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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Ahmad M. S. Abu Baker and Amer Hassan Al-Rashid	1	Natural Providence? in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat": Naturalism, Romanticism, Ecology
Siham Arfaroui	15	A Quest for a "House with no Walls Between the Rooms": An Ethnic Approach to Gish Jen's <i>Mona in the Promised Land</i>
Hasan Bakır	29	The Idea of Mothering and Mother-Child Relationships in "Matmazel Dimitra'nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi"
Eda Dedebaş	39	Shakespeare Re-Positioned: The Demystification of the Canon and the Subversive Strategies in <i>Harlem Duet</i> by Djanet Sears
Murat Göç	49	Palahniuk's Desperate Men and the Gender Angst
Dimple Godiwala	61	Language, Experience, Identity: Contemporary Indian Women Poets Writing in English
William S. Haney II	85	Eugène Ionesco's <i>Rhinoceros</i> : Defiance vs. Conformism
Carla Rodríguez González	103	An Act of Union?: Conflicting Depictions of Scotland and England in Ali Smith's <i>Like</i>
Şebnem Toplu	113	Adoption and Reconstitution of Lives: Jackie Kay's "The Adoption Papers"
Bronwen Welch	127	Sue Made Flesh: Sue Bridehead's Corporeality in Michael Winterbottom's <i>Jude</i>
Maria C. Zamora	137	Ethnic American Literature and Its Discontents: Reflections on the Body, the Nation

REVIEWS

Aylin Atilla 145 *Sacred Theatre*

Yeliz Biber 149 *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?*

Laurence Raw 153 *Passion Play*

157 **CONTRIBUTORS**

**Natural Providence? in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat":
Naturalism, Romanticism, Ecology**

Ahmad M.S. Abu Baker and Amer Hassan Al-Rashid

Abstract: This article explores the depiction of Nature in Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat", re-reading the story as depicting Nature as a mindful goddess of retribution rather than being merely indifferent to the characters' plight. Unlike many critics who argue that the death of the Oiler was arbitrary, we suggest that Oiler is *naturally* selected to die because he stands for pollution and contamination. Conversely, the Correspondent and the *injured* Captain are saved because of Natural Providence.

Keywords: Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat", Nature, Natural Providence, Ecology

*Perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all
sincerity, are just compressed into that
inappreciable moment of time in which we step
over the threshold of the invisible.*
(Joseph Conrad *Heart of Darkness* 107)

Stephen Crane is a modern American author whose works are permeated with naturalism, absurdity of life, and the insignificance of human existence. Such works include *Maggie*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and "The Open Boat" which is the focus of this paper. According to Stefanie Eye, the story is about "nature and fate, life and death, brotherhood and the strength of man" (66). Crane's critics tend to focus on Nature as mainly indifferent to the human condition. The reason for this is Crane's status as a modern writer, whose works have to be treated by modern critical theory, thus focusing on the godless universe and analyzing the text via modern movements such as Naturalism and Existentialism. However we contend that Crane has contradictory views about Nature as being both indifferent and mindful simultaneously.

The contradictions and inconsistencies in Crane's view of Nature which will be outlined in this article are caused by the nature of the modern text itself in which "a reader can be robbed of assurances" because of the "*unresolved* contradictions, where interpretation of reality clashes with another internal interpretation" (Hume 125, our emphasis). The meaning of the work, then, becomes amorphous due to the uncertainty that characterizes the modern text. Terry Eagleton defines Modernism as "a term [that] at once expresses and mystifies a sense of one's particular historical conjuncture as being somehow peculiarly pregnant with crisis and change" (367), and that "[i]t signifies a portentous, confused yet curiously heightened self-consciousness of one's own historical moment, at once self-doubting and self-congratulatory, anxious and triumphalistic together" (367). Eagleton argues that "[i]t suggests at one and the same time an arresting and denial of history in the violent shock of the immediate present" (367). Crane's modern text suffers from confusion, contradictions and inconsistencies.

It also rejects history (being influenced by Romanticism) and embraces it simultaneously. According to Irving Howe, Modernism is “a dynamism of asking and of learning not to reply. The past was devoted to answers, the modern period confines itself to questions [...] We present ourselves, we establish our authenticity by the questions we allow to torment us” (8-9). Indeed, Crane leaves us tormented by the following questions: Is Nature a mindful goddess of retribution? Does it have Providence or is it flatly indifferent? Is life absurd or is there a meaning to be reached? Is Crane writing in the spirit of Romanticism or is he following the Naturalistic movement?

There are solid reasons to assume that Nature is depicted simultaneously as indifferent *and* a goddess of retribution, despite such “unresolved contradictions”. Such a depiction is not really that strange in a modern text. For instance, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* serves as a perfect example of such contradictions and inconsistencies. In the play, Vladimir and Estragon search for meaning in the absurd life that they live and in which there is “[n]othing to be done” (5) and “[n]othing is certain” (10). They wait for a Godot, or God, and they do not know whether He will come or not. The many references to people or objects that are saved/damned (the reference to the thieves who were damned for not believing in Jesus Christ and the thief who was saved by Christ (7), the lung that is healthy/saved and the other that is weak/damned (36), leaves readers tormented with the question of whether there is divine providence or whether everything is arbitrary.

Similarly, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* contains another godless modern context. Nature, in this modern novel, fights the colonizers and damns them “as if nature herself had tried to ward off intruders” (18), while it saves the natives and protects them. For instance, the colonizers realize that Nature is bent on killing them: “death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here” (5). Also, Marlow feels that “[t]he great wall of vegetation” is ready “to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence” (42). On the other hand, Nature protects the “nigger” who “was being beaten” (32) for causing the fire in the shed; “the wilderness without a sound took him into its bosom again” (33). Furthermore, Nature saves the “old” hippopotamus from the mad “pilgrims” who “used to turn out in body and empty every rifle they could lay hands on at him” (40). “The pilgrims” start believing that the “animal has a charmed life” (40). Nature, in contrast, damns the “rail-way truck” which Marlow sees “lying there on its back with its wheels in the air” and which “looked as dead as the carcass of some animal” (19), because it is working for the colonizers. Despite its modernity, *Heart of Darkness* clearly depicts a natural context which is permeated with Natural Providence.

Like the two modern aforementioned literary works, Crane’s story contains characters who are saved despite being weak and injured (the Captain and the Correspondent), and others who are damned/drowned despite being strong (the Oiler). The reference to the Correspondent’s cigars emphasizes this point about Natural Providence. The Correspondent discovers that four of his eight cigars “were soaked with sea-water” (i.e. damned) and “four were *perfectly* scatheless” (i.e. saved) (1234, our emphasis). Crane leaves us tormented with the question of whether the death of the Oiler and the survival of the Captain and the Correspondent were random arbitrary acts or whether Nature chose to save them. In this article, the authors will prove that there is

strong solid evidence in the text that reveals a kind of Natural Providence that saves most characters in Crane's "The Open Boat", but damns the Oiler because of ecological reasons that shall be explained in the following sections.

