erasing the non-self. The result of this operation is the subject-object dyad. The act of "minor" writing constitutes a certain dialectical relation with alterity and negativity that allows it to reassert its positive identity in the confrontation with the "other."

Self-perception is rooted in the operation of inscription. But in minor writing, any mediating inscription is immediately erased or relegated to a secondary status because self-consciousness and self-presence demands the graphic identification and the perfect reproduction of the self by itself. In other words, there should be an unproblematic and spontaneous passage of the self into its sign.

Hegelian dialectics also stands for the negotiation of the act of representation through the process of self-difference and the ostensible negativity of the 'other'. It eventually seeks to link this practise to a certain back grounding of language. This dialectical economy, designed to preserve self-identity through negativity, is in fact restricted and countermanded by a post Hegelian movement whose paradoxical logic questions the internal distinctiveness of thought and jeopardizes self-identification and organic representation. The defeat of the language of dialectics and the phenomenological model of universal knowing that it proposes lead to the emergence of multiplicities that resist attempts at taming by representation. This in short is the theoretical basis of the narrative act of transgression, which postmodern artists like Bataille perform.

It is the moment when the neat contours of what we had taken for granted as concrete and recognisable start melting and begin multiplying on themselves. It is a moment when ignorance and humility etches the sign of 'otherness' permanently on the palimpsest of identity.

Works Cited

- Allison B. David, Mark S. Roberts, and Allen S. Weiss. Eds. *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Habermas, Jurgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998.
- Derrida, Jaques. "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve." in Jacques Derrida. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge, 1997, 251-277.
- Docker, John. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

- Foucault, Michael. "A Preface to Transgression." *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Trans. Robert Hurley and others. Ed. James D. Faubion. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1998. 69-87.
- . "The Thought of the Outside." *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Trans. Robert Hurley and others. Ed. James D. Faubion. London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1994. 148-169.
- . "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx." *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*. Trans. Alan D. Schrift. Ed. Gayle Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. 53—78.
- Guerlac, Suzanne. *Literary Polemics: Bataille, Sartre, Valéry, Breton*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Lyotard, Jean Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington. Oxford: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- Richardson, Michael. *Georges Bataille*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Miller, James. *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Doubleday, 1993.
- Stoekl, Allan. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.
- Taylor, Mark C. Erring. *A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Depending on the Oppressive “Saviour” : Jelinek’s *Women as Lovers* as a Derision of Women’s Submission to Patriarchy

Ramesh K. G.

Mighty ideological tools of the colonizers kept the colonized under the colonial spell for centuries. The postcolonial age beheld the undermining of those colonial ideologies by theorists like Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward W. Said and Stephen Slemon. Colonization was actually motivated by the desire of the West for extra-living spaces and the extraction of riches. Looting the colonized spaces by dominating the native indigenous people was their actual agenda. But they covered it within the showy ideological mask of their nurturing and civilizing mission. Really, they were oppressors in the guise of saviours. Asserting the supremacy of the colonizing culture and perspective, they constructed Europe’s others as inferior, disordered, irrational and primitive beings dipped in barbarism and dominated them for centuries. But the domination of men over women has a far more extensive history. Centuries before the establishment of European colonies men conquered and colonized female consciousness by debauching it with patriarchal ideologies. The rise of the Feminist movement was to decolonize the female psyche by dethroning the patriarchal values. But majority of women are still following the bad faith and live within the patriarchal ideologies as members of the “weaker sex” depending entirely upon men. For them men are their saviours. Such women lose a lot because of this dependence. Simone de Beauvoir says:

Man-the-sovereign will provide woman-the-liege with material protection and will undertake the moral justification of her existence; thus she can evade at once both economic risk and the metaphysical risk of a liberty in which ends and aims must be contrived without assistance. . . . Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of

reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the *Other* (9).

Thus, women who depend entirely on men usually get marginalized without liberty and they often lose their status as separate subjects. 2004 Nobel Prize winner, Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek's *Women as Lovers* takes a scornful look both at those women who like to become the other of men and at the system that moulded them so.

In *Women as Lovers* Jelinek adopts a surprisingly original writing style where all conventions slip away. She never indents the first words of her paragraphs from the left margin and is not ready to stick on to the tradition of using capital letters to initiate paragraphs, sentences or names. She uses capital letters only occasionally to stress some words or ideas. By breaking conventions, she tries to denude the absurdity of them because they have no role in conveying the meaning.

Women as Lovers portrays the endeavours of two women – brigitte and paula – to attain a better future. Quite paradoxically, they see their future not in themselves but in their insensitive “lovers” – heinz and erich respectively. Their self-negating attempts to acquire the attentions of heinz and erich are mocked without pity.

brigitte works in a textile factory, where she sews brassieres. But she has no sense of duty and considers her work a burden. She “loves” heinz, an electrician, and dreams that he will liberate her from the sewing machine. She wants to become a parasite because she has no faith in herself. The narrator mocks: “brigitte wants to have her future made. she cannot produce it herself” (Jelinek 8). Born and brought up in a patriarchal society she has been trained to see her future in a man: “in this special case life is called heinz. real life is not only called heinz, it is heinz” (Jelinek 6). She has no choice but only heinz. What disturbs her most is the thought that, unlike her, he has enough options to choose from. She terribly fears losing him to someone else and without any sense of honour always pursues him like a shadow. Thus brigitte's life is no more at her hands. The narrator says:

it is left completely to chance, whether brigitte lives, with heinz, or escapes life and goes to waste.

there are no rules for that. fate decides brigitte's fate. it's not what she does and is that counts, what counts is heinz and what he does and is. (Jelinek 6-7)

This over dependence is a blind submission to patriarchy and ultimately to slavery. It's worth mocking and that is what Jelinek does.

Serving heinz, brigitte is always behind him. But he knows all the privileges of being a member of the "superior sex" and is often quite indifferent to her concern for him. But it is worth mentioning that he is never indifferent to her body. "Female sexuality," says Luce Irigaray, "has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters"(350). Quite obviously those masculine notions of female sexuality privilege only the sexual needs of men. Irigaray says:

Woman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role, by proxy, is possible, even certain. But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants. (Irigaray 351)

In *Women as Lovers*, the relationship between heinz and brigitte demonstrates Irigaray's ideas. brigitte is only a passive receptacle of heinz's active sexual feelings:

heinz is happy at last to have found a person to rut. hardly has heinz set eyes on the person brigitte, than he's unbuttoning himself and going into the starting position. while brigitte is still explaining to him that she loves him, and at the same time feels something like respect for his professional success, while brigitte is still letting her thoughts wander from love and respect to wedding and house renovation, before she even has time to watch out, she already has heinz the rutter clinging to her body like a leech.

and heinz operates his pump handle diligently. (Jelinek 62)

From the description it is quite clear that brigitte enjoys neither love, nor pleasure. She can fulminate and liberate herself from this doomed state. But she does absolutely nothing, since she sees her future in him. Jelinek is full of disdain.

Later, susi, a grammar school girl intrudes into the world of heinz and brigitte. She is more beautiful, educated and rich. So heinz and his parents begin to prefer susi. But brigitte continues to stick on because he is her future. She becomes a burden for heinz and he even beats her. But she takes it all as part of the game and desperately wants to get impregnated by him so that he will not avoid her. After a lot of tiresome attempts she becomes pregnant. Soon heinz recognizes that susi considers him just a time pass and then accepts brigitte as his wife. heinz develops into a first class businessman and brigitte sells electrical appliances in his shop. She is quite happy with the triple burden that she bears as woman, mother and businesswoman.

paula is a fifteen year old girl who lives in the country. As usual, her family is highly patriarchal. Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* says: "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror of and a connection with a larger society; a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole" (33). In the novel Jelinek often aggress into the patriarchal institution called family to prove that it is the chief ideological space in which the members of the younger generation of the "second sex" are trained to accept and to adapt to their "inferior" gender roles. It is quite strange that mothers are usually in alliance with patriarchy to force their daughters to internalize the socialized gender roles. They inculcate patriarchal values in girls and gift their miserable state to their daughters as a legacy. In the novel paula's mother is a mere tool of patriarchy; a propagator of its ideologies. When paula expresses her intention to learn dressmaking, her mother tries to tame her to remain within the system and persuades her to renounce herself for the service of the "prime sex." paula's mother says:

when my dada was still alive, i slaved for him, and then i went on slaving for your dada and for gerald, and now that you're old

enough to slave with me, you suddenly don't want to any more but learn the clean trade of dressmaking instead. why and for what have i slaved all my life, if not for dada and gerald, and now when you could at last slave with me, you don't want to. you can put it out of your head! before dada and gerald put it out of your head for you. i'll tell dada and gerald right now. right now! (Jelinek 18)

Because of this allegiance with patriarchy Jelinek's mother figures often get an unfavourable shade. In spite of her mother's protest paula insists to learn dressmaking. Initially her father too is against her intention. But her continuous efforts meet with success and she gets permission to learn dressmaking.

But paula's initial enthusiasm towards dressmaking abruptly stopped when she begins to dream of love. Soon the readers recognize that she too is not untouched by the patriarchal ideologies. Like majority of the girls in her village, she also invests all hope in her future man. But seeing one's future in someone else is an adventure.

paula was "fortunate" enough to find her future soon in a handsome woodcutter, erich. For her, life is no more work alone; it is "love" too. The narrator says: "all that matters is that love has come at last, and that it hasn't come to an ugly, worn out, drunken, exhausted, vulgar common woodcutter and her; but to a handsome, worn out, drunken, strong, vulgar, common woodcutter and her" (Jelinek 42). This account on erich by the narrator is quite proleptic, because it eloquently predicts paula's future. paula is blindly in love. Once she preferred dressmaking to house work. Now she prefers erich to dressmaking. She is often behind erich to get his attention and love. But he is quite insensitive to her love because he has a lot of girls around him. The narrator mocks: "if erich could choose between paula and a motor cycle, he would take the motor cycle" (Jelinek 47). paula continues with her attempts and one day, inside an old barn, she gets erich's body but not love. Jelinek is unable to provide the readers with a romantic account of the love scene because there was nothing called love. "we have not described the love between erich and paula, because it wasn't there. it was like a hole into which one stumbles, and after which one hobbles away again. nothing is broken, except a human creature in the

bloom of her youth” (Jelinek 109-110). paula expected love, but witnessed only lust. For erich, paula is just a heap of flesh; an object of pleasure. She is mere sex. Simone de Beauvoir says: “And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called “the sex,” by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex – absolute sex, no less” (5).

paula becomes pregnant and soon a scapegoat. The entire society starts despising her. The anger of her parents has no bounds and there is no unmarked spot on her body. erich and his parents reject all her requests to marry her. “love can move mountains, but not erich” (140). Then Jelinek makes the readers witness the double standard with which society measure man and woman. Wherever paula goes, she is an object of contempt. Many even throw stones upon her. But none hates erich. Instead, he gets a better treatment.

until now no one has really taken erich as being all there. now he’s given paula a fat stomach, and suddenly he’s accepted as all there. previously everyone just thought erich too dopey, too stupid, to have the skirts off the summer visitors, too weak in the head, to get his driving license even at the third attempt, too feeble-minded and weak to hit the tree trunk with the axe. . . . now everyone pays erich their respects with regard to cracking paula. (Jelinek 144)

Thus there are boundaries, but only for women.

paula gives birth to a girl. Her town aunt makes a visit and she speaks with erich and softens him. Finally he agrees to marry paula. After the marriage paula begets one more child. But erich is not a committed husband. He continues his drinking habit. “. . . erich likes his wine better than any woman ha ha” (Jelinek 177). Their family life is full of dissensions. erich is an utter failure both as a husband and as a father. When he fails to fulfil her dreams, paula falls into prostitution. Society’s ever watching eyes trace it out and erich divorces her. paula’s social status breaks once again into pieces. However, erich gets a new girl friend very soon because being a man means being stainless. paula’s condition is pathetic.

the girl in the first year of her dressmaking apprenticeship, who was full of hope, has become a broken woman with inadequate dressmaking skills.

that is too little. (Jelinek 89)

paula married and ruined. Now once again she thinks about a job and turns a semi-skilled worker in an underwear factory, where brigitte was a worker earlier.

From the conventional patriarchal point of view brigitte is a success and paula, a failure. But from a more radical feminist perspective, the situations of both paula and brigitte are not that pleasing. brigitte is a slave of the patriarchal system and her so called "better" state is a gift of the chance.

brigitte invested a lot, all the resources of her body and mind.

paula invested a lot, all the resources of her body and mind.

brigitte finds happiness and success.

paula does not find happiness and success.

brigitte's happiness depends on chance, which smiles on her.

paula's happiness depends on chance, which does not smile on her.
(Jelinek 169)

By telling the stories of brigitte and paula Jelinek attempts to convey how doomed is the state of women who depend entirely on men. But she often makes it clear that women can easily transcend this pitiable state of dependence by self-recognition and self-respect.

It's a fact that centuries of male domination has turned, at least some, women passive and subjugating. The patriarchal institutions and customs often persuade women to abandon themselves to despair by teaching them, from childhood, how to become shadows, when they could create shadows themselves. The differentiating characteristics associated with each of the genders are not innate or natural but culturally constructed in favour of men who produced and propagated them. Felman says: "From her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development, the social role assigned to the woman is that

of *servicing* an image, authoritative and central, of man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter/a mother/ a wife” (6-7). Really, centuries of male domination enabled men to invade all cultural and socio-political discourses and institutions to enshrine patriarchal ideologies everywhere. Therefore it is quite hard for ordinary women to defy the inherited patriarchal lessons. Jelinek’s paula and brigitte are representatives of such ideologically charged women. They lost their identities by deificating and depending men. By depicting and despising their pitiable state Jelinek tries to convey how necessary it is to unlearn the ideological lessons of the oppressive saviours because as Cixous says: “The future must no longer be determined by the past” (334).

Work Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone de. From *The Second Sex. Key Concepts in Critical Theory: Gender*. Ed. Carol C. Gould. New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997. 3-15.
- Cixous, Helene. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993. 334-349.
- Felman, Shoshana. “Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy.” *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993. 6-19.
- Irigaray, Luce. “This Sex Which Is Not One.” *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993. 350-356.
- Jelinek, Elfriede. *women as lovers*. Trans. Martin Chalmers. London: Serpents’ Tail, 1994.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. 1970. London: Virago, 1991.

Noli Me Tangere **The Mystery of Mary Magdalene**

Sonia Paul

Noli me tangere (Latin) translated “*don't touch me*”, is the name given to most of the famous paintings of Jesus Christ's resurrection. The painting depicts the appearance of the resurrected Christ to Mary Magdalene in the garden as described in John Chapter 20. Mary Magdalene goes to the tomb with spices and ointment to anoint the body of Jesus on the third day, as was the Jewish custom. She finds the tomb empty, and fearing the worst, begins to weep. She is then bestowed with the privilege of beholding the first appearance of the risen Christ, but she mistakes him for the gardener and asks him whether he knows where the body of Jesus is. Jesus calls her by her name “Mary,” and there is instinctive recognition when she responds “Rabboni.” The Gospel further states that Jesus stops her from reaching out and touching him, with the words,

Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God (V.17).

This is the scene that has been immortalized in the *Noli me Tangere* paintings. We see Mary Magdalene with her hands outstretched to touch the resurrected Christ, who delicately sidesteps the extended hand, and moves away in his whirling clothes, a tender look of admonition on the peaceful face. These images adorn countless galleries across the world.

Not any less fascinating and intriguing than these paintings have been the numerous interpretations of the character Mary Magdalene in literature, which this paper sets out to explore.

The Bible presents Mary Magdalene as a woman out of whom Jesus has driven out seven demons, and as one of the first witnesses of the miracle of resurrection. The body of myth that has subsequently evolved

around the figure of Mary Magdalene through the centuries has proclaimed her “the Apostle to the Apostles,” and the repentant prostitute. Writers of fiction have gone one step further and have amalgamated all these images to depict her as a morally depraved woman whose life is transformed after she meets Jesus, and have even suggested she could be the consort of Jesus.

As Susan Haskins states in *Mary Magdalen — Myth and Metaphor*, “The predominant image we have of her is of a beautiful woman with long golden hair, weeping for her sins, the very incarnation of the age-old equation between feminine beauty, sexuality and sin” (3). Haskins finds that the brief references in the gospels converge on four points: (a) Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus Christ’s followers, (b) she was present at the crucifixion, (c) she was a witness of the resurrection, and (d) she was assigned to proclaim the Christian message, and brought the knowledge that Jesus Christ’s triumph over death signifies that “life everlasting was offered to all those who believe” (4).

Examining the little we know about Mary Magdalene against the backdrop of our knowledge of Jewish social life and customs, two points draw our attention. One, unlike the other women who are mentioned in the Bible, Mary Magdalene is not known by the name of a man, but of a place – “Magdala.” Magdala was a village on the western shore of the Lake of Galilee. It was known for its fish drying and pickling industry, and was acclaimed as such even in the Roman Empire, which was not a mean achievement. That Mary came to be referred to as ‘of Magdala’ maybe suggestive of her important role in Jesus’ ministry. Ingrid Maisch has remarked that Mary’s origins in Magdala could have contributed to her developing a strong personality, and she could have been influenced by Hellenism to such an extent that she consciously chose to move down to a different social milieu. “A beatitude for the poor does not emanate from below, but always from those who deliberately enter into solidarity with the poor” (5).

The second point is that she is portrayed as a woman from whom Jesus has driven out seven demons. Demonic possession caused sickness and deprived people of the ability to control their lives. Sociological and psychological causes have been attributed for the phenomenon.

The exponents of the sociological cause explained demonic possession as an affliction, which affected the members of the middle class who faced the prospect of a downward social mobility, brought on by fluctuating financial fortune. These people sought refuge in their illness. The psychological cause suggests that when individuals were incapable of dealing with their inner psychic conflicts, they fall prey to symptoms suggestive of demonic possession.

It was only in the nineteenth century that interpreters started analyzing the possibility of a psychological cause behind Mary Magdalene's mental condition. Haskins observes that it is possible that Mary's association with Magdala "destroyed in AD 75 because of its infamy and the licentious behavior of its inhabitants – may have helped later to color the name and reputation of Mary Magdalene herself" (15).

The first misreading about Mary Magdalene occurred because the Gospel of Luke mentions the story of a sinner in the city immediately before mentioning Mary Magdalene. In Chapter 7, Luke speaks about Jesus' ministry in Capernaum and Nain, and the many miracles he performed therein. At the house of Simon the Pharisee, where Jesus was invited for a meal, "a woman in the city, which was a sinner," (v. 37) apparently a prostitute, washes Jesus' feet with her tears, wipes them dry with her hair, kisses his feet, and anoints them with ointment (83). Sensing that his host was discomfited by his not having reprimanded the sinful woman for her audacity, Jesus draws on the parable of a creditor and two debtors, and proceeds to tell Simon that the woman had loved much and hence her many sins were forgiven. It is immediately after this that Mary Magdalene is introduced as a follower of Christ in Chapter 8: 2–3,

And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance. (84)

The proximity of these two references has played a key role in portraying Mary Magdalene as the sinner, whose seven devils were the devils of immorality and sexual sin.

With the discovery of the Coptic Gnostic library in the desert near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in December 1945, the Magdalene question got a new perspective. The texts copied from Greek originals, and dating back to the second half of the first century, are contemporary to the New Testament. Some of these texts were known as the gospels and their authorship is attributed to the disciples of Jesus. Mary Magdalene too has a gospel in her name – The Gospel of Mary.

Texts like the Dialogue of the Saviour, the Gospel of Mary, and the Gospel of Thomas also highlight her prominence as a disciple, mediator and messenger of esoteric revelations. It is the Gospel of Philip that suggests that Mary Magdalene was the most important of the women with Jesus and the one who was called “his companion.” As translated by Meyer, there is a part in the text suggestively titled “Wisdom and Mary Magdalene,” which proceeds thus:

The companion of the [savior] is Mary Magdalene. The [savior loved] her more than [all] the disciples, [and he] kissed her often on her [mouth].

The other [disciples] ... said to him, “Why do you love her more than all of us?”

The savior answered and said to them, “Why do I not love you like her? If a blind person and one who can see are both in darkness, they are the same. When the light comes, one who can see will see the light, and the blind person will stay in darkness.” (49)

Though Jesus’ relationship with Mary Magdalene can be seen as a perfect spiritual union, which is symbolic of Christ’s love for the Church, the Gnostic interpretation has paved the way for many radical and controversial interpretations of the role of Mary Magdalene in the life of Jesus. Her position in the history of the early church has also been debated, wherein Peter’s rivalry towards her has been pointed out as a crucial factor in removing her from all leadership power and her subsequent complete absence from all the records tracing the evolution and growth of the Church.

This theme has been developed into a work of fiction by Marianne Fredriksson, in her novel *According to Mary Magdalene* (1990). The novel is the story of Mary Magdalene's attempts to spread the teachings of Christ on her own when she comes to know that Peter and Paul are distorting the teachings of Christ to serve their own purposes. The novel became extremely popular.

In the "Pistis Sophia," Jesus is depicted as having stated that his twelve disciples are not of the evil earthly cosmos, but are twelve powers belonging to the treasury of light, whom he himself had placed in the wombs of women. They were thus coming from the Sphere of the Redeemer, which made them capable of saving the world. This group consists of eight males and four females, and Mary Magdalene is one among these. It is thus evident that Mary Magdalene enjoyed a very high position in the Gnostic tradition. The reason for this, Ingrid Maisch says, could be that she was acknowledged even by Jesus as a woman who was filled with the spirit, thereby blessed, and an inheritor of the whole Kingdom of light.

Ki Longfellow's 2005 novel *The Secret Magdalene* echoes the Gnostic tradition and presents Mary Magdalene as a woman of unparalleled wisdom who was also Jesus' companion.

In 591 A.D., Pope Gregory the Great unified the various images of Mary appearing in the New Testament, and delivered this unified image in a sermon in Rome. Thus, the woman in the city who washes Jesus' feet with her tears in the house of Simon the Pharisee, becomes his follower, remains by his side during the crucifixion even when the male disciples run away in fear, goes to the tomb early on the third day with the ointment and spices, is blessed with the first vision of the risen Christ, and is assigned the task of announcing the joyous news of the resurrection to the disciples.

The motive behind Pope Gregory's attempt to unify the images could have been to present the possibility of salvation to penitents, but the consequence of this attempt was the first biography of Magdalene. The Middle Ages was an era of "noble saints." The saints of this age were of noble birth, the emphasis being on the fact that their aristocratic

origins had not prevented them from leading pious lives. It was Odo of Cluny in the tenth century who suggested Magdalene was a descendant of nobility (Maisch 46). This detail too went into her biography that was gradually taking shape.

Mary Magdalene was therein portrayed as the daughter of an aristocratic family, having for her parents Syrus and Eucharia. Two reasons were cited for her lapse into sin. One was that the combination of unparalleled physical beauty and financial fortune paved the way to her life of profligacy. The second reason attributed for her sin was that she was the bride of the wedding at Cana, who was deserted by her groom, John the Evangelist, to follow Jesus, after Jesus miraculously turns six jars of water into wine, at his mother's request. She avenges the insult to her honor by giving into a sinful life.

In literature, the initial inclination of all those who attempted to work on the image of Mary Magdalene, was to portray her as a woman who openly flaunted her sexuality, and reveled in it. The mid-eighteenth century, Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock poetical piece "*Messiah*" stays faithful to the Biblical interpretation of Mary Magdalene; she is shown to be a confident woman, who possesses undeterred faith. She holds an important position among Jesus' disciples. Her sins are not mentioned, but she is depicted as a forgiven sinner (Maisch 88 – 92).

Clemens Brentano's *Life of Jesus* published posthumously between 1858 and 1860, works with the medieval interpretation to a certain extent. Mary Magdalene is of noble lineage, and she is beautiful. Possessed by devils, she sinks into a life of prostitution. Her conversion is shown as a physically and emotionally torturous process, because Satan torments her all the more strongly when he realizes that he may lose his control over her. The work is primarily a study of the behavior and emotions, and is noteworthy in that Brentano portrays many women who were cured of evil spirits by Jesus, in place of the few mentioned in the Bible (Maisch 95 – 103).

A significant dramatized version of Mary Magdalene's life was produced by the Nobel Laureate Paul Heyse in 1899, – *Maria von Magdala*. In his drama, Heyse presents Mary Magdalene as a noble

courtesan. Judas is shown as her lover. She has another admirer in Roman Flavius. When she hears of the holy man from Nazareth, who had never touched a woman, her curiosity is piqued, and she immediately senses an overwhelming attraction towards him. The high priest tries to enlist her services to seduce Jesus and thereby expose his “hypocrisy” and bring down his popularity with the masses.

Mary Magdalene meets Jesus in the midst of a crowd, when she is being accused of being a whore, and the words of Jesus rescue her from being stoned to death. This brings about her transformation. But her transformation makes Judas ally himself with the Romans.

When Jesus is arrested, Magdalene is again caught in the trap of temptation. Roman Flavius offers to release Jesus if Magdalene submits to him, while Judas offers her only two alternatives – either flee with him or die at his hands. She contemplates the course of action, and decides to give in to Flavius if that will procure Jesus’ release, and then die at Judas’ hands. But at the critical hour she does not open her door to Flavius, thereby overcoming the lure of sin. After Jesus is crucified, Magdalene is depicted as a mad woman. But when she hears that Jesus had spoken of a return from death, she is again transformed. The play closes with Magdalene leading the faithful in adoring God (Maisch 119 – 122).

A Magdalene novel, which won fame in the beginning of the twentieth century, is Anna Freiin Von Krane’s *Magna Peccatrix*, published in 1908. The novel presents Magdalene as the mistress of the Roman legate Proculus. Educated in the arts and enjoying the luxuries of a worldly life, she is transformed when Jesus glances at her one day while he passes by her house. She gives up the life amidst riches and even rejects an offer of marriage and becomes a follower and disciple of Christ.

The twentieth century has witnessed books like *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, published in 1982 which have set off sparks of controversy by suggesting that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and she is the Holy Grail – that is, the vessel which contains the blood of Christ. The proponents of this story claim that the descendants of Jesus, the Merovingians, are

waiting for the time when they may reconstruct the kingdom of God on earth (Maisch 163). The 2003 Dan Brown novel *The Da Vinci Code*, created a furor in academic and religious circles, by suggesting that Jesus and Mary had been man and wife.

The mystique of Magdalene is incomplete without a mention of Nikos Kazantzakis' 1951 novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which became highly controversial after Martin Scorsese's cinematic reproduction of the same in 1988. The storyline implies that Jesus and Magdalene grew up together, and they shared an intimate relationship, which in due course would have culminated in marriage, had not Jesus realized and responded to God's divine plan for his life. The result of Jesus responding to his vocation is Mary Magdalene's descent into prostitution. Jesus redeems her and she accompanies him in his travels, tending to him as a disciple. Their love is never consummated, because as the Messiah, Jesus' love is for the whole world and there's no place for an individual woman in his life. She is ultimately stoned to death.

Luise Rinser's 1983 novel *Mirjam*, tells the Jesus story from the perspective of Magdalene. The Miriam of the novel is not ill nor has she committed any sexual sin, she has merely rejected the female stereotype role allotted to her. Her encounter with Jesus transforms her, and she is the only one who really understands him. He derives strength from her as he goes to his death, and in turn he strengthens her so that she may strengthen the others. She spreads the message of Jesus and is persecuted by Paul, and finally she escapes across the sea (Maisch 170 – 172).

In Margaret George's *Mary Called Magdalene* published in 2003, Mary is the daughter of a successful fish processor, and is raised in a religiously observant family in the town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee. The demon, in the form of an ivory idol she discovers, begins speaking to her and then possesses her. Through marriage and motherhood, the demons haunting her persist and multiply, forcing her to leave her family and seek a cure. Just as she is fighting a losing battle with the demons, she meets Jesus, and he commands the evil spirits to leave her, and through this healing she is initiated as his disciple. She is rejected by her family on her return.

The novel portrays Mary as a spiritual seeker, whose longing for her estranged daughter and desire for Jesus' love as a man, adds to her misery and suffering. Her gift of prophesy, coupled with her closeness to Jesus, provokes the hostility of the other disciples. Significantly enough, George has also crafted yet another image of Mary Magdalene in her novel, namely that of a lonely woman who would gladly give up her gift of prophecy and her special relationship with Jesus if she could be the wife and mother she yearns to be.

After Jesus is crucified, resurrected, and has ascended to heaven, Mary and the other disciples are left to spread the message, which they set out to do in their own ways. *Mary Called Magdalene* examines various themes ranging from the conflict between romantic love and love of God to the role of suffering in the catharsis of the heart.

Internationally renowned inspirational author and speaker Deepak Chopra's *Jesus: a Story of Enlightenment*, published in 2008, reverts to the stereotyped picture of Mary Magdalene. Exploring the lost years of Jesus' life, i.e. between 12 and 30 years, Chopra weaves a story pivoting on religious, cultural and political threads. Mary is once again painted as the seductress; she tends to Jesus out of her own means, but she wavers between a sensual life and a life of austere spiritual awakening, and is pictured as more often than not, failing and giving in to her depravity. Since the novel fictionally delineates only the lost years, it is not relevant to speculate how the character may have further evolved. But the mould is the same – "frailty, thy name is woman".

At one glimpse, it would seem that a few male authors have pandered to the predominant tendency to equate Mary Magdalene with the sinner of the city, and female authors have been more kind. In the words of Ingrid Maisch,

We owe it to the patience and persistence of feminist authors that gradually the many layers of over painting are being removed and another image laid bare: the healed woman, the disciple, the apostolic witness. (176)

For instance, we notice that Kazantzakis's conception of Magdalene is as an embodiment of the kind of woman to whom men are magically

attracted, but yet despised. “Her love means heaven and hell, despair and consolation; it bewitches and delights” (Maisch 169). On the other hand, Magna Peccatrix adopts a very definite stand on the “woman question” by taking “a position on contemporary questions such as the right of self-determination, the right to think for oneself, and the right to have one’s own opinion” (Maisch 125). *Mary Called Magdalene*, holds out a very important message for the feminist perspective – the need for a woman to ask herself two questions, – “Who are you, if you put away your father, your husband, and your children?”, and “What can you do?”, which will help her to know herself, discover what she is, and develop a reverence for herself.

However, the essence of this mysterious woman is still out of our reach, though it bewitchingly echoes *noli me tangere*. It is this elusive nature of veracity that haunts our imagination and gives birth to literature and art.