Naturalism versus Romanticism

To claim that Crane depicts Nature as a goddess of retribution, or that it has Providence, is tantamount to claiming that Crane is following the romantic tradition. As shocking as this claim may appear, its shock wears off when a person examines Crane's style of writing. Despite being a modern writer, Crane's style shuttles between the nineteenth century tradition and that of the twentieth. In fact, Crane's "The Open Boat" shares many similarities with Coleridge's romantic poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in terms of the structure (both texts are divided into seven sections), themes (sin against Nature and Nature as a goddess of retribution, need for redemption through retelling the ordeal), elements (boat vs. ship, seagulls vs. albatross), and the moral lesson that is taught (the need to respect Nature and be at harmony with it). Such an obvious and amazing similarity was first noticed by Lloyd Dendinger in 1968 in his article "Stephen Crane's Inverted Use of Key Images of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'" published in *Studies in Short Fiction* 5 (192-94). These similarities could by no means be considered coincidental. They prove beyond doubt that Crane was influenced by Coleridge's poem and that, therefore, Crane's story can possibly be analysed in a similar way to Coleridge's poem. Hence, there is a good reason to view "The Open Boat" using the nineteenth century Romantic perspective. The results of such a new way of looking at Crane's "The Open Boat" are quite interesting.

Keeping in mind the fact that Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" influenced Crane's "The Open Boat", one starts to realize that a romantic view of the text is possible. The first element to suggest such a treatment is that the story is about the sea. Jonathan Raban maintains that "[i]n the United States, as not in Britain, writing about the sea has been contiguous with 'nature writing', as if the sea offered not so much a counterworld as a liquid extension of the green fields and forests within the land itself" (24). In other words, writing about the sea is equal to writing about Nature, thus invoking Romanticism. Raban explains that going "to sea was to escape from the city and the machine and from the regulated and repetitive patterns of life in a complex industrial society" (15). This escape is the essence of Romanticism which is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as "[a]n artistic and intellectual movement originating in Europe in the eighteenth century" which is "characterized by a heightened interest in nature, emphasis on the individual's expression of emotion and imagination" and by a "departure from the attitudes and forms of classicism, and rebellion against established social rules and conventions". Indeed, Crane's story is tinged with Romanticism and with the focus on Nature, particularly the sea.

The story begins after the destruction of the vessel *Commodore*. The very title of the story suggests the vulnerability of the boat to natural elements and the insecurity of the characters. The description of the boat's movement in the sea is "animalized"; "[t]he craft pranced and reared and plunged like an animal" and "seemed like a horse making at a fence outrageously high" (1230). The description of the boat in the tumultuous sea proves Richard Lehan's claim that Naturalism "depicts the confluence of humanity and

animality and the struggle of the individual with nature, as well as other forms of hostility” (17). Lehan differentiates between two kinds of Naturalism: one that “looks out to a material world of matter in motion subject to physical laws” and another which “looks inward to the consciousness (and often unconsciousness) a critic brings to or finds in a reading text” (15). Both aspects of the definition of Naturalism are present in Crane’s story. Crane could have consciously created a world that is naturalistic, while simultaneously and unconsciously creating a world that is colored with Romanticism. According to Westbrook “naturalistic philosophies *tend* to play down the element of free choice and free will in human activity, while humanistic philosophies tend to emphasize them” (87). Additionally, Naturalism is defined as “the view of the world that takes account only of natural elements and forces, excluding the supernatural or spiritual” (dictionary online). These definitions invoke the Law of the Jungle (survival of the fittest) also emphasizing the naturalistic context of the struggle between Man and Nature in a godless universe and generate a deterministic pessimistic view about life.

Sin and Punishment

The scene of the boat in the sea seems mostly static; it is as if the boat is frozen or captured in a photograph or a painting: “[v]iewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtless have been weirdly picturesque” (“The Open Boat” 1230). The characters seem also frozen “[w]hereupon the three were silent, save for a trifle of hemming and hawing” (1231). Furthermore, the boat seems to be standing still: “[t]hey were traveling, apparently, neither one way nor the other. They were, to all intents, stationary” (1232). Modern life is fleeting and moves too fast. It is essential to freeze the moment through a snap shot, so that one can ponder about it and have the leisure to dissect it. Conrad uses a similar technique in the introductory scene of *Heart of Darkness* in which everything seems frozen and “brooding motionless” (1) and conducive to a state of contemplation by Marlow who is presented as a “Buddha” (6) and by the other characters who “felt meditative” (2). By freezing the boat as if in a painting frame, Crane forces us to “stand and stare”, to use William Davies’ words in his poem “Leisure” (L.2), and contemplate the situation.

Edward R. Stephenson maintains that “[t]he perception of the men in the boat is strictly limited by the demands upon their limited capacities” and that “[t]heir perception is limited in terms of what they are able to see and what the turbulent sea allows them to see” (43). Hence, the sea forces the men to contemplate it in detail by diverting their attention away from “the demands upon their limited capacities” (43). More to the point, Robert Shulman, claims that “Crane’s visually effective experiments with light, motion, and color [...] [represent] his unique and extreme version of a common nineteenth century response” (443). Shulman’s claim proves that Crane was more attracted to the past traditional forms of writing and, consequently, his text can also be analyzed according to the nineteenth century traditions.

“The Open Boat” focuses on the psychologically traumatic and physically painful experience of the characters. In Raban’s view, “the sea was the realm of man as a solitary creature, the hero struggling with elemental forces” in which “man might still feel small and lonely in the vastness of Creation” (15). The characters in “The Open Boat” struggle with such “elemental forces” and feel how “small” and insignificant they are. The correspondent describes rowing as “a diabolical punishment” and as “a horror

to the muscles and a crime against the back” (1233). The words “diabolical punishment” could imply that the characters are sinners. But, what are their sins?

Apparently, the sailors are guilty of not contemplating the beauty of the sea. According to Raban, “[t]he professionals of the sea take its hazards and its beauties for granted” and consider the sea as “merely a space to be traversed” and as “a *waste*, and sometimes a *rude waste*” (5). He also maintains that the “blindness to the ocean was a common English affliction. There was some social *snobbery* in it” (7 our emphasis). In addition, Ruskin “perceived man’s disregard for nature as monstrous *hubris*” (in Bate 83). It is obvious then that the sea is ignored and not contemplated by the sailors despite its vastness. This marginalization of or lack of respect for Nature/sea caused by the sailors’ *hubris* is probably the sin that the characters of the boat have committed.

Stephenson argues that “[t]he harsh environment and the need not to be swamped by it force men to be myopic in their approach to large human questions” (43). In effect, Nature forces the sailors to contemplate it by forcing them to scrutinize the waves and the “colours of sea”: “[t]heir eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept toward them [...] and all men knew the colours of the sea” (“The Open Boat” 1229). “[T]hey knew it was broad day because the colour of the sea changed from slate to emerald green streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow” (1230), and they considered it “probably splendid” and “probably glorious, this play of the free sea, wild with lights of emerald and white and amber” (1231). Wertheim and Sorrentino maintain that Crane “utilized” Goethe’s passage which “analyzed the effect which the several colors have upon the human mind” (1891). Furthermore, Robert Shulman notes that the experimentation with “light, motion, and color express different degrees of epistemological uncertainty” (443). According to Shulman, the men “come to know” the sea “*intimately*, in the precise detail, wry humor, and sensitivity to color and to the way things look and feel” (448 our emphasis). All these critics argue that the men’s perspective is broadened by the sea which they are compelled to contemplate. Indeed, Crane’s sailors are forced to think more deeply about the sea and not regard it as “merely a space to be traversed” or as “rude waste”.

Because of the sin of ignoring the sea and reducing it to a distance to be crossed, the men realize that natural forces prevent them from reaching safe shores, but their instinct of self-preservation forces them nevertheless to fight for their lives although their hopes of salvation are dying:

If I am going to be drowned – if I am going to be drowned – if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? (“The Open Boat” 1235)

Contemplating the sand and trees is exactly what Nature wants the characters to do. Nature tries to teach the characters to love and respect her. It is said that a person appreciates life more deeply once he or she is undergoing a near-death experience. Modern man wastes his life in nothing but work and worry, and fails to watch Nature and contemplate its beauty. A mitigation of the characters’ suffering takes place in the fifth section of the story. The temporary reconciliation between the men in the boat and the sea is suggested by the line “[t]he particular violence of the sea had ceased. The

waves came without snarling” (“The Open Boat” 1238) as if the men are rewarded for their contemplation of the sea.

In part six of the story, Crane reveals a contradictory view of Nature being indifferent now, instead of mindful – a matter that reveals the contradictory nature of this modern text as explained in the introduction. The narrator realizes the indifference of Nature or even God to their suffering aboard the boat, thus suggesting the alienation of modern man in a godless universe—a theme that is emphasized by the reference to the story of the legion officer in the Algerian desert. The legionnaire and the characters in “The Open Boat” are going through a traumatic experience in which chances of survival are slim and they are trapped in an alien hostile context. The indifference of Nature and/or God is embodied in the following lines:

When it occurred to man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers. (1240)

Being close to the land, yet unable for the sailors to reach it, reveals the dominion of Nature over human destiny. However, this tantalizing experience can also be interpreted as a punishment for the characters’ sins by what should be an “indifferent” Nature. This contradictory view of Nature can be explained in terms of the contradiction that characterizes the modern text explained before. Shulman maintains that “for Crane men cannot achieve absolutely certain, unchanging knowledge”. The failure to reach this knowledge, nevertheless, “does not for him make their perceptions inevitably false in an absurd universe and it does not detract from their remarkable achievements” (Shulman 448). Therefore, the desire to throw bricks at the temple is a protest against Nature, which suggests that the characters did not learn the lesson of harmony with Nature yet.

In final seventh part, the indifference of Nature and its forces concerning the destiny of man is further emphasized along with the insignificance of human life in the following lines:

It [Tower] represented in degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual – nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She [Nature] did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. (1242)

This passage is central to the story itself because it projects the absurdity of human existence in an indifferent or hostile context. The contradictory representation of Nature as a goddess of retribution and as indifferent is evident in the story. However, a person can realize the strong presence of natural Providence in the following section.

Natural Providence – One was Saved, the Other was Damned

Crane’s “The Open Boat” is a story that can be viewed differently if analyzed using romantic ecology. According to Ernst Haeckel, ecology can be defined as, “the body of knowledge concerning the economy of nature – the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and to its organic environment” (Bate 36).

He also defines it as “the study of those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence” (36). “‘Romantic ecology’ reverences the green-earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things”. In addition, “it proclaims that there is ‘one life’ within us and outside, and that the earth is a single vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our peril” (40). Note the similarity between these definitions with naturalist philosophy in terms of a single governing principle. “[T]he naturalist must ever strive to include all objects and beings in the ironclad dispensation”, and he feels obliged to “establish the cosmos as a monism, a single vast mechanism, with or without a governing power in control of it” (Westbrook 88). These definitions foreshadow and justify the events in Crane’s “The Open Boat” and help the readers understand why the Oiler has to die and why the correspondent realizes the need to be in harmony with Nature. The remaining two sections of this article focus on the way Nature favors the Correspondent and targets the Oiler especially after they fall into the sea.

The Correspondent's Case

According to Adams, the whole narrative “reveals the Correspondent’s contemplation and resigned acceptance of his (humankind’s) insignificance and isolation in the face of an environment that simply does not care” (422). The correspondent’s realization of human insignificance is similar to the one Henry, in Crane’s other work *Maggie*, makes through an experience that “leads not to redemption but to a new realization for Henry that he is insignificant” (in Nagel 33). This insignificance is equal to humility. In a sense, Nature tries to humble the men and “teaches” the correspondent through suffering. It is only after the acceptance of the human insignificance and after Man is humbled that harmony with Nature can be reached.

Indeed, the correspondent appreciates life more due to his boat experience. He recognizes “the innumerable flaws of his life, and have them taste wickedly in his mind, and wish for a second chance”. Moreover, the “[d]istinction between the right and wrong seems absurdly clear to his mind” (“The Open Boat” 1242). As in *Heart of Darkness*, the realisation of the absurdity of life comes too late, yet it is, nevertheless, a “victory” (HD 107). As Conrad’s Marlow suggests, “[p]erhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the threshold of the invisible” (HD 107). This realization, or “wisdom”, that comes at “the grave-edge” makes the correspondent determined, if “given another opportunity”, to “mend his conduct and his words, and be better and brighter during an introduction or at a tea” (“The Open Boat” 1242). The correspondent is similar to Wordsworth’s Pedlar in “The Ruined Cottage” who gains, according to Bate, “consolation and a sense of tranquility, an inner peace that leads to an acceptance of suffering, from the weeds” (12). In effect, Nature acts as a catalyst that helps the correspondent achieve enlightenment because he is incapable of reaching it on his own.