Works Cited

- Bucar, Donna. “Mary Magdalene – The Wild Woman of the Bible.” About.com. 24 July 2005 <<http://altreligion.about.com>>
- Chopra, Deepak. *Jesus: A Story of Enlightenment*. New York: Harper One, 2008.
- Editorial Reviews - *Mary Called Magdalene*. Amazon.com. 25 July 2005 <http://www.amazon.com>
- Editorial Reviews – *The Secret Magdalene*. Que Pasa Magazine. 25 January 2010 <http://www.theseecretmagdalene.com>
- Harper’s Bible Dictionary*. Ed. Paul J. Achtemeier. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996.
- Haskins, Susan. *Mary Magdalen – Myth and Metaphor*. Connecticut: Konecky & Konecky, 1993.
- Jesus and His Times*. Ed. Kaari Vard. New York: Reader’s Digest Association Inc., 1987.
- King, Karen L. *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*. California: Polebridge Press, 2003.

Maisch, Ingrid. *Mary Magdalene, The Image of a Woman through the Centuries*. Trans. Linda M. Maloney. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998.

Starbird, Margaret. *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar*. Vermont: Bear & Company, 1993.

The Bible, Authorized King James Version. Eds. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. London: Oxford UP, 1997.

The Gospels of Mary. Ed. Marvin Meyer. New York: Harper Collins, 2004.

Globalised Islam and Neofundamentalism: A Reading of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Jisha John

Globalised Islam refers to the way in which the relationship of Muslims to Islam is reshaped by globalisation, westernisation and the impact of living as a minority. It refers to an Islamic revival or re-islamisation in a globalised context. It does not refer to the theological content of the Islamic religion, but the way the believers explain their behaviours in a context where religion has lost its social authority. The participants of this process are the global Muslims either settled permanently in non-Muslim countries or those who try to distance themselves from a given Muslim culture and stress their belonging to a universal Muslim community.

One third of the world's Muslims now live as members of a minority through increased migration and population flows as a consequence of conquests, trade and conversions. While the old minorities had time to build their own culture or to share the dominant culture (Tartars, Indian Muslims and the Chinese Hui), Muslims in recently settled minorities have to reinvent what makes them Muslims due to the lack of a common cultural or linguistic heritage. Contemporary globalisation for the immigrant Muslim community is a mass phenomenon where the deterritorialisation experience calls for a reflection on what it means to be a Muslim living in a minority. This has led to a quest for definition since Islam is no longer embedded in territorial cultures. The thrust is on the deterritorialisation experience of the immigrant minority shaped by Western cultural norms and social standards, and the emergent religiosity in the form of a culturally detached Islam.

Globalised Islam has given rise to a new phenomena gaining ground among the second and the third generation Muslim immigrants in the West which Olivier Roy, the social theoretician, terms "neofundamentalism" (Roy 1), a radical movement striving to establish an imaginary "ummah" (Roy 1) or Muslim community transcending

notions of ethnic culture and territory. Living as a minority means experiencing Islam only as a religion unsupported by any social authority. Therefore fulfilling religious obligations depend on the goodwill of the believer and not on any external cultural pressure or a state's legal system. The problem of reconciling the self with religion in a globalised context calls for new forms of religiosity manifested in what Roy calls neofundamentalism (Roy 1).

The basic tenets of neofundamentalism: individuation, the quest for self-realisation, the rethinking of Islam outside the framework of a given culture and the recasting of the Muslim community in non-territorial terms, can be viewed as resulting from the impact of globalisation on Islam. As a mode of survival in the globalised world, neofundamentalism calls for a return to the basic tenets of Islam. One might wonder why "neofundamentalism" has "neo" as its affix since the call for a return to the basic Islamic tenets is not new. Rejection of sectarian affiliations in favour of a strict return to the Koran has been a perennial feature of fundamentalism. But as Roy points out, in neofundamentalism, there are some new elements that make a difference. The deterritorialisation experience is the central concept and neofundamentalism significantly addresses westernisation that lies at the core and no longer at the frontiers of Islam. The dilution of the pristine culture where religion was embedded in a given society, the absence of religious authorities who could define the norms of Islam and the impossibility of any form of legal, social or cultural coercion can be reflected in the new religiosity created by neofundamentalism. It includes a range of practices involving makeshift compromises, personal construction of attitudes, casual use of various levels of self identity and the use of liberal rationalization while borrowing from the Hadith or the Koran. The using of two languages, travelling by air, studying, training and working in different countries across the world, and communicating through the internet and cellular phones, the neofundamentalists consider themselves as global Muslims and not citizens of a particular country.

Focusing on the British Bangladeshi writer Monica Ali's debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003), the paper explores how neofundamentalism has been gaining ground in Britain, especially among the second and the third

generation Muslim community. The novel which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize, and which made Ali, Granta's Best Young British Novelist, chronicles the life of Nazneen, who at eighteen is married off to Chanu, a man double her age, to settle in Tower Hamlets, the heart of London's immigrant Bangladeshi community. The humdrum existence of Nazneen as an observant dutiful wife and concerned mother of two daughters, and the parallel tale of her rebellious sister Haseena revealed mainly through the letters the latter send from Bangladesh occupy the major part of the novel. However, the significance of the novel to a great extent depend on Ali's portrayal of the escalating social tensions between the white and the Muslim community represented by Nazneen's lover Karim, an Islamic radical and his men. Ali focuses on newer ways in which tradition is re-imagined and reproduced by globalisation as much as it is challenged or encroached upon by it. This allows us for an understanding of the deterritorialised nature of contemporary Islamic identities and the drift towards neofundamentalism where ethnicity and religion are marshaled to form new categories in imaginary terms based on a performative definition: we are what we say we are, or what others say we are.

In the novel, Nazneen's lover Karim is a second generation Bangladeshi Muslim immigrant who acts as a middleman bringing clothes to Nazneen for repair from his uncle's garment factory. Ali depicts him as a young man with revolutionary dreams who strives to direct the immigrant Muslim youth towards strict Islamic traditions. He is the charismatic leader of the revolutionary Islamic group, Bengal Tigers, which aims at protecting Muslim rights and culture and supporting the global Islamic community. The name of the group is chosen merely because the members feel that it is a powerful name and does not relate to anything Bengali. Karim can be regarded as the product of globalised Islam, the neofundamentalist, who shocks Nazneen when they first meet at her house: "It was a strange thing and it took her some time to realize it. When he spoke in Bengali he stammered. In English he found his voice and it gave him no trouble" (222).

Since neofundamentalism is based on reconstruction, it has to borrow from different elements to rebuild the life of a true Muslim.

They may resort to traditional sources (for example, the turban or the salwar kameez, whose origin had more to do with the Roman camisa) or from western sources (raincoat and gloves). Dressed casually in jeans and shirt with sleeves rolled up and white trainers and sporting a phone at his hip from a black leather holster, Karim looks every bit a westerner, quite unlike what one expects a revolutionary Islamic leader to look like. In this sense, neofundamentalism as expounded by Olivier Roy accords with the modern makeshift cultural patchwork where the social life of things depend only on the meaning bestowed on them by consumers. The religious market thus becomes part of the global market. In Brick Lane, the Bengal Tigers strike Nazneen as adhering to a dress code adaptable to any culture as is evident in the first meeting she participates:

A small man with a scabrous-looking beard grinned at her. He was drowning in a white panjabi pajama and he had a skullcap in his hands. She allowed herself to look around. Mostly young men in jeans and trainers, a few kurtas, a handful of girls in hijab. (252)

Neofundamentalism is both a product and an agent of globalisation since it embodies in itself an explicit process of deculturation. It looks at globalisation as a good opportunity to rebuild the Muslim community on a purely religious basis. In this sense it is perfectly adapted to a basic dimension of contemporary globalisation: that of turning human behaviour into codes, patterns of consumption and communication delinked from any specific culture. Neofundamentalists reject identification with a sub community, a tribe, a nation, a race or ethnic group. At the meeting of the Bengal Tigers, Karim says: “The meeting is open to all Muslims ... Every brother and every sister wherever they come from” (253).

While traditional fundamentalists are at a loss how to deal with deculturation, neofundamentalists consider deculturation as a positive factor that permits the decontextualisation of Islam. Religion is considered as a decontextualised set of norms adaptable to any society since it has severed links with a given culture and allows people to live in a deterritorialised community that includes any believer. In the novel

the Bengal Tigers include a black man passionate about bhangra music and a rock musician who prefers the sound system to attract the crowd. According to Karim:

If you wanted to be cool you had to be something else - a bit white, a bit black, a bit something. Even when it all took off, bhangra and all that, it was Punjabi, Pakistani, giving it the attitude. It weren't us, was it? If you wanted to be cool, you just couldn't be yourself (281).

In Britain neofundamentalism has attracted the second and the third generation Muslims who have broken with the pristine culture of their parents but do not feel integrated into the Western society although they have mastered its language and consumption habits. Karim rejects phone calls from his father who wants his revolutionary son to stay out of trouble. He believes that his father is too much of a pacifist who had spent twenty five years as a bus conductor in London, getting called all the names, having a tooth knocked out and taking all the cheek from kids. The only reward earned by his father was a nervous disorder because of which he had to make an early retirement. Karim tells Nazneen that his father's religion was nothing but the pills he had to consume to retain normalcy.

One of the greatest disseminators of globalisation - technology - plays a pivotal role in taking across the neofundamentalist doctrine. Mobile phones and the internet are preferred by preachers to address the largest possible audience, transcending ethnic divides and targeting the new generation of Western born Muslims. Karim gets the "salaat" alert reminding him of prayer time on his phone. He believes that the internet is the place where things really get radical. He keeps abreast of the teachings from the Koran and gets religious quotes from the Islamic websites. Since religion is a strict code of explicit and objective norms of conduct, the neofundamentalists resort to any media explaining what should be done and what is forbidden. Karim keeps a magazine titled *Are You a Good Muslim? Twenty Ways to Tell*.

Despite their shared commitment to the true tenets of Islam, the neofundamentalists are divided on the role of the spiritual leader. One faction of neofundamentalists states that the spiritual leader should be

obeyed blindly irrespective of whether he is learned enough to preach or not while the others are vehemently against this stand. In *Brick Lane* Ali brings forth the former as is evident in the election of the spiritual leader:

“Wait. Wait. One more election, Spiritual leader.” He jumped off the stage, dragged an old man from his seat and pushed him onto the platform. Nazneen saw that the old man was wearing flat, open toed sandals with a white plastic flower on the heel strap: women’s shoes. And she knew that the imam had only recently been imported. He kept wetting his lips and smiling. He had not the slightest idea what was going on. He was duly elected. (258)

What is advocated according to the neofundamentalist doctrine is total reliance on God and the belief that there is little man can achieve by himself. The insistence is on salvation consistent with the focus on the individual. Towards the close of the novel, Karim realizes that his relationship with Nazneen, a married woman will make him fall short of the glory of God if he remains unrepentant. But still there is hope: “If you were with me you’d never be able to forget what we did, when it all started. Technically yeah it was a sin. It bothered me, too. So it’s for the best. Really. Pray like hell. That’s what I am going to do” (498).

Towards the close of the novel a remarkable transformation becomes evident in the character of Karim. He feels that his gang is dying out and needs to be rejuvenated. A “mela” which includes song, dance and celebration is planned for attracting the youngsters to the Islamic outfit. However, soon the World Trade Centre in the U.S. gets attacked and the carnival gets cancelled on account of the probability of an American retaliation. Karim discards his jeans, for a Punjabi pajama, fleece, big boots and skullcap, and looks as though he is headed for the mosque. He prepares for the protest march against the Lion Hearts, a British rival outfit. The march turns violent but contrary to expectations it is not the Lion Hearts who mess it up; the chaos is created by the in-group rival factions within the Islamic outfit itself. There is no news about Karim after that.

Neofundamentalism has resulted from increased immigration, the growth of communication technologies, and the deterritorialization of

Islam - all a product of the current era of globalisation. By freeing the believer from the bonds of pristine cultures, families, tribes, social status and ethnic solidarities, neofundamentalism favours individualism, one of the basic premises of globalisation. By appealing to the youth over the heads of their parents, by favouring a direct approach to the holy text and by encouraging a personal return to the true tenets of Islam, neofundamentalists strive to construct a collection of individual born-again Muslims, a homogenous community of equals, delinked from their natural milieu and devoted to the sole aim of practicing as true Islam. The weakness and strength of such communities is that they don't exist outside free and personal choices. Norms and transgressions are two sides of the same coin; one might wonder how a norm gets enforced without an external authority. It is to be noted that according to the neofundamentalist doctrine, the implementation of norms and the responsibility of following the true path and maintaining of the integrity of the community is to be devolved to all of that community's members. If this rule gets violated then the very implementation of the doctrine gets thwarted. Towards the close of the novel, the Bengal Tigers outfit gets disbanded due to internal factionalism and its chairman flees reportedly to Bangladesh. The fleeing of Karim can be considered as an act of escape from an imaginary world or his deterritorialised existence to a real world, his country of origin, a territory he can protect.

Beyond the portrayal of the domestic world it is the depiction of the Islamic politics that makes the novel the focus of the study on neofundamentalism. Bricklane thus depicts the immigrant Bangladeshi Muslim community in *Britain* fighting to reconstruct a universal Muslim community in a globalised scenario. This community is not the product of a given culture or civilization, but of the will of individuals who experience a process of individualisation through deculturation and who explicitly and voluntarily decide to join a new community based on the tenets of the Islamic religion. However, towards the close of the novel Ali reveals how neofundamentalism can be a failure since it has no concrete basis - territorial, cultural, economic or ethnic - on which to build a community. The resolution lies in an escape into a concrete world. And for this, Ali prefers the real world as is evident in the fleeing of her protagonist to his country of provenance.

Work Cited

Ali, Monica. *Brick Lane*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

Ohmae, K. *The Borderless World*. London: Collins, 1990

Olivier Roy. *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New Delhi: Rupa, 2005.

Scholte, J. A. *Globalisation: A Critical Introduction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004.

Stiglitz, Joseph. *Globalisation and Its Discontents*. New York: Norton, 2002.

Historical and Colonial Dimensions in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

Dr Rooble Verma & Prof. Manoj Verma

India born Amitav Ghosh is a prolific and world-renowned novelist and author. He is arguably the most cosmopolitan of contemporary Indian English writers and also the most significant. He endeavours to recuperate the silenced voices of those not represented in the historical world. With a historian's grasp of facts and chronology, and with a creative writer's curiosity about causation and effects, and great narrative skill and imagination, Ghosh weaves together a pluralist and self-reflexive view of the world. Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* is an epic saga, set just before the Opium Wars, which encapsulates the colonial history of the East. The remarkable sweep of this historical tale of high sea adventure and drama covers the lush poppy fields by the Ganga, the rolling high seas with their furious storms and pleasant glorious days and the exotic and unparalleled back streets of China during the time of the Opium Wars. However, it is the vast panorama of characters, whose multifarious diaspora encapsulates the vexed and confounded colonial history of the East itself, which makes the book so breathtakingly vivid and majestically interesting.

Indian writing in English has slowly but surely made its mark at the international level and in this regard Ghosh (1956-) has carved a special place. His significance has its roots in his cosmopolitanism, for he is a writer who travels and re-maps the world, drawing connections across the boundaries of modern national states. It is in this creative engagement with historical and political realities and truths, it is in this clearheaded erasure and redrawing of cultural and political lines that divide and unite, that finds his mission as a writer.

Ghosh's own academic antecedents – history, sociology, anthropology – illuminate his fictional works. In particular, he is concerned with the Indian/South Asian diaspora in different regions of the world, and he hones his novelistic skills in areas (both geographical and thematic)

that overlap his research interests. Diasporic identity in this inherent fracturedness clearly intrigues him; he analyses this space with reference to its histories. Patterns begin to emerge as he travels between cultures/lands that diasporas straddle (India/Bangladesh/England in *The Shadow Lines*; India/Egypt in *In Antique Land*; India/Burma/Malaya in *The Glass Palace*). The burden of India's colonial past appears to weigh heavily on a migrant post-colonial generation and Ghosh seems to be constantly in search of that elusive epiphanic moment in which individuals may come to terms with their histories, thereby releasing themselves from the metaphoric and metaphysical burden of their condition. A glimpse of that final redemptive mystery is all that Ghosh can, in all honesty, give us.

In most of the novels of Ghosh, we find the historical element. Ghosh is specially a postmodern writer who attempts to subvert metadiscourses on freedom, nationality, history, etc. in his novels. After the arrival of post-structuralism and later post-colonialism on the academic scene, history in its institutionalized, canonical form has been repudiated and its objective truth claims have been questioned. Post-colonial writers often use allegory to proceed beyond a deterministic view of history by revising, re-appropriating or reinterpreting it as a concept, and in doing so, articulating new codes of recognition within which those acts of resistance, those unrealized intentions and those re-ordering of consciousness that history has rendered silent or invisible, can be recognized as shaping forces in a culture's tradition.

Many of Ghosh's works focus on characters who straddle cultures and countries; *The Shadow Lines* (1988), his second novel, examines the partition of Bengal, while his anthropological travelogue *An Antique Land* (1992) into age-old ties between India and Egypt. The best-selling novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) is set between Burma and India circa the Second World War and explores the rise and dissolution of political regimes, nations and empires, and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) explores the mangrove forests and marginal peoples of the Sundarbans tidal plain. In each of these, Ghosh forces readers to consider how history reveals the most enduring and seemingly stable things to be ultimately tenuous, as ever changing as the ebb and flow of the ocean. *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is no exception. *Sea of Poppies*, the first in a projected trilogy, traces

the global effects of a gargantuan drug-trafficking enterprise. While the slave trade in the Atlantic triangle between England, Africa, and the Americas has long been a rich source of epic fiction, the novel casts light on a less well-charted triangular trade.

Sea of Poppies is a story set in India of 1830s against a backdrop of the Opium trade. From the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth, British India led the world as an opium supplier, an export business imposed and monopolized by the East India Company expressly to balance the colonial power's trade with China. Though Britons thirsted for tea, silk, and porcelain, China's relative imperviousness to British manufactured goods meant that, without the addictive lure of opium, that demand would have drained the empire's coffers. The novel unfolds the eve of the Anglo-Chinese opium wars of 1839-43 and 1846-60, just as China's mandarins are cracking down on the illegal import—having failed, as one bellicose British merchant sees it, to “understand the benefits of Free Trade.” As traffickers in Macao are publicly beheaded, and Lord Palmerston threatens to send a fleet to reopen Chinese markets by force, the price of opium plummets, sending a jolt up the supply chain, from British seamen to factory hands and poppy farmers in Bengal and Bihar.

Set in eastern India, by the Ganges River and the Bay of Bengal, the novel suggests a link between this disruptive crop, with its faltering profits, and the dispersal of Indian labour from this region that began in the early half of the nineteenth century. It was, Ghosh writes, “as if fate had thrust its fist through the living flesh of the land in order to tear away a piece of its stricken heart.” Once slavery was outlawed in the British Empire in 1833, the plantocracy demanded indentured labor. A planter, Monsieur d'Epinay, puts it squarely: “Now that we may no longer have slaves in Mauritius, I must have coolies, or I am doomed.” As relative profitability shifts between Calcutta's twin exports of “thugs and drugs—or opium and coolies,” the self-made Liverpoolian ship owner and planter Benjamin Burnham, an ex-East India Company man, is among the merchants shipping human cargo once more. Calcutta, Ghosh notes, was also the hub for transporting Indian outlaws to a network of island prisons. “When God closes one door he opens

another,” Burnham crows, “A hold that was designed to carry slaves will serve just as well to carry coolies and convicts.”

Set against the background of the Opium Wars in China, the novel presents journeys both physical and psychological. Ghosh creates a fascinating cast of characters from the varieties of people living in India at this time: seamen, peasants, bureaucrats, prisoners, et al. His characters are either rootless or uprooted, each instance of which serves as the impetus that guides them toward the Ibis. In addition to being a captivating narrative, this rootlessness makes *Sea of Poppies* a pointed comment on the struggles of displaced colonized people and on the rippling effects of colonial expansion. Ghosh spends some time early in the novel describing how the opium trade effectively pushed all other crops out of many Indian farmers’ fields, forcing those farmers into increasing debt as they took advances and loans to cover the expense of buying the basic foods that they had previously grown. A virtue that Ghosh’s books consistently reveal is his ability to make history come alive while drawing the reader’s attention to stories often washed over in traditional historical accounts.

Ghosh’s verdant epic *Sea of Poppies* is stirring, beautifully written, and extremely suggestive. Ghosh possesses the amazing ability to conjure vivid imagery as he recounts the stories of several distinct groups of people along the Hooghly River and beyond at the onset of the Opium Wars. The story is expansive, and although there are dozens of characters, the reader is not overwhelmed in the least. The author takes his readers through time, across social castes and cultures, and over land and sea. Ghosh’s story-telling abilities are so finely tuned that one can see and feel the story. He’ll make you cringe, get a knot in your stomach and feel hopeful all within the span of a few pages.

The novel opens with Deeti, the woman protagonist of the novel, who lived 50 miles east of Benares on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipur. Right in the beginning it is revealed that the British have turned India’s farmers into corporate slaves growing poppies for export.

“... the English sahibs would allow little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign *asami* contracts. It was impossible

to say no to them: if you refused they would leave their silver hidden in your house, or throw it through a window. It was no use telling the white magistrate that you hadn't accepted the money and your thumbprint was forged: he earned commissions on the opium and would never let you off. And, at the end of it, your earning would come to no more than three-and-a-half sicca rupees, just about enough to pay off your advance." (*Sea of Poppies*, 2008, pp. 29-30)

Deeti is also one of such slaves of the British colonizers who farms the poppies with her daughter while her addicted husband, Hukam Singh, works in the opium factory. She is a very strong character in the novel and despite a lot of sufferings and victimization, she never loses the courage to fight against the odds of life. Taking the advantage of the weakness of her opium addicted husband, she is raped by her brother-in-law Chandan Singh on the very first night of her wedding. But, Deeti doesn't succumb to the situation when after the death of her husband, Chandan Singh made indecent proposals to her, she replied, "I will burn on my husband's pyre rather than give myself to you." (p.158) Even in the face of difficult circumstances she stands firmly and fights out till the end.

Ghosh wonderfully portrays the Pre-Sepoy Mutiny India, which was ruled by the "Company Bahadur" rather than the British Government. He draws upon the helplessness of British Parliament in the matters of the company's dealings in the Far East and South East Asia. Mr. Burnham makes a mockery of the British Parliament when he says; "Parliament will not know of the war until it is over. Be assured, sir, that if such matters were left to Parliament there would be no Empire" (pp.117-118). He also does well to bring out the dual nature of British judiciary and the British Clergy. Mr. Burnham quotes some English Gentleman as saying that Jesus Christ is for free trade: "Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ" (p.116).

What is ironical is the fact that on one hand, Britain was busy evangelizing China, and on the other she didn't see her own responsibility to ensure the well being of the new converts. The woes the opium trade brought to India and to China are well illustrated. It

talks about the artificially created shortage of food in the northern plains of India as more and more farmers are forced to grow opium. When the dark clouds are seen on the trading of opium, the people resort to other means, as revealed in the conversation of Mr. Burnham with Raja Neel Ratan;

“Well then, it falls to me to inform you, sir,’ said Mr Burnham, ‘that of late the officials in Canton have been moving forcefully to end the inflow of opium into China. It is the unanimous opinion of all of us who do business there that the mandarins cannot be allowed to have their way. To end the trade would be ruinous for firms like mine, but also for you, and indeed for all of India.” (p.111)

It was even said that British Rule in India was in danger if the opium trade was stopped;

“. . . British rule in India could not be sustained without opium—that is all there is to it, and let us not pretend otherwise. You are no doubt aware that in some years, the Company’s annual gains from opium are almost equal to the entire revenue of your own country, the United States. Do you imagine that British rule would be possible in this impoverished land if it were not for this source of wealth? And if we reflect on the benefits that British rule has conferred upon India, does it not follow that opium is this land’s greatest blessing? Does it not follow that it is our God-given duty to confer these benefits upon others?” (p.115)

Ghosh is a wonderful storyteller who introduces various characters with stories of their own. Ghosh draws the situation of Indian kings during the rule of East India Company in India. Such is the situation of Raja Neel Ratan, the king belonging to the Raskhali Rajbari – the Halders’ principal seat in Calcutta;

“It was on decisions like that the Halders had built their fortunes over the last century and a half. In the era of the Mughals, they had ingratiated themselves with the dynasty’s representatives; at the time of the East India Company’s arrival, they had extended a wary welcome to the newcomers; when the British went to war against

the Muslim rulers of the Bengal, they had lent money to one side and sepoys to the other, waiting to see which would prevail. After the British proved victorious, they had proved as adept at learning English as they had previously been in the acquisition of Persian and Urdu. When it was to their advantage, they were glad to shape their lives to the world of the English; yet they were vigilant always to prevent too deep an intersection between the two circles.” (p.84)

Raja Neel Ratan’s debts land him in prison. The judgement is a curious pronouncement:

“ ... this court pronounces its sentence, which is that all your properties are to be seized and sold, to make good your debts, and that you yourself are to be transported to the penal settlement on the Mauritius Islands for a period of no less than seven years. So let it be recorded on this, the twentieth day of July, in the year of Our Lord, 1838. . .” (pp. 239-240)

As the story progresses, it is found that all the characters are approaching *Ibis* as the only way to escape the difficulties in their lives. The *Ibis* is a two masted schooner that was used as a slave transport ship to run the coasts of Africa. The slave trade is no longer legal, under British law, in 1838 and this particular ship is unable to outrun the law ... so she must be repurposed. *Ibis* is renovated. Her hold is cleared of those elements that used to restrain human cargo and she is instead made ready to carry opium. Kalua, a lower caste man, saved Deeti from becoming *sati* and took her to safe place. But, both are searched extensively by the village people, at this moment. “Both Deeti and Kalua knew that their best chance of escape lay in travelling downriver, on the Ganga, in the hope of reaching a town or city where they would be able to disappear into a crowd; some place such as Patna perhaps, or even Calcutta.”(p.191) *Ibis* seems to bring all the characters in the novel to become *jahaj-bhais*. Deeti, the central character of the novel, is on the run with her burly savior and lover, the low-caste ox-cart driver Kalua. Also central is the ship’s second mate, who is passing for the white, Zachary Reid, the son of a Maryland freed woman. His likely soul mate is Paulette, or Putli, the educated daughter of a French republican freethinker and horticulturalist in Calcutta, adopted by

Burnham after her parents died. The nurse's son, Jodu, whom Putli regards as a brother, joins the crew after the *Ibis* mows down his river dinghy. She, meanwhile, tries to escape Burnham's predilection for being spanked by young girls and seeks passage to her mother's Mauritian birthplace by disguising herself first as a sari-clad migrant woman, then as a boyish crew hand. Also on the *Ibis* is Neel Ratan Halder, who is sentenced to be "transported," after refusing to sell his estates to Burnham. They all end up on the *Ibis*, a ship heading for the Mauritius Island.

Most of these folks, especially the Indians who end up in the stinking hold of the *Ibis* as indentured workers, have been yanked from all they knew and loved for they have been separated from wives, husbands, parents, and children. Horrible things happen to many characters as their lives are turned upside down. But these characters learn that they are in fact not powerless, but rather have strengths that allow them to take charge of their own fates, if only in a very small way. Deeti doesn't give up even when she is in the clutches of Bhyro Singh and she not only saves Munia but also helps Kalua to escape and saves his life:

A wave of lightning surged across the sky, widening as it traveled westwards, flooding the water below with a rolling tide of radiance. In that unearthly light a longboat seemed to leap out at Zachary, from the crest of a wave: although it was already some twenty yards off the schooner's beam, the faces of the five men who were in it could be clearly seen. Serang Ali was at the rudder, and the other four were huddled in its middle- Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua. (p.511)

The end of the novel is the victory of such relentless souls and the never-say-die attitude of the characters:

As the lightning was retreating across the sky, Zachary became aware that he was not the only one who was watching the boat: there were three others on the main deck, below, standing with their arms interlinked. Two of them he recognized immediately, Paulette and Baboo No Kissin-but the third was a woman in a sodden sari, who

had never before uncovered her face in his presence. Now, in the fading glow of the clouds, she turned to talk at him and he saw that she had piercing, grey eyes. Although it was the first time he had seen her face, he knew that he had glimpsed her somewhere, standing much as she now, in a wet sari, hair dripping, looking at him with startled grey eyes. (p.512)

With the vast array of characters in the novel boarding the ship, an unlikely dynasty is born. The enormous sweep of historical adventure spans the lush poppy fields of the Ganges, the rolling high seas, and the exotic backstreets of China. But it is the portrait of the panorama of characters, whose diaspora encapsulates the vexed colonial history of the East itself, that makes *Sea of Poppies* a splendid piece of literature of Indian writing in English and makes Ghosh an outstanding writer of our times.

Work Cited

- Auradkar, Pradiprao Sarika. *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2007.
- Bose, Brinda. Dd. *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*. Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 2008.

Globalisation and the Fragmentation of Self in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Sonia James

This paper is an attempt to chart out the fragmented selves of the Indians under the impact of a multitude of forces like globalisation, economic inequality, multiculturalism, fundamentalism and terrorist violence as it is portrayed in Kiran Desai's Booker-Prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. Globalisation has opened up a very active interaction among cultures all over the world. "Global culture" has become a very familiar concept today. The critics of globalisation insist that the concept of "global culture" is actually "cultural imperialism" whereas the supporters feel that it is "cultural hybridity". Culture is often equated with national culture. The effect of globalisation, positive, negative or neutral, on the national culture as well as the tensions between local cultures and the globalising forces is a major concern.

Today, for many people, global culture means "Western culture" or even "American culture". In the 21st century, the United States enjoys a degree of international dominance in every field of human endeavour. After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 the American primacy got established uncontestedly. Karsten Voight, a German diplomat having close acquaintance with the United States comments: "The USA has long been setting standards on a world wide basis, not just for the general populace, but has been leading the field in the classic cultural spheres, for example in research and teaching, or film and modern art. Its global role is rooted in a hitherto unknown blend of economic power, the ability to set the global cultural agenda and military superiority" (qtd. in Lieber and Weisberg 145). The globalisation of culture is blamed as a levelling force leading to a sweeping homogeneity or Disneyfication of culture. President Mohammed Khatami of Iran compares it to colonialism. He opines, "[Globalisation is] a destructive force threatening dialogue between cultures. The new world order and globalisation that certain powers are trying to make us accept, in which the culture of the entire world is ignored, look like a kind of neocolonialism. This

imperialism threatens mutual understanding between nations and communication and dialogue between cultures” (qtd. in Leiber and Weisberg 150)

Boundaries have been transcended, creating a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. The hybridized ethos is represented in world literature, specifically in postcolonial writings.