When the boat capsizes, the characters fall into the water. The Correspondent feels the cold water and thinks it is so “sad” and “tragic” and “a proper reason for tears” (“The Open Boat” 1243). These references are an indication of his painful experience as well as his tragic realization of his insignificance. The Correspondent’s

realization should encourage people to appreciate life and make the best of the little time they have in it, not in doing manual labor (rowing the boat for instance), but in contemplating Nature. According to M. H. Abrams “a human being exists entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul or any mode of participating in a religious or spiritual world beyond nature” (175). The correspondent realizes that he “does not have a soul [...] beyond nature” and achieves “inner peace” and “accepts his suffering” (1243) through this realization, which invokes the aforementioned definition of Romantic ecology that maintains that “there is ‘one life’ within us and abroad” (Bate 40). Due to this realization, the correspondent starts to view things differently; he describes the person who rushes to save him as a “saint” and as a “naked tree”. The man “was naked – naked as a tree in winter; but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint” (1244). The images used are projections of the Correspondent’s internal state of mind. They are projections of his newly-adopted perspective which makes him view this stranger as a saint and compare him to a naked tree. It also suggests redemption and “salvation through death” (Nagel 32) as in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

When the Correspondent despairs and believes that he is going to die, “a wave perhaps whirled him out of this small deadly current, for he found suddenly that he could again make progress toward the shore” (1244). Nature obviously saved him. The Correspondent must live to tell his story in order to give meaning to his experience. He has to teach people about Nature, the absurdity and insignificance of the human existence, the need to respect and contemplate Nature, and about how easy it is to die – modern ideas that can be found in Eliot’s “The Hollow Men”, especially in the last two lines “This is the way the world ends/Not with a bang, but with a whimper” (in Kermode 2002). In this respect, the Correspondent is similar to Coleridge’s Mariner in “The Rime of The Ancient Mariner” as explained earlier in the introduction. He cannot choose, but tell the story, and the audience cannot choose, but listen. He is also similar to Conrad’s Marlow who has to tell the story of his sin in the Congo as a confession of guilt. Nature saves him from telling a story of redemption through suffering. He is *naturally selected* to tell his story because of his job proving that profession matters. Again, the contradictory nature of the text steps into view. The supposedly indifferent Nature is depicted as a goddess of retribution just as it appeared in Coleridge’s poem.

The final lines of Crane’s story are significant; the men on the beach heard “the sound of the great sea’s voice” and “they felt that they could then be interpreters” (1244). If taken literally, these lines indicate that the men, especially the Correspondent, are transformed by the experience and willing to listen to the sound of Nature/Sea. If taken ironically, the lines indicate the failure to express such an experience with words. This interpretation again renders the story similar to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow expresses his frustration at trying to tell his audience his story which is as hard as telling someone a dream and making him/her live it. Consequently, Marlow says, “We live, as we dream—alone....” (38). This is also similar to Forster’s *A Passage to India* in which Mrs. Moore expresses her frustration at trying to tell Adela Quested about her experience in the caves with the echo. She protests, “‘As if anything can be said!’” (205). If this is the case, then this

interpretation would emphasize the theme of futility and absurdity in Crane's story which are in harmony with the naturalistic pessimistic theme of determinism.

The Oiler's Case

Three out of the four characters survive this traumatic experience. 'Three' is a spiritual number that symbolizes the spiritual experience the Correspondent goes through. This is also emphasized by the Jungian symbols of water (death and rebirth), the boat (a concave image symbolizing the female womb as well as death and rebirth), and the three matches ("The Open Boat" 1234). The only character who dies is the Oiler. He was the black sheep and the odd one out, since all the other characters start with the letter "C" (Correspondent, Captain, Cook). Lighting the cigars, which is ecologically harmful and represents pollution, foreshadows the death of the Oiler since the Correspondent has four cigars, but only three matches thus, suggesting that one of the characters' life-force is going to expire. Daniel K. Muhlestein claims that "Crane uses the cigar incident [...] to foreshadow the death of the Oiler" (43). It is true that the cigars belong to the Correspondent, but it is the Oiler who pays the *bill* for this contamination of Nature, because his name is "Billie". The focus on the physical abilities of Billie also associates him strongly with the Body, whereas the Correspondent represents the Soul, because his name is "Willie" derived from "will". Only the Oiler and the Correspondent take turns rowing the boat. It is only in the end of the sixth section that the captain asks the cook to take the oars to "give those boys a chance to get into shape again" and rows only for a very short time because the boat is "drifted in pretty close" (1241). The shift between the Oiler and the Correspondent in the act of rowing is symbolic of the way the desires of the Body can take the place of those of the Soul and vice versa. The Body is the source of contamination, and hence his death becomes a triumph of spirituality.

It is important to note that the characters are identified by their professions (Captain, Oiler, Cook and Correspondent), which suggests that profession matters. In fact, only two characters are identified by their names in the story, and they are the Oiler (Billie) and the correspondent (Willie). This is similar to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in which characters are identified by their profession and which offers similar motifs of self-discovery, water, human insignificance, emptiness, entrapment, and hostility of Nature. Indeed, it is the profession of the Oiler that causes his death as will be explained below. According to Shulman, "the story renders a modern tragic vision of human existence [...] and vulnerable mortality in the face of arbitrary death" (454-55). Shulman, then, considers the Oiler's death "arbitrary". Likewise, Stephenson maintains that the death of the Oiler suggests "the dominant role of chance in the naturalistic world" (47). Nevertheless, if the text is considered from an ecological perspective, one realizes that the Oiler's death is *not* really arbitrary, which is the perspective the writers of this article are arguing for and which strongly indicates the presence of a Natural Providence.

Ecologically speaking, the Oiler is viewed by Nature as a threat, more like an oil spill that is eventually washed ashore: "forehead touched sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea" ("The Open Boat" 1244) and later buried in a grave. The Oiler represents contamination and pollution, and therefore, Nature targets him: "[S]ometimes a *particularly* obstreperous sea came inboard and

drenched him *once more*" (1235-6, our emphasis). Apparently, the waves are primarily targeting the Oiler: "suddenly there was a growling of water, and a crest came with a roar and a swash into the boat". The crest amazingly "did not set the cook afloat in his life-belt" and he "continued to sleep" undisturbed, "but the oiler sat up, blinking his eyes and shaking with the new cold" (1239). The wave does not disturb the cook because it mainly targets the Oiler.

The aforementioned definition of Romantic ecology states that "the earth is a single vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our peril" (Bate 40). Consequently, the Oiler who "destabilizes" the "ecosystem" by polluting it with oil and with cigar smoke, is *chosen* to be her victim. The story here becomes similar to that of "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson. In the beginning of "The Lottery" nobody knows who is going to be stoned, but the nominees are those who did not work hard. Similarly, in "The Open Boat" nobody knows who will die, and "it was certainly an abominable injustice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard" (1240). In "The Lottery", Anne Hutchinson is chosen to be the victim because she defies the system of the lottery although she worked hard. Likewise, the Oiler dies although he worked hard because he defied Nature.

The Oiler is associated with machines, artificiality, dirt, darkness and hence evil. It is imperative to remember the reference to the three matches which foreshadow the death of the Oiler as mentioned earlier. The matches symbolise light that stands for all other three characters, whereas the Oiler represents darkness. His death is death of darkness. Therefore, his dead body is described as "dripping *shape*" (1244, our emphasis). He was a threat since "the oiler was a wily surfman" (1235), and he defied Nature by trying very hard "to keep a sea from breaking into the boat" (1233) and by saving the others with "a series of quick miracles and fast and steady oarsmanship" (1235). These deeds are not evil in their nature, but they are sinful since they are done in the name of pride and defiance of Nature. In addition, the Oiler also dies because of his pride (*hubris*). He was not afraid of the sea: "It is almost *certain* that if the boat had capsized, he would have tumbled comfortably out upon the ocean as if he felt *sure* that it was a great soft mattress" (1236, our emphasis). This quotation reveals his hubris which renders him similar to Homer's Odysseus.