Writers like Salman Rushdie and Homi Bhabha consider this hybridization as the focal point of post colonialism. This hybridization acts as a cause for fragmentation and inward turning at the individual as well as the social level. The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* seems a good explication of Post- 9/11 world scenario though it is set in the mid 1980s. The narration is situated in the backdrop of Nepal and Tibet. It tells the story of the Cambridge educated Anglophile Judge Jemubhai Patel who lives his retired life in a crumbling, isolated house at Kalimpong at the foot of mount Kanchenjunga. To his secluded life comes his orphaned grand daughter Sai. The judge has a decrepit cook who lives under the illusion that his son Biju is amassing money in America. In fact Biju is shifting from one New York restaurant to another on an elusive search for a green card. One meets with the Anglophilic sisters Lola and Noni. Desai also delineates the love affair between Sai and her Maths tutor, Gyan who eventually gets involved in the Gorkha insurgency.

Desai traces very cleverly the different stages of India's transactions with the foreign powers: first England, then the Soviet Union and finally America. We see Jemubhai Patel as highly enamoured by the superior British culture. Though belonging to a poor agriculture background, his father wanted to send him to England to get the English education and thus enter into the ICS. Here we see the ideological conquest of the Indians by the British, as Gauri Viswanathan has proved in detail in her *Masks of Conquest*. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci, Viswanathan explains the relations between culture and power. Gramsci says that cultural domination works by consent and can precede conquest by force. Voluntary cultural assimilation is the most effective form of political action. Indians were convinced about the superiority of the British ways and they blindly craved to attain the same. The time is

around the year 1919 when Jemubhai was sent to school. In his memory he still sees the portrait of Queen Victoria at the school entrance: “In the entrance to the school building was a portrait of Queen Victoria in a dress like a flouncy curtain, a fringed cape, and a peculiar hat with feathery arrows shooting out. Each morning as Jemubhai passed under, he found her foggy expression compelling and felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grew” (58). This character presents India under the clutches of British impact.

The two sisters Lola and Noni who live at Mon Ami are also admirers of England. “... Mon Ami its vegetable patch containing as far as they knew, the country’s only brocoli grown from seeds procured in England ; — Their washing line sagged under a load of Marks and Spencer panties” (144). They are people who imitate the English ways. She feels that at present there is no difference between the coloniser English people and the once colonised Indians. She says,

“Quite a different thing now. In fact she said chicken tikka masala has replaced fish and chips as the number one take- out dinner in Britain. It was just reported in the *Indian Express* — She imagined the English countryside, castles, hedgerows hedgehogs etc., and tikka masala wizzing by on buses, bicycles, Rolls- - Royces” (46).

She says that the new England is a completely cosmopolitan society. For example her daughter Pixie, who is a reporter in BBC, has a perfect English accent. The sisters live as if they have no connections with the Indian life.

There is Sai, the grand daughter of the judge, ie, the daughter of his daughter. Jemubhai Patel’s daughter had fallen in love with a space pilot in the Indian Air Force. After marriage he got recruited as a likely candidate for the Russian Intercosmos Programme, to be sent to space. Lola and Noni regard Sai as the orphan child of India’s failing romance with the Soviets. The narrative voice in the novel says: “These were the last days of Indo- USSR romance and already there was a whiff of dried bouquet in the air, in the exchanges between the scientists

that segued easily into tears and nostalgia for the red-rose years of courtship between the nations.” (25) Sai’s father was a Zoroastrian and her mother a Hindu. They felt free and brave, part of a modern nation in a modern world, may be a cosmopolitan one as they expected. Later we find that they had died in a car accident in Russia “under the wheels of foreigners” (27) which points to the sad demise of India’s courtship with socialism.

After India’s encounter with Britain and the Soviet Union comes the one with the capitalist America. The cook sends his son Biju to America with great expectation. The Indian attitude towards the three supreme powers can be clearly seen in the cook’s interrogation on the arrival of Sai to Cho Oyu. “Have you come from England?” the cook asked Sai ...She shook her head. “America? No problem with water or electricity”, he said. Awe swelled his words, made them tick smug and fat as first-world money. ‘No’, she said. No? No? His disappointment was severe “From Foreign”. No question mark. (25).

From these conversations one finds that the attraction towards England and America reigns supreme in the Indian mind, with America occupying a better position. That is why Biju is sent to America. The cook thinks that since his son is cooking English food, he has a higher position than if he were cooking Indian. By sending Biju to America the cook feels himself in an elevated position. The cook has been disappointed to be working for Jemubhai. For him it is a severe fall when compared to his father who served white men only. There is another character, Mrs. Sen, who has her daughter Mun Mun in America. Mrs. Sen is excited when Mun Mun is about to be hired by CNN, which will surely upset Lola. Infact there is a rivalry for superiority between Lola and Mrs. Sen based on their daughters being in England and America. The cook even goes to the extent of referring to America as the best country in the world. Post colonial India still cherishes America as the dreamland. The cook is happy that he is equal in status with Mrs. Sen whose daughter is also staying in America. He boasts, “My son works in New York... He is the manager of a restaurant business... New York. Very big city. The cars and buildings are nothing like here. In that country there is enough food for everybody... One day soon my son will take me” (84).

The seemingly varied characters in the novel share a historical legacy and a common experience of helplessness and humiliation. The attraction towards the West has a stunting effect on Desai's characters. The judge, when he is in England for education, gets isolated because of racism and feels "barely human at all". He becomes a recluse there. He feels ashamed of his darker skin. His problem is that of racial self-hatred. Even at the civil service examination when questioned by the white examiners he turns out to be a failure in communicating and is laughed at by them. Yet on his return to India, he finds himself despising his apparently backward Indian wife, Nimi. He behaves very cruelly towards her and after some time sends her back home. He does not accept even his daughter who is born soon afterwards. He hates Indians. He hates his job and retires. He is a representative of the individual torn between the Western culture and the local culture.

Gyan, Sai's Maths tutor is also initially enamoured by the Westernised house, food, etc. at Cho Oyu. Later he gets pulled into the insurgency movement for independent Gorkhaland. The search for identity and rights has been imported to India, under the impact of Western values which in fact is a result of modernity and globalisation. Individuals got acquainted with values like scientific reasoning, individualism, freedom of expression, political pluralism, equal rights for women and minorities etc. In this new attitude he questions Sai about the relevance of Sai and Indians like her celebrating Christmas. Once Sai tells him about the Christmas party. He asks her "Why do you celebrate Christmas? You're Hindus and you don't celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year. ...You are like slaves, that's what you are, running after the west, embarrassing yourself. It's because of people like you we never get anywhere"(163). One knows very well that celebrating Christmas has today become part of the global culture. People like Sai don't even realize that it is a Western import. She does not know why and when she started celebrating Christmas. She says; "If I want to celebrate Christmas, I will, and if I don't want to celebrate Diwali then I won't. Nothing wrong in a bit of fun and Christmas is an Indian holiday as much as any other" (163).

Though set in the 1980s the novel portrays the Indian yielding to the global culture which most of the time is nothing more than an American culture. Nitin Gupta says, "Cultural hegemony is the imposition of a homogeneous global culture through marketing, advertising, laws and other top-down forms of influence" (112). The novel tells us that even before 1991 the Indians were in a mood to embrace the West wholeheartedly. The intensification of globalisation has increased the interactions among diverse cultures. Cultural exchanges do happen since time immemorial but the era of globalisation has increased the frequency and intensity of these influences. Desai seems to be hinting at the negative impact of globalisation on national culture. It is colonialism in disguise. One sees the Judge turning more white than the whites themselves and Gyan and his Gorghas resorting to terrorism under the name of independence. According to Stephen Dahl, culture has an outer layer which consists of artifacts and products of cultures like language, food, architecture, style, art, fashion etc. In Lola and Noni and Mrs. Sen we see this layer being influenced. The second layer of culture consists of norms and values pertinent to a particular culture and the third layer consists of the basic assumption and belief of culture which get threatened in the course of the novel (qtd. in Nitin Gupta 114).

Many modern scholars valorize the hybrid identity of the immigrants. But it is not applicable in the case of working class immigrants like Biju who does not prosper in New York as his father expects him to be. He barely lives by waiting at tables and sleeping in a basement. The fantasy of America turns out to be an illusion for him. Biju is an illegal resident in U.S.A. doing menial labour under abject living conditions. The novel is set in India and in the U.S.A. Desai herself says that the book tries to capture what it means to be torn between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant. It also shows the consequences of poor Indians going to the wealthy U.S.A. Even in the U.S. the rich Indians illtreat and exploit the poor like Biju. Once when Biju gets wounded in his knee his boss is not willing to provide him with medical attention. He tells Biju that it is better to go back to India. Thus the idea of a "Global village" of equality does

not become a reality. Again, Biju quarrels with a co-worker constantly just because he is a Pakistani.

Edward W. Said observes that exile is “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (173). However, in the present age of globalization, exile is often a condition chosen voluntarily in the hope of a “better life.” But people like Biju get disappointed in such a condition. He feels nowhere in America. He works in hotels and restaurants. French, American, Italian Indian to name only a few. He finds America a crowded place where people from third world countries are engaged in an unending struggle for existence. Santwana Haldar opines,

Kiran Desai highlights that the process of globalisation has its loopholes, that the cartographical binaries have collapsed only for a blessed few. The poor people of the third world countries who dream of a better future and are lured by the affluence of the American Society, have no place in the world of their dream. They are compelled to suffer in their homeland and the exile they opt for only increases their suffering. Though, apparently, they are not banished and they accept the exile condition voluntarily, it is a great bluff for them. The myth that America is a dollar producing country and that whoever lands there is financially secured is at the root of their faulty decision.... While a small number of the emigrants manage to earn a sufficient amount, the majority of the emigrants are humiliated and compelled to live a disgraceful life (268).

Though colonial powers do not exist in the modern world, the emergence of the USA as the richest country having financial transactions even with the poor ones and the growth of the MNCs have developed a situation that is similar to colonial situation. Kiran Desai shatters the popular dream about America when she traces Biju’s return to India, penniless and almost naked after being robbed by the Gorkha insurgents. According to Manoj .S. “The pathetic re-union of Biju is a crushing ironic commentary on the illusions that post-colonial India cherishes on America as the ideal land of the future” (161).

Work Cited

- Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. Penguin: New Delhi, 2006.
- Gupta, Nitin. "Can Globalisation Lead to Cultural Hegemony?". *The ICFAI University Journal of History and Culture*. Vol.3. Nos.3&4. July & Oct. 2009.
- Halder, Santwana. "Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*: A Study of Exile and Displacement". *New Lights on Indian Women Novelists in English*. Ed. Amar Nath Prasad. Serup & Sons: New Delhi, 2008.
- Lieber, Robert J and Ruth E Weisberg. "Globalization, Culture and Identities in Crisis". *Globalization: Issues and Perspectives*. N. Janardhana Rao. Ed. The ICFAI University Press Ltd.: Hyderabad, 2005.
- Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*. Penguin, 2001.
- S. Manoj. " Postcolonial India in Kiran Dasai's *The Inheritance of Loss*". *Littcrit* Vol. 33 Nov. 2 Dec.2007.
- Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. OUP: New Delhi, 1998.

**Gender as an Explicator of Ethnicity:
Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman
Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts***

Dr Tessa Anthony C.

In a society comprising a single culture defining ethnicity is superfluous. America is a tossed salad of multiculturalism. In a multicultural society there are many strands of different cultures. And ethnicity permeates through differences. Ethnicity includes heritage, physical characteristics, traditions, cultural characteristics and ethnic values. In a multicultural society there is a frontier that separates ethnic minorities from the mainstream. This space is a shifting one when two cultures encounter one another. A transfer of culture, values, and stories and belief systems is possible in encounters. But women more than transfer, dexterously try to achieve the preservation of culture. Women preserve culture and thus uphold ethnicity especially in a multicultural society.

Maxine Hong Kingston is a second generation Chinese American writer. She has published six books. She is married to Earl King, an American actor. She retired as a member of the Faculty of Creative Writing from University of California, Berkeley. In the autobiographical work *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Kingston has given voice to a marginalized community with emphasis to women. The Chinese woman, in effect, a subaltern is more victimized and controlled by the male, just because she happens to be a woman. Like any subaltern she is enslaved and exploited, with freedom denied at all costs. Kingston reflects a culture that has enslaved and belittled Chinese women. Yet, she reconstructs from its experiences, myths, dreams of liberation and resilience. The Chinese life she critically reflects in *The Woman Warrior* is different from the traditional Chinese society today.

Women as the preservers of culture

In an orthodox conservative society like that of the Chinese, women are the culture torchbearers. Kingston's mother Brave Orchid is a culture preserver. To induce Chinese culture into the members of her family, especially her daughters Kingston says: "Night after night my mother would talk story until we fell asleep. I couldn't tell where the stories left off and the dreams began" (*TWW* 19). *The Woman Warrior*, reveals Kingston's childhood as a female growing up in America amidst dos and don'ts from her mother. She shows how through stories of immigrants and especially her mother's talk stories she has been moulded by Chinese social norms. Chinese women do not have a very crucial role to play in Chinese society. This can be illustrated by words like "'Girls are maggots in the rice'. 'It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters' (*TWW* 43). Every time Brave Orchid works hard to make her daughter Ting Ting Hong conform by telling her how girls should behave and be, she is actually supporting patriarchy and preserving culture. Through myth and talk stories Brave Orchid attempts to enmesh her daughter in Chinese social norms in Chinese American society. Constant reprimands, reminders and storytelling checks Kingston within ethnic boundaries. She grew up listening to these sayings, which she hated. Brave Orchid does not want the purity of Chinese culture to be lost and tarnished in her child because of Americanisation.

Kingston sees China through her mother's eyes. It mirrors the traditional Chinese community where women are not allowed to learn or speak English, women are not to express their views or rebel in any way or make attempts to get on in the world. Mothers know that daughters do leave their homes. So through stories, references and caution the daughter is prepared for life consciously and unconsciously. "There is a Chinese word for the female I- which is "slave" (*TWW* 47). "Feeding girls is feeding cow birds" (*TWW* 46). Kingston remembers the sexist gibes, which are responsible for her turn of mind as a part of her growing up. When one girl after another girl was born into her family, "One girl-and another girl," they said, and made our parents ashamed to take us out together" (*TWW* 46). All these indicate the position of women in Chinese life.

According to Chinese conservative society there is no permission to marry outside the community, and girls marry early. There is no free choice to decide your man. Kingston's mother is advised to improve her daughter's voice, if she wants a suitable bridegroom for her daughter. For Brave Orchid to realize how bad Kingston's voice is, she is told by one of the powerful voices in the community that even mainstream men or half breeds wouldn't want to marry her. "Improve that voice", she instructs Kingston's mother, "or else you'll never marry her off. Even the fool half ghosts won't have her" (*TWW* 192). Any thing or person connected to outside the family, or community is considered alien or a ghost.

There are many rituals and customs connected to Chinese social norms. In Chinese society the physical mutilation of women is another way of preserving culture. It is performed in the interests of a cultural image of feminine beauty-piercing of ears, feet are broken, "Walking erect (knees straight, toes pointed forward), not pigeon-toed, which is Chinese feminine" (*TWW* 11) body hair plucked, body powdered and painted. It is blindly accepted that an ordinary woman would want nothing more than to satisfy the body to look beautiful. But women are made conscious that they must struggle with bodily desires and not give in to it. They must conform to patriarchal notions. The first warning comes from her mother about her No-Name-Aunt who killed herself in the well because of an unwanted pregnancy. She gets married and her husband leaves for America. A year later after his departure she finds herself pregnant. Kingston is asked not to mention her name ever. This kind of deviant act is punished by erasure of existence (name). Her mother states how her father would not admit to having a sister because of the humiliation she caused them:

Don't let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful (*TWW* 5).

This story is very intense and detailed, which starts with the introduction of how women are portrayed, and how women are looked on as objects. And even in socialization gender plays an important role.

The man who gets her aunt pregnant wants to kill her because he does not want to be embarrassed, when actually it is his fault just as much as hers. She says:

The other man was not, after all, much different from her husband. They both gave orders: she followed. "If you tell your family, I'll beat you. I'll kill you. Be here again next week....She told the man, "I think I'm pregnant. He organized the raid against her. (*TWW* 7).

When she tells him she is pregnant he organizes the raid against her so that he can silence her. Yet he is not blamed and escapes scott free. The family treats her like an outcast; "wrongdoers eat alone" (*TWW*7). No Name Aunt's energy culminates in her own death unable to fight till the last. Brave Orchid tries to make her daughters submissive by telling them the advantages of being so, and the dangers of being rebellious too. She says: "The villagers punished her for acting as if she could have a private life, secret and apart from them" (*TWW* 12). Kingston's mother tells her about No Name Aunt because she wants her daughter to be the perfect female for their family and not go astray.

The Chinese American male's responsibility is to be the breadwinner but culture transmission is a woman's prerogative. For a male, if his culture is to be transmitted to his offspring, he is dependent on the female. Hence gender is an explicator of ethnicity. For Kingston her mother Brave Orchid helps her to preserve her ethnic cultural values. Through "talk stories" Kingston is introduced to the Chinese way of life from the cradle onwards. Werner Sollors in *Consent and Descent in American Culture* rightfully says that "ethnicity is descent and marriage is consent" (1986:6) In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston describes how Brave Orchid hands down culture and defines Kingston's cultural ethnicity much before Kingston herself becomes conscious of racial differences and identity, from other coloured minorities and mainstream. As a part of her growing up, her ethnicity is defined. It is a way of life, comprising belief systems, cultural practices, myths, rituals and oral traditions.

Women are the cultural outsiders

A woman is a preserver of culture and tradition but she is also a social and cultural outsider. Though she preserves culture it is

observed that she doesn't have a voice in setting the rules. Women like Fa Mu Lan and No Name Aunt are outside the decision making communal authority structure. They do what patriarchy administers to them. The private and public space for women is as limited as what is decided for them by the male members in their community. The Chinese man bears his allegiance first to the society then to the clan and last to his family. A man in China is subject to domination of three systems, clan, political authority and clan authority. In the case of a Chinese woman she has all these overshadowing her and the dominant male also has a major role to play in her life. Kingston quotes certain beliefs: "A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him, Confucius said" (TWW196). "Chinese smeared bad daughters in law with honey and tied them naked on top of ants nests," (TWW 196). Social and cultural pressures have silenced Kingston and undermines her confidence.

Myth

One way ethnicity survives is through myths. And myths survive when they are passed on. There is no one frozen authentic version to a myth. Myths are passed on by talk stories and writing by women. In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston uses the legend of Fa Mu Lan for the purpose of equality and justice. According to this myth Fa Mu Lan is a girl who took her father's place in battle. Girls are not allowed to join the army so after a rigorous training she disguises herself as a male warrior. Later she takes her revenge on the emperor who forces males to join his army by beheading him. She kills even the baron who drafted her brother, attacks families and leaves with their women. Fa Mu Lan is given the freedom and power of a man while retaining the secret satisfaction of knowing that she is more than just another man. Yet her love for her husband, child and family never suffers. In fact she juggles roles of daughter, wife, mother, warrior and Chinese very skillfully. Thus gender is used to explicate an ethnic story and gender brings about justice. And without justice there is no peace possible. Kingston fights for justice in *The Woman Warrior* and achieves it to the end of the novel.

Like in most societies, the woman is the preserver of culture. Brave Orchid doesn't realize that riding on the back of myths and stories is a parallel story of fighting against injustice, and for one's rights. So

the more Brave Orchid tells the female members of her family to conform, the more determined they are to fight for their rights and to prove their mettle. Kingston preserves a Chinese myth and value by moving from a particular cultural value to implement it to reveal global overtones.

She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman (*TWW* 20).

In *The Woman Warrior*, the women in the novel internalize the woman warrior myth and they live them out. Kingston accepts No Name Aunt as, “my aunt my forerunner,” (*TWW* 8) who “combed individuality into her bob” (*TWW* 9). No Name Aunt by her silence and death reveals her passive resistance whereas Kingston wishes to become a word warrior to awaken the world against injustice. As Kingston says in *Conversations With Maxine Hong Kingston*:

Myth is vibrant and alive as long as it keeps changing when people emigrate from China (or from anywhere), they bring myths with them, but they change the myths. And if they don't change the myths, those myths are useless and die. So I'm free with myths (218).

According to her she is writing a Chinese myth for an American audience in an American language. In answer to criticism of traditionalists Kingston says to Kay Bonnetti. “It never was a tradition to keep everything the same”. Especially since Chinese myths are “talk stories” they are modified to suit present circumstances. “Yes that mythologies and stories and rituals change to give you strength under present circumstances. Either that or they die”(*Conversations* 42). The stories change according to personalities, occasions and listeners. Kingston does not try to document traditional stories like a historian, but she documents traditional stories and uses them to suit her own ends. Hence gender is an explicator of ethnicity.

Reconstructing the myth

Asian women tend to be socially inhibited. So when they write they are making known unknown facts. Kingston has been warned not to

tell family secrets to anyone. She doesn't tell but writes them. This is a kind of baring oneself in public. Even though writing is a secretive act when printed it becomes public. In *The Woman Warrior* Kingston is warned of life by Brave Orchid, by stories like that of No Name Aunt and deriding statements like girls are "Maggots!" (TWW 191). *The Woman Warrior* is based on the myth of Fa Mu Lan, which is a fitting metaphor. Kingston fights for a completely just cause. *The Woman Warrior* is also a story of adolescence and growth. She twists her traditional chant of Fa Mu Lan to suit a modern American context. She says "The beginning is hers...but the ending is mine"(TWW 206). In the Chinese American context Kingston is the woman warrior. Kingston narrates what is going on, she shapes history by identifying with feminists and advocating a fight against injustice. *The Woman Warrior* is anthropology, sociology, feminism and Asian American history. Kingston tries to remake the world that has made her. Though born a Chinese, she tries to appropriate her Chinese American inheritance. Through all her experiences of being relegated a subaltern, she learns how to become tough within herself. By rewriting and reconstructing she has proved that she can be whoever she wants whether society agrees with her or not. She can now be a woman warrior fighting for justice, just like Fa Mu Lan who fought for her people. Kingston states many times how she rebelled against ideas of women. For example "There is an outward tendency in females, which meant that I was getting straight A's for the good of my future husband's family, not my own. I did not plan to ever have a husband. I would show my mother and father and the noisy emigrant villagers that girls have no outward tendency. I stopped getting straight A's." (TWW 47).

Maxine Kingston's life tells her readers that people need to be proud of their gender whether male or female. She has heard from her mother the chant of Fa Mu Lan so she promises herself "I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (TWW 20). She decides not to conform but to learn to fight for her rights like the warrior woman. This is frightening for Kingston because she feels that as a typical Chinese female one's community doesn't come to one's rescue when you need it most. All the same she realizes it is difficult to live based on Chinese patriarchal norms. She fights for her rights and questions her mother:

“Did you roll an egg on *my* face like that when I was born?” “Did you have a full month party for me?” “Did you turn on all the lights?” “Did you send *my* picture to Grandmother?” “Why not ? Because I am a girl? Is that why not?” (46).

Kingston realizes it is impossible to meet up to the expectations of patriarchy. According to Kingston we represent our own gender in our own individual ways. So she decides to resist stereotypes and reveal her bicultural identity. Kingston explicates ethnicity.

In the opening line of *The Woman Warrior* Brave Orchid says, “You must not tell anyone what I’m about to tell you.” The silent threat in these words was, punishment if you don’t adhere. But Kingston wants to voice the unspeakable. And thus by learning English, and using it as a weapon she preserves culture by writing talk stories searching for a bicultural identity and avenging ethnocentrism. From the age of seven, she learns English and uses this tool as a silent, confident writing woman warrior. This myth rings significantly for Kingston living in alien America, confronting racist mainstream. She is struck by the rightness of her action.

Brave Orchid supports patriarchy and at the same time provides an emancipatory role. But Kingston uses the myth of Fa Mu Lan to reshape her destiny as a word warrior educating the world of her Chinese American culture. Brave Orchid tries to make Kingston typically Chinese, whereas Kingston stretches a Chinese myth to a universal significance of fighting for justice. She says: “The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar. May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them”(TWW 53). Since it is a conglomeration of numerous talk stories, the writer searches for her voice and an identity.

The Woman Warrior is about a young girl trying to come to an understanding of herself, she is still individuating: she is learning what is secret and what is public. “I wrote with the privacy of writing a diary. What I am writing now is about public life and about communal life, and so I set up the outside world to be the same as my inside world” (*Conversations* 197). Later Kingston etched a Chinese American identity

because her outside and inside was Chinese American. Hence Kingston explicates her bicultural identity. Both Kingston and Brave Orchid preserve culture in their own respective ways and are explicators of ethnicity. Even as Kingston finds women as mechanical carriers of culture she wants them to practice non-conformity. So she speaks in a new voice. Based on this study, women are preservers of culture but they are pushed to the peripheries, and that is an injustice.

Works Cited

- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of A Girlhood among Ghosts*. New York: Alfred Knof, 1967.
- Ruthven, K.K. *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Skenazy, Paula. Tera Martin *Conversations with Maxine Hong Kingston U.S.A.*: University Press of Mississippi, 2004.
- Sollors, Werner. *Consent and Descent in American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Seeking a Pattern in the Poetry of Edwin Muir

Dr N. Jenny Rappai

A prominent and distinguished British (Scottish) poet, critic, translator, essayist and novelist, Edwin Muir (1887-1959) was born into a simple and intensely religious family on the islands of Orkney, (the idyllic Orkney landscape later turned out to be a universal landscape for him) from which he drew the nourishment for his poetry and the traumatic emigration from the solitude of the Orkneys to the industrial Glaswegian conurbation shaped his poetic and critical sensibilities further more. A traditionalist, with an Edenic purity, innocence, simplicity and religious over-tones in his approach to poetry; Muir stands in stark contrast to the erudite exhibition of the times and hence remained outside the main currents of modern poetry. But time does not fade Muir's poems, as new movements are wont to lose their significance with the change of scene. He advocates a close connection between literature and life, thereby giving a more permanent expression to his world through his poetical realm.

Edwin Muir entered the literary arena when the world was in the vicious grip of wars, disillusionment, economic depression, ruin and misery. Marxism tended to be the dominant influence on the people of the day and the writers realized the futility of literature if not harnessed to a social or political purpose. In spite of being bred in the midst of the tumult and confusion of the times, his poetic influence did not wane in the miserable conditions. Nor did he succumb to the literary fashion of the day. Muir's poetry became a landmark in the history of poetry of the twentieth century, striking a harmonious note in the affirmative way contrary to the negative way perceived in the poetry of many of his contemporaries.

The affirmative way of writing, in its search for pattern, derives its source and inspiration in the dominant imagery of Nature and in interpersonal relationship within the family, community, the immediate

social environment of growing up and mankind in general. Nature exerts a significant influence upon the child's mind because one apprehends the beauty in Nature before one knows that there is beauty. The child's mind in particular is influenced by the fact that it sees the world first at a range of two or three feet and on recreating that childhood, the focus is always on that life drenched in the sweet memories of Nature around. Nature, at times provides a firm grasp on which to hold on in the initial stages of writing and Muir finds solace and comfort in the early musings of his childhood and in Nature in his early poems.

The interpersonal relationship in Muir is structured in such a way that it confines to his family in his early poems, but his later poems encompass the whole purview of mankind in general as he says in his letter to Alec Aitken:

... but I want to know something about Tom and Dick and Jane, and their relations to one another as they move about; I want to know something, too, about myself, my moods, my relation within myself to everything as it impinges immediately upon me (and that is always). This wish, followed out, creates a picture of life, or a series of pictures, drawn from experience and intuition (never demonstrable). The picture is humanly necessary and can never be complete. It has to be visual, sensible, and as far as it comes from participation in life, as far as it shows understanding, spiritual at the same time. (*Selected Prose* 197-98)

When the realization that the meaning of time is the meaning of life dawned on Muir, it assumed great significance in his life as a man and in his poetry. The Incarnation is assumed a very profound symbol in the poetry of Muir- as that which gives meaning to the life of man. In the Preface to Muir's *Collected Poems*, T. S. Eliot says:

That utter honesty with oneself and with the world is no more common among men of letters than among men of other occupations. I stress this unmistakable integrity, because I came to recognize it in Edwin Muir's work as well as in the man himself. The work and the man are one; his autobiography, and the lecture

on Orcadian folk poetry, which is the first of his Norton lectures at Harvard, help us to understand his own poetry. And I cannot believe that Edwin Muir ever uttered one disingenuous word in speech, or committed one disingenuous word to print. ("Preface" *Collected Poems of Edwin Muir*)

The statement of T. S. Eliot speaks volumes about the man, Muir and his poetry.

In the poem, *Childhood* Muir reminisces his early childhood spent in his father's house, in the island of Wyre in Orkney. He recollects the days spent upon the sunny hill surrounded with the black islands, grey tiny rocks, black hill and the beautiful natural scenery near his father's house in the Orkneys. The imagery of Nature encompassing the Wyre in Orkney is brought alive to the readers' view. The surrounding countryside picture is also evident in the poem. He vividly pictures the Orkney of his childhood in the poem which represents the timeless secure world of his days in the island of Wyre:

Long time he lay upon the sunny hill,
 To his father's house below securely bound
 With the black islands lying thick around....
 Where the massed islands rolled in mist away,
 He knew that unseen straits between them lay...
 That in the black hill's gloom it seemed to lie...
 Grey tiny rocks slept round him where he lay...
 The grasses threw straight shadows far away,
 And from the house his mother called his name.

(*Collected Poems* 19)

Muir considers himself lucky to have been brought up on an island, as it enabled him to view the pristine beauty of Nature in all its splendour. His *Autobiography* substantiates this claim as: "In an island everything is near, for compressed within it are all the things which are spread out over a nation or a continent,..." (*An Autobiography* 33) G. M. Brown too aptly observes: "Even the texture of the verse had the grainings of Orkney in it: its shape mirrored the quiet flowing laterals of the Orkney fields and hills. (*Selected Prose* 204)

The implication of the source of interpersonal relationship in the family and the attachment and security associated with it wriggle out instantaneously in the poem. The images of “father” and “mother” are well defined in Muir’s poems. A child reposes its trust completely in its parents in a state of Edenic innocence and Muir traps that source of security in his first poem. There is an instance of security related to his father’s house as he states in the *Autobiography* of his father’s daily prayer which ran on the lines: “An house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” This has reference to Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (2) in the Bible, where one longs to be in the heavenly dwelling which can never be destroyed. It also points to the heavenly Father who is a constant source of security and in whom mankind can rely in general. Thus, Muir accomplishes the twin objective of universalizing the personal and the general in the poem.

A mother rears her child in accordance with her plan, thereby proving to be its first teacher. Hence, Muir, succeeds in transmuting the everyday experiences of his life into something meaningful in the poem. In this way the poem incorporates into its framework the concepts of faith, hope and love that Muir seeks in his parents. In fact, he succeeds in conjuring up multiple layers of meaning through a very simple poem.