Crane was influenced by Greek literature. Wertheim and Sorrentino state that Crane "was a voracious reader of the nineteenth century English writers and reveled in the classics of Greece and Rome" (1888). Consequently, it is not surprising to note that the Oiler's pride is similar to Homer's Odysseus. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus challenges the sea-god Neptune and claims that Man does not need gods, so he is punished for ten long years of being stranded away from home. This is similar to the lesson Nature tries to teach the characters in Crane's boat. Nature is to be respected, and any sin against it will cost them dearly. Hence, like Odysseus, the Oiler is punished for his pride and his disregard and defiance of Nature whereas the other sailors are punished only for their disregard of Nature. Eventually, he is humbled "face *downward*" and his "*forehead touched sand* that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea" (1244, our emphasis). Like the sand that moves "periodically" with each wave, the Oiler's head would also probably lift slowly up and down as each wave reaches the shore as if he is begging Nature for forgiveness with kisses.

The Correspondent regards drowning as a “cessation of hostilities” (1244), and indeed, the death of the Oiler restores order and harmony and symbolizes the death of artificiality and pollution: “[t]he welcome of *the land* to the men from the sea was warm and generous” whereas its welcome for the Oiler “could only be the *different* and *sinister* hospitability of the grave” (1244, our emphasis). These references, along with the aforementioned points reveal that the Oiler received a *different* treatment by the sea and by the land: he was chosen to die. The reference to the “sinister hospitality” highlights the evil that awaits him, a really bad punishment for his sin, disclosing that Nature cannot forgive.

The death of the Oiler reveals the absurdity of life since the Oiler is the strongest of the four characters and the most unlikely person to die. In contrast, the injured captain miraculously lives, although he was the most likely person to die. The death of the Oiler and the survival of the Captain reveal Natural Providence. In order to explain this point better, it is wise to allude to the Puritan text “OF Plymouth Plantation” in which William Bradford gives an example of two men (Bradford in Perkins and Perkins 26-32). One is weak and falls overboard into the sea and struggles for hours with water until he is saved, and he lives to be a preacher. The other one is a strong sailor who was giving the Puritan pilgrims a hard time. He is stricken by a disease and dies quickly and is thrown overboard. Bradford attributes this to Providence. In contrast, Crane’s injured Captain and the Correspondent (like Bradford’s weak man) are miraculously saved. The Oiler, however, (like Bradford’s strong sailor) dies against all odds since he was “ahead in the race. He was swimming strongly and rapidly” (1243). If Crane’s world was purely made of a naturalistic context, Darwinian rules of survival of the fittest and the rules of natural selection should dominate. Nonetheless, the Oiler (the fittest) dies and the injured (weakest) Captain and the Correspondent live.

Conclusion

Crane’s “The Open Boat” reveals a contradictory view of Nature. On the one hand, Nature appears to be a mindful goddess of retribution. On the other hand, it appears to be indifferent. However, there are several references that prove beyond doubt that Nature is not simply indifferent toward Man who stopped respecting her. Rather, Nature forces Man to stop and contemplate her, especially when his life is threatened. Man fails to reach illumination on his own because his perception is blurred or limited, and Nature makes him see things clearly and broadens his limited perspectives. Crane seems to be a romantic author and obviously was influenced by the nineteenth century Romanticism since his story is quite similar to Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. Nature in Crane’s story is similar to that in the works of modern writers such as Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. It saves and damns, depending on the type of character she is dealing with. She has her own Providence by which she saves even the weak or injured and damns even the strong person who contaminates her.

In a nutshell, the authors proved that Crane was influenced by Romanticism which, to the best of the researchers’ knowledge was not highlighted by any critic and proved the strong presence of a natural Providence in Crane’s story by: 1) Maintaining that writing about the sea was to escape from the city, which is the

essence of Romanticism. 2) Highlighting Crane's interest and influence of the past and not only the modern and contemporary. 3) Alluding to the great similarity between "The Open Boat" and Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in terms of structure and elements, including the moral message of both works, which would force one to analyze Crane's story along the same lines of Coleridge's poem since such similarity can, by no means, be merely coincidental. Therefore, a romantic approach to the text is quite logical. 4) Highlighting the way the Oiler was targeted by the sea and singled out by Crane by his profession, strength, pride, and by the letter 'O' whereas all other characters start with the letter 'C' – a matter which cannot be simply coincidental and suggests that profession matters, and so the assumption that the Oiler's demise is caused by his job. 5) Comparing the Correspondent with Coleridge's Mariner and Conrad's Marlow who are all saved to tell the story of redemption through suffering and guilt. The question remains whether this lesson can be communicated to others or not. As is typical in a modern text, nothing is certain. The certainty of the presence of Natural Providence and the ability to communicate its lesson and the influence of Romanticism on Crane's text is blurred and mystified. The reader is "robbed of assurances" because of the "unresolved contradictions" (Hume 125) that characterize this modern text. Nevertheless, with close examination, Natural Providence can still be detected as the authors have done.

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Özet

Stephen Crane'in "The Open Boat" Adlı Öyküsünde Doğanın İlahi Takdiri: Naturalizm, Romantizm, Ekoloji

Bu makale, Stephen Crane'nin "The Open Boat" adlı eserinde doğanın nasıl ele alındığını inceler. Yazarların sunduğu bu yeni okumada, doğa, karakterlerin içinde

bulunduđu kötü duruma kayıtsız kalmayan bir intikam tanrıçası olarak ele alınmaktadır. Olier'in ölümünün nedensiz olduğunu iddia eden pek çok eleştirmenin aksine, bu makalede Olier'in, kirlilik ve pisliliđi temsil ettiđi için, *doğanın hükmüyle* öldüđu öne sürülür. Buna karşın, Muhabir ve yaralı Kaptan'ın kurtuluđu ise doğanın ilahi takdiridir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat", Dođa, Doğanın İlâhi Takdiri, Ekoloji

**A Quest for a “House with no Walls Between the Rooms”:
An Ethnic Approach to Gish Jen’s *Mona in the Promised Land*¹**

Siham Arfaroui

Abstract: Situated through the criss-crossing of cultural and discursive descriptions, the essay provides a close analysis of ethnicity in Gish Jen’s *Mona in the Promised Land* with a tightened focus on its challenge of dichotomous ethnic boundaries. As a result of its publication in 1996, that is, close to the turn of the century, *Mona in the Promised Land* emerges in a post-civil rights mindset which is sufficiently ripe at all levels, for a multicultural project of “a house with no walls between the rooms” (208). The borrowing from Jen’s text is of special importance in my argument as it fosters the performance of a multiethnic identity. Through a range of ironies and symbols, *Mona in the Promised Land* debunks the racist antithesis of outsiders versus insiders and points out the inconveniences embedded in hegemonic ethnocentric positions that, essentially, establish the concept of hyphenation as a stigma. True to a deconstructionist spirit, the novel under investigation exposes the contradictions within the self-abhorring tendency to melt into the standard European stream through the model minority myth. In alternation, the novel speaks to an appropriation of hybridity, as opposed to total Westernization, through the authentic conversion from Christianity to Judaism and an activist involvement in plots subversive of the elect/ethnic binarism. Both food and name symbols are used to illustrate and emphasize Jen’s deconstructive/reconstructive way of reading and representing alterity.