The concept of time is also brought into focus with the motif of the sun. Words such as “sunny” “evening” and “time seemed finished ere the ship passed by,” suggest the influence of time. In childhood, time is not viewed as an enemy but as in the words of Muir: “That world was a perfectly solid world, for the days did not undermine it but merely rounded it, or rather repeated it, as if there were only one day endlessly rising and setting.” (*Autobiography* 25)

Muir considers childhood as the only time in one’s life when one exists within immortality because time does not exist there for them. One can feel the kinaesthetic imagery in the poem, rendering it the beauty and the splendour.

Another poem, *The Lost Land* does not depict Muir’s escapist mood but rather sets the tone of the poem towards the end in the lines:

While past huge mountains and across great seas
That haven lies, and my long-sought release. (*First Poems*)

For instance it appears as though the poet is grieving about the loss of childhood days in the beginning of the poem. But on a deeper level one can recall to mind the concept of hope that looms large in the last line. The revival of childhood memories is only a technique employed to keep a sense of it alive in the present. Hence, it cannot be an escapist idea, but paradoxically an affirmative attitude to experience the powers within himself, and as Muir's biographer, P. H. Butter states:

Eden is known in early childhood more naturally and easily than it can be later, and so the revival of childhood memories is one means of keeping a sense of it alive in oneself, but it can be re-entered only through the present moment, only by the man one is now. This desire is natural to man, and is not an escape. Indeed it is the reverse of an escape; for the recovery of an ability to experience freshly like a child makes a man unusually vulnerable, strips away the protective mask worn by most adults. (*Edwin Muir: Man and Poet* 96-7)

Muir's case can be considered similar to that of a blind man in the poem. The blind man in spite of his blindness knows that there exists a road; similarly the speaker (Muir) in the poem perceives the solidity and clarity of his imagination in spite of the "mists" which he encounters on his flight. Hence, a note of hope exists delineating the positive framework of the mind underlying the poem, though Muir tries to revive his buried childhood memories in the lines:

And sleep upon a green embattled mound
With childhood's labyrinth engirdled round;
And I have been here many times before
And shall return hereafter many more. (96)

Here, for instance, in spite of the sojourn in childhood memories, the connotation of his flight into the journey of life is forward, keeping in tune with the affirmative note in his poetry.

Horses is another simple poem depicting Muir's passion for the animals on his farm as he recollects in his *Autobiography* about his "father's plough horses" as he saw them at the age of four or five. He "loved and dreaded" the horses as an explorer loves and dreads a strange country which he has not yet entered. Beautiful metaphors and similes adorn the poem in the lines:

Their conquering hooves which trod the stubble down
 Were ritual that turned the field to brown.
 And their great hulks were seraphim of gold. (*Collected Poems* 20)

And again in the lines:

Their eyes as brilliant and as wide as night
 Gleamed with a cruel apocalyptic light.
 Their manes the leaping ire of the wind
 Lifted with rage invisible and blind. (20)

The word "apocalyptic light" explores the possibility of a Christian interpretation contained in the last book- "Apocalypse" – the revelation to John in its strict sense but the wider possibility is gained in the poem, *The Horses* where it is explored to the zenith.

The three poems- *When the Trees grow bare on the High Hills*, *Autumn in Prague* and *October at Hellbrunn* pinpoint to his worship of Nature akin to Wordsworth's.

The virtue of the poem, *When the trees grow bare on the High Hills* is sustained in its imagination. The speaker in the poem compares his heart to the "bare branches" of the trees, bereft of leaves. His heart seems to be unburdened of thoughts which oppressed him previously, and so has become light akin to the bare branches which have shed its leaves. The landscape resembles the poet's state of mind:

My heart grows light like the bare branches,
 And thoughts which through long months
 Have lain like lead upon my breast,
 Heavy, slow-ripening thoughts,
 Grow light and sere,
 And fall at last, so empty and so beautiful. (*Collected Poems* 22)

Symbolically, the poet seems to be laying bare his inner and outer feelings; the fable and the story in his sense of the term as he states in the *Autobiography*:

...the life of every man is an endlessly repeated performance of the life of man. It is clear for the same reason that no autobiography can confine itself to conscious life, and that sleep, in which we pass a third of our existence, is a mode of experience, and our dreams a part of reality. In themselves our conscious lives may not be particularly interesting. But what we are not and can never be, our fable, seems to me inconceivably interesting. I should like to write that fable, but I cannot even live it; and all I could do if I related the outward course of my life would be to show how I have deviated from it; though even that is impossible, since I do not know the fable or anybody who knows it. One or two stages in it I can recognize: the age of innocence and the Fall and all the dramatic consequences which issue from the Fall. (*Autobiography* 49)

The poem reveals the maturing of Muir's mind, gained as a result of the experiences in Germany, where he engaged himself in the "orgy of looking." The imagery of Nature provided him with the necessary stuff for imagination. And in the lines:

The leaves fall faster,
Like a slow unreturning fountain of red gold. (*Collected Poems* 22)

The handling of colour and ornaments for instance, "red gold" is suggestive of the images of the natural and sensuous life which lies outside the tragic action.

Autumn in Prague is about the calmness that follows the harvest. The poet conjures up the image of a young girl in the poem:

A young girl,
Sits with bent head,
Blind, covered head,
Bowed to the earth,
Like a tree
Dreaming a long-held dream. (23)

The image of the girl is one with the natural scenery around. And the vivid description extends to:

The gossamers forge their cables
Between the grasses,
Secure. (23)

Here, the word “secure” hints at the poet’s security, solace and comfort established with Nature. The earth is pictured as a God, lying far withdrawn and asleep. Muir’s imagery is largely visual and kinesthetic. His tone is reflective and the emotion controlled but “recollected in tranquility” similar to his favourite poet, Wordsworth, for whom he had great devotion. P. H. Butter observes:

... the poet too assimilates himself to the scene, as the clamour of his own strife seems to come to him in his new serenity from afar. The peace, the exhaustion, the sense of energy withdrawn but still existing in suspense, the coldness and clarity, the sense of having been unburdened and of bareness- these are all features at once of the landscape and of the poet’s state. (*Edwin Muir: Man and Poet* 99)

In the poem, *October at Hellbrunn*, the poet is in a romantic guise and pictures the beauty and wonder of Nature. The Muirs (Muir and Willa Muir) undertook a continental tour after their marriage to Germany and it was the German landscape that provided an added succour to Muir’s Nature poems. He mentions it in the *Autobiography*:

There was something in the appearance of the woods which seemed to invite nature-worship, and from nature-worship to worship of our own nature....The trees solicited us to be natural, since they were natural, to be young, since they renewed their youth every year, to be child-like, since we could easily feel as we wandered among them that we were children of nature... The worship of nature was a powerful cult in Germany...after the war...the war had made them poor and wakened in them a need to be with harmless unwarlike things like trees and streams, and to move freely through peaceful spaces. (202-3)

The war created an awakening in Muir and induced in him the need to be with unwarlike things like trees, streams and peaceful spaces. This idea evokes the affirmative way that Muir chooses in Poetry. The idea is implicitly expressed in the lines:

The dim Lake shines, oppressed the fountains play,
 And shadowless weight lies on the wooded hill.
 The patient trees rise separate, as if deep
 They listened dreaming through the hollow ground,
 Each in a single and divided sleep,
 While few sad leaves fall heedless with no sound.

(*Collected Poems* 23-4)

There is a radiance about these poems. Muir longs for places in time where he found happiness along with his wife, especially during the War and recollects the same in the *Autobiography*:

The cobbles shown, and tender green grass began to sprout
 between them;
 As we went on the grass steadily grew longer, the house walls
 crumbled, sending out green branches from the stone, and in a
 little square where we found ourselves next trees began to rise and
 blossom, filling the air with perfume, while farther away we heard
 the plashing of fountains and the singing of birds. (225)

The above passage in the *Autobiography* bears a similarity to the last stanza of the poem:

The silent afternoon draws in, and dark
 The trees rise now, grown heavier is the ground,
 And breaking through the silence of the park
 Farther a hidden fountain flings its sound. (*Collected Poems* 24)

In fact the key to Muir's poetry lies in his *Autobiography* and his poetry is patterned upon it, revealing the thematic and symbolical meanings hidden in his poems. These poems are therefore a revelation of his inner fable and outer story. In most of the poems, Muir portrays a solid, concrete world like the real and solid world of his childhood days in the Wyre as also the life of the Glasgow slums that resonate like the real and solid world to his poetic mind.

The source from which Muir has drawn sustenance for his poetry lies deep-rooted in the imagery of Nature, time and in inter-personal relationships within the family. He is coerced into gazing at the splendour and marvel of Nature, an artifice of God in consonance with the teachings of the Christian faith. The themes of love, time immortality and eternity figure in his poems. These themes are revealed in terms of images and when images recur over and over again in poem after poem, they take a meaning beyond its objective self and move into the realm of a symbol. Thus, "Horses" are a relevant image for time. But its frequent employment, hauls and releases it into a symbol of timelessness, and is seen in relation to eternity and immortality. Muir's poems are based on a strong and solid foundation as it is the actual experience (lived experience) and are communicated in the form of a motif. It is just like the theme in a musical composition, which can be picked, worked over and then developed. This releases the pattern underneath his works and the reader is thus, able to view and feel the experience of the poems. This thematic pattern recognizes images or identifies related symbols and the experience inherent in the work. The steady repetition of images and symbols is a recurrent pattern in Muir and as observed from an analysis of his poems make the experience a part of our consciousness and sensibility. Muir possesses a god like quality in his narration and has a predilection for the traditional and conventional symbols and images. Thus, the inherent tone in Muir's poetry conveys a lyric message.

Works Cited

- Brown, G. M. Ed. *Selected Prose*. (London: John Murray, 1987).
- Butter, P. H. *Edwin Muir: Man and Poet*. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966).
- Muir, Edwin. *First Poems*. (London: Hogarth Press, 1925).
- - - , *Collected Poems*. Ed. Hall and Willa Muir. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).
- - - , *An Autobiography*. rev. ed. (London: Hogarth Press, 1968).
- - - , "Letters" Ed. G.M. Brown. (London: John Murray, 1987).

Celibacy Versus Marriage

A Reading of Larkin's "Dockery and Son"

Thongam Dhanajit Singh

I see life more as an affair of solitude diversified by company
than an affair of company diversified by solitude.

Philip Larkin

The reason why Larkin chose to remain single despite having a number of girlfriends still remains an unanswered question except some conjectures made in some books on him by some writers on the basis of some events that took place in his life which might or might not have direct link to his celibacy. Some say that he is a loner by nature, a stammerer and a very shy boy who avoids company. Some say that he had an unspent childhood, always feeling like an outsider in the family. Some say, the only reason is in the diaries destroyed (Andrew Motion, 522) at the Brynmore Jones library immediately after his death in 1985; or in the letters written to Bruce Montgomery and George Hartley which are either forbidden to be seen until 2035 or may be seen in a future sale as the case may be. (Anthony Thwaite XII).

Though the reasons cited are not so exacting, reading his poem "Dockery and Son" in the light of his celibacy is of immense interest. In an interview he granted to *Paris Review* he once said :

Yes, I remained single by choice and should not have liked anything else, but of course most people do get married, and divorced too, and so I suppose I am an outsider in the sense you [Robert Phillips] mean.

Of course it worries me from time to time but it would take very long to explain why. Samuel Butler said, Life is an affair of being spoilt in one way or another. (Larkin, 65)

Larkin had affairs with a number of women; yet, his poems are filled with the dark side of life, full of sorrow, defeats, isolation, death and chaos. He remained single out of his own 'choice', yet he felt as an outsider in the society because of his own 'choice'. Now, again, why did he remain single? "Dockery and Son" could throw some light to this question.

The poem opens with a one-sided conversation with the Dean giving some information to Larkin about Dockery who was his (Larkin's) junior at St. John's College, Oxford. To this information Larkin gave a nod of acknowledgement and like a pendulum, his mind started moving from present-to-past-to-present and then to future at the end of the poem. He came to Oxford 'death-suited' to pay homage to Agnes Cuming, his predecessor as librarian at Hull, who died on 8th March 1962 with the funeral taking place on 12th of the same month. The poem was written in February 1963 and was completed on 23rd March after a year of his visit to Oxford and included in the volume *The Whitsun Weddings* which Charles Montieth, the then Chairman of Faber and Faber, gave nod for its publication as a recognition of Larkin's literary talent.

As the poet's mind drifts back to his college days at St. John's, he suddenly recalls Dockery, two years junior to him "who was sharing room with Cartwright who was killed" (in the 2nd world war?). Recalling those days takes him to an emotional nostalgic saga. They met at the college, left the college, took different decisions — Dockery deciding to get married and have children and Larkin deciding to remain single — like the "joining and parting (rail) lines." The more baffling question Larkin raises in the poem is "What is marriage all about?" It brings children which means "increase" to Dockery while it will mean "dilution" of life for Larkin - a thing that will defame life. In the penultimate stanza the poet seems to reject both their decisions of marrying and remaining single as empty "innate assumptions" in the face of death which the poet brings in at the last line of the poem. He allows his unsatisfactory life to go on because he has no option but to go on without resisting it and tries to find solace by creating his own world while living in our world.

Life is ‘unsatisfactory’. Larkin does not, however, offer it the resistance, as his admired Hardy does, of contrary expectations. Perhaps the only unqualified positive emotion he expresses is one that he has remarked in Betjeman, a poet he also admires : *a yearning for a world, as it were, unburdened by himself; out of this he has created pastoral worlds blessedly emptied of himself, ‘attics cleared by me.* (Michael Kirkham, 299)

The poet thinks that those including Dockery who get married take their decisions only as a habit and not as a religious act. People marry because they have seen others do so before them. We marry not because “we think truest, or most want to do” but because it is a “style” of life that makes us inclusive in a society without doing which we will be alienated. But the different “innate assumptions” of the poet and his friend Dockery do not make sense at all because, for the poet, “life is first boredom, then fear (of death).” In life we will meet what we have not chosen but “something hidden from us chose — the only end of age.” Thus the theme of the poem is ‘the disparity between reality (death) and desire (marriage) (Michael Kirkham, 296). As such the tone of the poem is very pessimistic as it was written probably in a nostalgic haze in 1963 recalling his visit to St. John’s College, Oxford, to attend the funeral of Agnes.

Coming to the question of marriage, Larkin writes :
To have no son, no wife
 No house or land still seemed quite natural.
 Only a numbness registered the shock
 Of finding out how much had gone of life,

(Lines 25-28)

The reality, Larkin saw, is that time will bring age to both of them (Larkin and Dockery) but before “the only end of age”, it has brought “for Dockery a son, for me (Larkin) nothing / Nothing with all a son’s harsh patronage.” “A son’s harsh patronage” will “dilute” life while it will “increase” the value of life for Dockery. As he considers life “more as an affair of solitude diversified by company”, Larkin was never committed to the cause of marriage with any of his many girlfriends

because marriage will bring him children, family, company – all of which will dilute the sanctity of his ‘solitude’ (i.e. life as he calls it). And the only way to preserve the sanctity of life is celibacy.