Keywords: Alterity, binarism, consent, diaspora, multiculturalism, model minority.

At one stage of American history and studies, the usage of “ethnicity” has perpetuated just the ‘exclusive’ facets of this category by saving the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs) from being qualified as ethnics and viewing them as the ‘elect’. This particular use equally suggests that non-WASPs are ethnics in the sense of pagans, thus, inflating ‘ethnic’ as a near-synonym of ‘other’ (Sollors 1986, 25). Nothing better reveals this dichotomous discourse than the phenomenon of ‘ethnic cleansing’ or also the biased categorization of Chinese Americans as a model minority. Historically speaking, the latter description is particularly attached to the post-war Chinese diaspora in the United States and used as a slogan of Americanization (Palumbo-Liu 244).²

However, the 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights movements stand for a hallmark in postponing cultural hybridity as a token of disgrace in order to affirm ethnic difference as a desired feature on the basis that people “can change their philosophies”, but not

¹ Throughout, I cite Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1996). From here on, the primary text is documented as *Mona* in parenthetical citations.

² According to Bill Ashcroft, the concept of diaspora captures people’s movement, either voluntarily or forcibly, from their homelands into new regions (70).

“their grandfathers” (Sollors 1986, 22).³ Consequently, the postmodern reference to the term ‘ethnicity’ retains both a “sense of coherence and solidarity” and an awareness “of having common origins and interests” (Cashmore 119). It re-develops such a category into a source of distinctiveness and creativity, transforming it “from a heathenish liability into a sacred asset, from a trait to be overcome in a conversion and rebirth experience to a very desirable identity feature, yet to be achieved through another regeneration” (Sollors 1986, 33).

More particularly, the historical development in the interpretation of ethnic in the exclusive sense of other or outsider versus a positive implication that focuses on the difference or distinctiveness of the other, requires that we draw on the term “alterity”. First and foremost, it is crucial to evoke the philosophical adoption of “alterity” as an alternative to otherness (Ashcroft 11). With this conceptual parallelism in mind, a scrutiny of the use of “alterity” by literary theorists unravels a Bakhtinian influence through the “description of the way in which an author moves away from identification with a character [...] The novelist must understand his or her character from within, as it were, but must also perceive it as other, as apart from its creator in its distinct alterity” (Ashcroft 11).⁴ The fact that the Bakhtinian formulation makes the possibility of dialogue dependent on “alterity”, thus otherness leads to an interpretation of otherness, not simply as “exclusion”, but an apartness that stands as a precondition of dialogue, where dialogue implies a transference across and between differences of culture, gender, class and other social categories” (Ashcroft 12). Among other consequences, this discursive explanation of “alterity” allows a transcendence of otherness, thus ethnicity, as a mere emblem of the so-called outsideness or alienness.

Situated through the criss-crossing of the above cultural and discursive descriptions, this article provides a close analysis of ethnicity in *Mona in the Promised Land* with a tightened focus on its challenge of dichotomous ethnic boundaries.⁵ As a result of its publication in 1996, that is close to the turn of the century, *Mona in the Promised Land*, as the second major novel by the Chinese American woman writer Gish Jen (1955), emerges in a post-civil rights mindset which is sufficiently ripe at all levels for a multicultural project of “a house with no walls between the rooms” (208).⁶ The borrowing from Jen’s novel, which has the features of an “ethnic *bildungsroman* with a clearly defined identity search”, is of special importance in this article insofar as it fosters the performance of a multiethnic identity which is inclined for what is termed a

³ Hybridity is a widely-used term in postcolonial theories. It describes “the margin where cultural differences come into contact and conflict, and unsettle all the unstable identities that are constructed around oppositions such as past and present, inside and outside, or inclusion [and] exclusion” (Macey 192).

⁴ Explicit reference is made to T. Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*. (Minneapolis: Uof Minnesota P, 1984).

⁵ Used in exchange with opposition, binarism in this essay entails any “violent hierarchy” which suppresses “ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories” (Ashcroft et al. 23-4).

⁶ I rely on Desmond King’s definition of multiculturalism in the sense of a political advocacy of “equal respect for all cultural and ethnic identities” which is exclusive of ethnocentric privileges (266).

transnational awareness that is resistant to rigid ethnic boundaries (Öztařhan 165; Gonzales 2004, 170).

In addition, serving of Jen's citation as a title of this paper has the asset of suggesting a reading of *Mona in the Promised Land* as a novel subversive of the self-abhorring tendency to melt into the standard European stream.⁷ In one incarnation of answering back ethnic stereotyping or exoticism as exerted by the dominant society, *Mona in the Promised Land* invalidates the model minority myth as a standard representation of Chinese Americans' mobility in the social strata to the middle-class as much as it breaks down the passive integration in the WASP culture as a touchstone of American success (Ling 168).⁸

A sequel to Jen's first novel, *Typical American* (1991), which already introduces the reader to Ralph and Helen Chang as Chinese young immigrants who venture to achieve the American dream, *Mona in the Promised Land* portrays the late 60s and early 70s by focussing on the multiethnic quests of Mona the protagonist and, to a less degree, her old sister Callie instead of the older immigrant generation's pursuit of Americanization (Gonzales 2001, 230; *Mona* 3). Through a range of ironies and symbols, *Mona in the Promised Land* debunks the racist antithesis of outsiders versus insiders. In alternation, the novel speaks to an appropriation of hybridity, as opposed to total Westernization, through the authentic conversion of a Chinese American Christian to Judaism and her activist involvement in subversive plots with adolescents from Japanese, African, and Jewish legacies. The switch is not a simple adolescent rebellion, but conveys a deeper message in favour of multicultural self-fashioning.

The present essay detects several paradoxes in *Mona in the Promised Land* to point out the inconveniences embedded in hegemonic ethnocentric positions that, essentially, establish the concept of hyphenation as a stigma.⁹ True to a deconstructionist spirit, the novel under investigation exposes the contradictory ways in which Mona's parents "succumb to the assimilationist impulse and find it incredible that their children wish to adopt an ethnic, rather than a mainstream, identity" (Furman 215).¹⁰ Considerable elements in the novel, aesthetic as well as thematic, serve to emphasize the incoherent logic that presides over the first generation's rejection of their

⁷ In partial emanation from the mimicry of a Eurocentric quintessence, the core of this cultural construction relies on the erosion of one's ethnic differences as a "process of creating the distinct American identity" (King 264).

⁸ Additional attacks of the model minority thesis do emphasize its inconvenience to account for the social gaps between Chinese American families who reside in suburban white neighbourhoods and take pleasure in mainstream life styles and others enduring the confinement to crowded flats in Chinatowns and the emotional stress of unhealthy and hazardous working conditions (Ling, 131-32, 168). As a form of tokenism, it overlooks the sweatshop conditions still existing for most Chinatown garment workers (Yung, 107).

⁹ Macey explains that ethnocentrism involves the "tendency to judge the characteristics and cultures of other groups by the standards defined or recognized by the observer's own ethnic group," which makes ethnocentric judgements "inevitably negative and pejorative, and serve to justify the denigration of other cultures and to promote racism" (115).

¹⁰ My reference to deconstruction, as a poststructuralist strand, is particularly attracted to the Derridian "insistence on unravelling the logic and contradictions of the text itself [...] in such a way as to discover and determine what it cannot describe, what its history has excluded in order to constitute it as what it is" (Macey 87).

ethnicity, which is represented at best in a sarcastic tone. Both form and content do not solely reconstruct “notions such as nationalism, assimilation, multiculturalism and identity that are common themes in immigrant literature” Öztarhan argues, but mainly deconstruct their binarist essence (165).

Mona comprises a conspicuously derisive indication of the Changs’ mainstream penchant. Its opening states that “they are the New Jews, after all, a model minority and Great American Success. They know they belong to the promised land. Or do they?” (*Mona* 3). The mobility of the Chang family to a Jewish neighbourhood in suburban New York already imposes the incarceration of a model minority mentality, especially if we remember that the Chinese and the Jews “seem to be the living proof of the American Dream” and that “both cultures place a high value on learning and hard work” (Gonzales 2001, 232). What could attest to the reality of this affinity is the mother’s experimentation with food, preparing the “most recent favourite duck dish recipe—namely, Peking duck, Westchester style. The whole secret is soaking the duck overnight in Pepsi-Cola” (*Mona* 186). The invented recipe not only makes clear that Mona’s mother, funnily, has to rely on improvisation in the preparation of food, but also undercuts her authority as a typical Chinese cook (Gonzales 2001, 231).

However, only to a certain extent do the Changs exemplify the ideal assimilated family via the ownership of a fried chicken franchise and the pancake house, both of them are non-Asian-ethnic eateries and evoke quintessentially American restaurants (*Mona* 3). Despite their beverage preference for a chocolate milk shake over a cup of ginseng tea which stands for “the repudiation of Chinese values for American standards,” the Changs speak to the impossibility of melting in the mainstream culture and obliterating their ethnic features and heritage (*Mona* 3; Ho 125). By contrast, *Mona* argues that whatever the emulation of mainstream values, it remains no guarantee of full acceptance into American society.

In essence, Gish Jen exploits the description of the parents,’ Ralph and Helen Chang’s, assimilation to bring to light their perpetual diasporic positioning. In a central passage in the text, the narrator describes Helen’s visible sensitivity to the hidden implications of a woman-promoter of a new clinic in overtly announcing, “of course you people would be welcome” (*Mona* 118). Helen’s persistent statements “‘We own this restaurant,’ ‘We live in Scarshell,’ and ‘You should see our tax bracket’” bespeak, at their best, the imperfection and “instability of her American identity that is built upon an identification with whiteness as the sole representative of American” (*Mona* 119; Chih-ming 110). On the one hand, Helen’s WASP tendency, indirectly, contributes to setting what is ethnic to a pagan position and perpetuates a binary opposition which preaches a Buddhist/Christian duality. On the other hand, it mirrors an insecure re-affirmation of her middle-class status as a sample of her family’s American success.

Besides the outsiders’ tendency to both reject and undermine the Changs’ social and economic mobility, it is essential to discuss the irony embedded in the theme of self-deconstruction which is a dimension no less evocative of the first generation’s deficient acclaim of assimilation as a model of identity formation. Helen provides an instance of self-criticism through an admission of her responsibility for being “very Westernized. I brought you children up without you even speak Chinese” (*Mona* 48). In the same context, Mona confesses having been reared to become an inauthentic Chinese who knows only three Chinese words of the Shanghai dialect: “*Byeh fafoon*,” “*shee-*

veh” and “ji-nu,” respectively, translating “stop acting crazy, rice gruel and soy sauce” (*Mona* 6). Such a limited background in Chinese language further destabilizes the essence and value of assimilation to mainstream ideologies as a hallmark of subjectivity construction, especially, in a predominantly white culture.

Furthermore, Jen’s third-person narrative demonstrates that the assumption of assimilation as the touchstone of a whole ethnic identity is nothing more than a distorted reflection of a racist WASP society. Mona’s mother stands out as an embodiment of this poetics in several episodes, particularly when we see her complaining about the college arrangement of putting Callie, her elder daughter, in the same room with a black girl. Helen gets relaxed only upon learning that Callie’s roommate is only “brownish black” and “how well she speaks English” (*Mona* 37). In the spirit of challenging the fakeness of the model minority philosophy as an extended representation of a racist ideology, *Mona* parodies Helen’s mimesis of what is termed WASP angst through a reference to the Ingles children who try to make their Chinese American guest feel like a displaced person. One of them dares to ask Mona where she is “from, from” and becomes ridiculed when Mona answers, in stark exaggeration, “[d]eepest, darkest China” (*Mona* 181). By denying Mona an American birthright for not having a European descent, her hosts are no less racist than her mother, both of whom biasedly believe that consent to the American mainstream should be the predominant model.¹¹

Actually, nothing stirs Helen’s prejudiced standpoint towards ethnicity more than the fact that Mona converts into Judaism. At this specific point, *Mona in the Promised Land* becomes engulfed in several ironies. A major one concerns the claim that the mother fled Communist China so that her children become “American, not Jewish,” and grow up no longer “purely Chinese,” let alone become Jewish (*Mona* 49, 45). Helen, therefore, asks Mona “[h]ow can you be Jewish? Chinese people don’t do such things” (*Mona* 45). This challenge is unlikely to hold together as long as it is based on the internalization of “conservative values and rigid notions of identity, ones undoubtedly shared by many people in the U.S.” (Ho 129). Helen’s objection is less to the fact that Mona is Chinese than to the prejudice that being Jewish is not American, both of which lend themselves to “anxieties about conversion, miscegenation, and multiethnic identity”, ones which are principally WASP-oriented (Ho 129).

It could be suggested that an identity choice which is paradoxical to mainstream conventions is what seems to offend Helen most. When compared to her conversion from a Buddhist into a Catholic after being educated by missionary nuns in Shanghai, which “took her one step up, closer to those in power,” her younger daughter’s switch to Judaism is, in her view, a step down, one that matches her “with a world-persecuted minority” (Ling 228-29). In the context of ethnic prejudice, the hilarious scene of the mother’s shock is a re-enactment of racism of one minority over another, because Helen ironically remains a member of the Chinese minority even through the closure of the novel. By making this insightful allusion, Jen denounces stereotyped pigeonholes in which the society at large, including ethnic people, is not lacking (Gonzales 2001, 233).

¹¹ Sollors captures this binarism through a reference to the polarization “between ‘the order of law’ and ‘the order of nature’” or also a “delineation of a conflict between contractual and hereditary, self-made and ancestral, definitions of American identity” (1986, 150).