Larkin experienced an “unspent” childhood and he would not have wanted to return it again to his children in the event of his marriage which might also bring “a son’s harsh patronage.” His childhood experience could be a strong basis for searching the causes that made him a confirmed bachelor. Tracing the facts of his childhood Nicholas Marsh writes :

Larkin highlighted a horror of his parents’ marriage as the defining experience that left him isolated, terrified of marrying and incapable of committing himself, throughout his life. We may add that his feeling of isolation was probably also a natural consequence of weak eyesight and a pronounced stammer. (Nicholas Marsh,166)

Isolation and anxiety were inveterate components of his world where a “featureless future” awaits him. He lived in a family where his Nazi supporting father, Sydney, always found faults with his helpless wife, Eva. Sydney treated Eva more as a servant than a wife criticizing her for every small failings and was also contemptuous of women. He also admired Hitler a lot in a country where Hitler was considered as an enemy, a dictator, anti-English and an usurper. The family was thus isolated in the country because of Sydney’s admiration of Hitler. Yet he was intellectual and clever only to make young Larkin confused and consequently he (Larkin) was deprived of the emotional bondage he should have with his parents. As a young boy he felt as an outsider even in his own family and started thinking of the “Importance of Elsewhere.” His childhood was thus “a forgotten boredom” when looked back after a long time. Thus Nicholas Marsh further writes :

. . . he (Larkin) mocks the joy and passion of Dylan Thomas’s and D.H. Lawrence’s memories insisting on the emptiness of his own early years : ‘Nothing, like something, happens anywhere. (Marsh, 166)

The visit he paid to St. John’s College, Oxford, prompted him to recall a series of past events and in the due course, he acknowledged

“the shock of finding out how much had gone of life” in the fourth stanza of the poem. To remain single or to enter a married life may be at our disposal by applying our “innate assumptions.” But the choices of marriage and celibacy are not our own but “what something hidden from us chose” and this “something” at last will leave us “age, and then the only end of age.” Thus the fear of death dominates in the last stanza belittling the question of marriage and celibacy discussed at length in the preceding stanzas by juxtaposing his life and Dockery’s side by side. The poem, Andrew Motion said, is a melancholic poem which reflects a great deal of autobiographical elements.

Bitterly funny and grievously melancholic, “Dockery and Son” is a compressed autobiography. It encapsulates Larkin’s views about the effect of his parents on his personality, it reports spiritedly on his undergraduate career, it grimly sketches the attitude which dominated his adult life. (Andrew Motion, 334)

To ascertain what Motion wrote, one may be reminded of what Larkin said in an interview when the matter of his being single is questioned as being the theme of his poems.

. . . I often wonder why people get married. I think perhaps they dislike being alone more than I do. Anyone who knows me will tell you that I am not fond of company. I’m very fond of people, but its difficult to get people without company. And I think living with someone and being in love is very difficult business anyway because almost by definition it means putting yourself at the disposal of someone else ranking them higher than yourself I think love collides very sharply with selfishness, and they are both pretty powerful things. (Larkin, 54)

In the light of the above remark Larkin would have found it quite “natural” while having “no son, no wife” and, in doing so, he would have been able to avoid the collision of “love” and “selfishness”.

The structure of the poem also gives strength to the theme of isolation by allowing the movement of the poet’s thought from present-to-past-to-present until the last stanza where the poet thinks of the grim future (the only end of age). The last line of the first stanza suggests

the poet's yearning for his past which was immediately negated by the word "Locked" in the first line of the second stanza suggesting that he is isolated by his own past. Then he fell asleep. However in the third stanza he was awakened by the present realities (fumes and furnace glares of Sheffield) only to taste the "awful pie" and see the "joining and parting (rail) lines." After taking stock of the unreturnable past and the present realities, he finds out "the shock /Of finding out how much had gone of life." This loss of past life could not be consolidated by marriage, instead, it will make his life oppressive by ranking someone higher than himself.

Of course marriage is the core issue of many of his poems such as "Wedding Wind", "Whitsun Weddings", "An Arundel Tomb", "Afternoons," etc. and, that Larkin remained a confirmed bachelor throughout his life suddenly draws our attention. He fell in love first with Ruth Bowman while he was in Wellington and got engaged; but the engagement was broken as he was not committed to it with Ruth returning the ring later. Their affair continued for seven years. In 1950, he fell in love with Monica Jones and their affair continued till the end of his life at Hull. But this affair too had not fruited to marriage despite the fact that they liked each other and continued their affair even when Larkin developed affairs with other women such as Betty, Judy, Maeve Brennan, Winifred and Patsy at different intervals of time while staying in Ireland and working at the Brynmore Jones Library, Hull. For Larkin, marriage means an act of uniting love and sex which is impossible because sex, to him, is a reality while love is always an illusion. The moment when one tries to turn love (illusion) into reality, the result he finds is grief. Andrew Motion also suggests that his commitment to his widowed mother could have been a cause, if not the only cause, of his decision to remain single.

Be it his own "choice" compelled by his commitment to his widowed mother, or his love of freedom, or anything else, the poem "Dockery and Son" portrays life's emptiness at the face of death which also nullifies the sanctity of marriage because people get married with the selfish motive of being looked after by their children when they grow old and weak. This selfishness collides with love, if one gets married, and the result it gives is grief. These factors can be assessed, for the

time being, as the reasons of Larkin's celibacy until the letters he wrote to Bruce Montgomery and George Heartley are opened for public inspection.

Work Cited

- 1 Larkin said this in an interview he granted to *Observer* when the interviewer asked him about his being a confirmed bachelor as the theme of his poems. See Philip Larkin, *Required Writing : Miscellaneous Pieces*, London: Faber and Faber, 1983, p. 54.
- 2 Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin : A Writer's Life*, London; Faber and Faber, 1994, p. 522.
- 3 Anthony Thwaite (ed.) *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin*, London: Faber and Faber, 1993, p. XII.
- 4 Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces*, London : Faber and Faber, 1983, p. 65.
- 5 Michael Kirkham. *Philip Larkin and Charles Tomlinson : Realism and Art* in the *New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Volume 8. Ed. Boris Ford, England : Penguin Books, 1984. p. 299.
- 6 Ibid. p. 296.
- 7 Nicholas Marsh. *Philip Larkin : The Poems*, Hampshire : Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.166.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin : A Writer's Life*, London : Faber and Faber, 1994/ p. 334.
- 10 Philip Larkin, *Required Writing : Miscellaneous Pieces*, London: Faber and Faber, 1983, p. 54.

Mother

A.S. Francis

Eager to perceive words of wisdom,
She goes her way, making love her kingdom;
Learning she makes an ornament of grace;
All her friends shower on her praise.

Never she errs into the path of the evil,
For she maintains a strong will;
She delights in learning
And makes wisdom her earning.

She despises no counsel, she is humble;
She loves the beautiful and the simple;
Discretion is her precious treasure;
The words she uses she does measure.

Her words breathe forth amazing knowledge;
Her actions prove beyond her age;
She exudes the elegance of virtues;
She is her parents' darling and fortune.

She finds favour in the sight of all;
All her teachers she does enthrall
With her faithful fair dealing;
Her smile has the effect of healing.

She never wearies of correction,
For in all she strives for perfection;
Her ways are ways of pleasantness;
Her words are messengers of righteousness.

She devises no evil against her friends;
She dwells securely in everybody's love;
Her heart retains her teachers' words;
Her soul treasures their lofty deeds.

Perverse lips she keeps afar;
With gossip nothing does she mar;
Her words and deeds come from the depth of truth
And they bring forth the best of fruits.

She perfumes her life with honour and joy;
She exults in excellence, though she is coy;
She is calm, but never clamorous;
She is sedate, but pleasantly humorous.

She is never a grief to anyone she meets;
Sloth never sits in her work and words;
She is a boon to every body she greets;
Her fairness is the richest of rewards.

She walks in integrity;
She works with knowledge;
Her faith is a tower;
God's grace is her bower.

To be with her is an honour;
Even the sluggard she makes labour;
Her way is forward, her work is right;
Prayer is the secret of her might.

Her thoughts tend to plenteousness;
Her deeds tend to righteousness;
Her words tend to truthfulness;
Her faith tends to fruitfulness.

She loves not sleep;
Secrets she keeps;
She makes none weep;
Rich rewards she reaps.

She builds castles of confidence;
She scales heights of excellence;
She builds bridges of trust;
She radiates great zest.

She trails freshness;
She keeps away harshness;
She sows goodness;
She harvests gladness.

Her heart is a hearth of warmth;
Her smile a rainbow of cheer;
Her faith a never crumbling fort;
She keeps herself above trifles.

She never wavers,
The wrong never favours;
She strives and seeks;
She stands by the meek.

METAMORPHOSIS

Juju Abraham

They struck me
And I writhed in pain
As venom coursed through my placid veins.

They struck me
Again and again
Until rattled I hissed and my hood arose.

Now
With indifference I discern
That I've sprouted fangs
And has become as deadly
As the other clan.

ANTIQUÉ

There she lay curled
like a millipede
the brown skinned, blue-veined matriarch,
reeking of urine
and all funny things
in an old mansion
beside a blue lake.

Home-stay, home-stay
cried a board
welcoming strangers from every port,
offering luxury of every sort
stood the owner, an epitome of warmth.

Memories meandering,
generations wilting,
blood ties loosening,
silence thickening;
strangeness creeping,
a distancing, a receding,
Dismissing raw pain with a casual flick
I silently bid goodbye
to the heirloom of bones.

On Digging and Discovering

Monisha Titus

“Unaccustomed Earth” by Jhumpa Lahiri

Random House India, 2009

Pp 333

Rs. 295

Jhumpa Lahiri, the famous “interpreter of maladies,” is taking us this time for a tour on the unaccustomed earth, the urban, global landscape. She is faithfully recording its uneven topography with all its twists and turns, but never fails to offer the readers a few glimpses of signposts and green signals. The characters in this collection of stories are the first generation Indian immigrants from West Bengal and their children in America.

Indians went to America, the land of dreams, in quest of a better quality of life in both private and public domain, earnestly hoping to strike roots in those greener pastures. But this American dream has its grey and dark shades as well. The alien land of their adoption will not open its secrets too soon. Many Indian settlers are unable to relate to the new land and culture in any profound manner. At the same time, it is true that most of them are able to grapple with the new realities and challenges with resilience and creativity. They do well in the academic and professional spheres, and take care of their families. These Indians are not unnecessarily sentimental and nostalgic about the country they left behind though Indian movies, politics, cuisine and jewellery invariably creep into their private space.

The first story in the book, *“Unaccustomed Earth,”* appears to me simply a masterpiece. The author invests the seemingly ordinary events of life with culture, grace and lyrical glow. There is a heightening of interest and exquisite narrative flow all through. The central character is a man in the evening of his life who lost his wife to illness. His financial stability enables him to travel in Europe and he visits his

daughter, Ruma, married to an American, during a travel-break. He enjoys his visit, the company of his grandson, Akash, seems to have widened his emotional horizon (akash).

He takes a keen interest in the garden; he himself had diligently maintained one. Though it is quite unlikely that anything new will bloom in the garden of his life in this twilight zone, he spends a good amount of time amidst the flowering plants. His staying back will be mutually beneficial. But he decides to move ahead. "He did not want to be part of another family, part of the mess, the feuds, the demands, the energy of it. He did not want to live in the margins of his daughter's life, in the shadow of her marriage."

His advice to Ruma to work for financial as well as mental stability is fine. During his travel, he once met Mrs. Bagchi who too was sailing in the same boat. Friendship immediately blossomed between the two lonely souls. Ruma who got a wind of this vaguely romantic affair could only hope for a silver lining in the 'evening horizon' of her father's life, though she had always harboured a grudge against him for neglecting her mother.

Other stories that follow are equally absorbing. They all reveal Lahiri's ability to transform the commonplace into something rich and enduring. In the second story, "Hell-Heaven", a daughter speaks about Pranab Chakraborty, "who had washed up on the barren shores of my parents' social life in the early seventies". Pranab could easily establish a rapport with her mother. It was a natural sequence of events. The narrator's father, "a lover of silence and solitude" was indeed wedded to his work and research. Pranab's marriage to an American lady ended in a divorce because he developed a relationship with a married Bengali woman. Two families were destroyed in a single stroke. The narrator's mother, the victim of an unhappy marriage also found it difficult to run the show. The narrator's "own heart was broken by a man" she had hoped to marry. The story conveys the idea that wrecking marriages and dysfunctional families are not the monopoly of Americans. Indians, too, have a share in it. Again, hell and heaven are the inseparable parts of existence, the choice lies with the individual. Dear readers! Are you hell-bent to prove me wrong? Or, heavenly

disposed to support me? In any case, there is no easy answer to the paradox of hell and heaven.

In “A Choice of Accommodations,” Amit, an Indian, and Megan, an American- a loving couple with two lovely daughters, Maya and Monika – find themselves drifting apart. Perhaps, they are not drifting apart, each one is only embracing some private space and a little solitude. Mercifully there is no threat to the marriage and to the family they have painstakingly built up. There is still love left between Amit and Megan, they are responsible father and mother, but they need to work hard on their relationship, not taking it for granted. True marriages are not made in heaven, but on this harsh, unaccustomed earth.

There are two more stories in the first section- “Only Goodness” and “Nobody’s Business”. In Part Two, there are three stories under a common title “Hema and Kaushik”. It is the story of Hema and Kaushik, their meeting during adolescence, separation, second meeting in Rome and final separation. It was Navin who finally marries Hema. But can she ever forget the past? A cyclonic storm in a sea beach wipes out Kaushik, but can it wipe out the memories of Hema?

Jhumpa Lahiri tells the stories of the diasporic community in her own inimitable style. The effortless flow of her narration is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. The crystal clear stream of narration mirrors everything with the vigour of art and sparkle of throbbing humanity. Vikram Seth once said: “What will last as literature and what gives you pleasure is clear, affecting, straightforward writing which appeals to the general intelligent reader.” There is much more for us to dig out from this unaccustomed earth. The stories offer a great deal more. Will you join me to plumb deeper and deeper, wider and wider? As T.S. Eliot said, criticism is as inevitable as breathing.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dr V. Nithyanantha Bhat

Research Supervisor in English, Mahatma Gandhi University,
Kottayam and Hon. Director, Sukrtindra Oriental Research Institute,
Thammanam, Kochi - 682 032.

Uzoechi Nwagbara

Greenwich School of Management, United Kingdom.

Dr V.S. Antony

Director, Academic Development of Aquina's Group of Colleges,
Kochi

Ramesh K.G.

Research Scholar in English, Mar Athanasius College, Kothamangalam.

Dr Varghese C. Abraham

Associate Professor in English, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam.

Sonia Paul

Research Scholar, Dept. of English and Centre for Research,
St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam, Cochin - 682 011.

Jisha John

Research Scholar in English, Mar Athanasius College, Kothamangalam.

Dr Rooble Verma

School of Studies in English, Vikram University, Ujjain (M.P.),
India - 456 010.

and

Prof. Manoj Verma

Govt. College, Nagod, Satna (M.P.), India.

Dr Sonia James

Associate Professor, Dept. of English, St. Peter's College, Kolencherry.

Tessy Anthony

Associate Professor, Dept. of English and Centre for Research, St.
Teresa's College, Cochin - 682 011.

Dr N. Jenny Rappai

Senior Scale Lecturer, Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit,
Kalady, India.

Thongam Dhanajit Singh

Research Scholar, English Department, Manipur University,
Canchipur - 795 003.

Monisha Titus

Scholar, Dept. of English and Centre for Research, St. Teresa's
College, Ernakulam, Cochin - 682 011.

A.S Francis

Former Head of the Department of English, Fatima Matha College,
Kollam.

Juju Abraham

Research Scholar in English, Mar Athanasius College, Kothamangalam.