As a feature of the inconsistent solidarity with the advocates of the model minority myth, the moral effect of the so-called ethnic fall from Buddhism to Catholicism and finally, Judaism, becomes embedded in a fusion of humour and bitterness on the mother:

Helen looks as though she's about to start crying. Her eyes redden, her face whitens. If she put a carrot on her nose, she would look just like the snowwoman that happens to adorn her at-home sweater. 'A lot of crap!' she takes a drink of her tea. 'Who do you think you are, you can lie to your mother like that.' Helen goes on with a delicate bang of her cup. 'You are daughter. Daughter. Do you remember what is a daughter?' (*Mona* 45)¹²

The quotation allows the reader to pinpoint the humorous specificity of *Mona in the Promised Land* as a text which is committed to using humour as "a way to organize [...] anger" (Jen's Interview with Rachel Lee 224). In this example, Mona adopts a tone which is sarcastic of Helen's racist attitudes, which coincide with those of the Gugelsteins and the Ingles. At the end of the quoted passage, one also understands that the assimilated Chinese mother falls into an additional paradox when she calls upon the very Chinese legacy which demands filial duty to one's parents and punishes any lack of family responsibility, something which, incidentally, Helen has openly abhorred as a requirement of assimilation in order to inculcate the model minority philosophy in her daughter's psyche (Wu 107). In the endeavour to shame Mona into guilt, Helen unknowingly contradicts the very mainstream theories to which she tries to domesticate her daughters in order to make them into typical Americans.

Consequently, Helen's assimilationist mindset is not fully intact to resist, in response, a regressive embrace of an ethnic heritage, much of which becomes improvised. In fact, inconsistency arises through a return to the mother culture, somehow belated, to revive a Chinese model of parenting, in a much disfigured way, to the detriment of what is termed "typical American parents" (*Mona* 246). The compromise requires Helen to give up one of the basic prerequisites of the model minority myth, being the wholesome Western education of her offspring.

Through a self-undermining reaction, Helen forbids Mona from attending Temple meetings: "That's enough Jewish [...] Forget about services" (*Mona* 248). Upon Mona's reclamation of her personhood, she indirectly demands her daughter's respect and allegiance, by shouting at her:

'And who do you think you are, tell me what to do? Daughter's job is to listen, not to tell mother her big-shot opinion.'
'That's the whole problem. I'm not just a daughter. I'm a person.'

¹² This mixture of comedy and criticism in the episode also reveals the problematic extent to which notions like race, religion and ethnicity are confounded. Upon her mother's enquiry, "[w]ho knows? Tomorrow you'll come home and tell me you want to be black," Mona disappointedly enquires "How can I turn black?" and clarifies, "That's a race, not a religion" (*Mona* 49). The current exchange echoes the way that 'ethnicity' is often confused with 'race' and reminds us that the fact that 'ethnic' and 'racial' groups overlap by being "often pushed out of the main spheres of society and made to endure deprivation" is not an account consistent enough for either concept to substitute the other (Cashmore 120; Sollors 1986, 36).

‘A person!’

Outside, a plastic jug moans in the night wind.

‘You know what you are?’ Helen says. ‘You are American girl. Only an American girl can do something like that and hide it from her mother. Everyday you lied to me ... Only an American girl would think about her mother killing herself and say oh, that’s so racist. A Chinese girl would think whether she should kill herself too. Because that is how much she thinks about her poor mother who worked so hard and suffered so much. She wants to do everything to make the mother happy.’ (*Mona* 221)

According to Mary Ambrose, the very fluctuation towards upbringing as a Chinese mother promotes the association of the novel with the years around 1968, a time when Americans “are still relishing rather than relinquishing their ancestral culture, and, as usual, they are experimenting, borrowing and rejecting the heritage of their neighbours” (24).

In the light of the ethnic consciousness-raising which stands out at the core of the Civil Rights struggles, the ensuing section of the paper will shift the focus from the outstanding paradoxes in the first-generation’s dualistic understanding of what is ethnic and what is American to the second-generation.¹³ It offers to discuss the predisposition of the American-born characters, principally *Mona*, to valorise the very hyphenation that the Chinese-born mother has endeavoured to obliterate through a homogenising project of acculturation. Relatively mimetic of her mother’s belated recourse to her ethnic customs, *Mona* takes advantage of her own multiethnic gatherings to adopt ethnically-amplified performances which, implicitly, put the general tendency towards typical Americanization upside down. As a matter of fact, the protagonist resorts to exhibiting her expertise in speaking Chinese, performing karate and getting pregnant by using tea (*Mona* 5). Based on inflating the ethnic position of a Chinese American through exaggerated ethnic postures, such enactments challenge Helen’s previous endeavour to make her daughters go unnoticed in the melting pot and pass for typical Americans. In the meantime, one ought to remember that these representations emphasize “*Mona*’s expertness as a façade;” i.e. as anything but authentic; thus the reader is soon informed that *Mona*’s karate story is stolen from a television show, that the tea story is an invention and that her Chinese language proficiency is elementary (Ho 122; *Mona* 5-6).

In a further parody of Helen’s reactionary regress to a Chinese model of education, even the Changs’ elder daughter, *Callie*, paradoxically affiliates herself with “borderlands” or the periphery of society.¹⁴ As a subversive symbol, the Changs’ Harvard elder daughter best manifests “the preposterousness of essentialized ethnicity, which in various ways is but fetishization of ethnic features” (Chih-ming 114). For instance, by calling herself *Kailan*, *Mona*’s sister seeks “to bridge the discrepancy between her physical appearance and her cultural identity” (*Mona* 301; Ling. 231). In

¹³ It should be pointed out that my understanding of the category consciousness-raising calls on the pride-activist movement of ethnic groups and, therefore, has little to do with the feminist practice of “speaking bitterness” (Macey 71).

¹⁴ The term *Borderlands* is borrowed from Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands: La Frontera/The New Mestiza*, introduced by Sonia Saldivar-Hull. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999.

another episode, intending to sell her stories to a New York publisher, Callie endeavours to become more Chinese than the Chinese themselves and, purposely, appropriates the Chinese padded jackets and cloth shoes for herself which, her parents believe, have already become completely outmoded in China (*Mona* 301).

In a similar way to Callie and her roommate, who chooses to claim ancestry with African American heroic figures like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth in the process of becoming more African, Mona turns out to emulate great Jewish American figures, who are partly of European descent, such as Einstein, Freud, Sandy Koufax and Woody Allen (*Mona* 135, 129). By reversing the self-other boundary, the often-rebellious daughter preaches personal freedom as an ethnic American, by stating that “Jewish is American, American means being whatever you want, and I happened to pick being Jewish” (*Mona* 49). In this context, Amy Ling makes the remarkable observation that, in addition to the five freedoms guaranteed by Article I of the amendments to the U.S. constitution, Jen has added a sixth one which she terms the freedom of cultural choice (227).

Though there is a particular focus on the mother, the *Promised Land* of the novel turns out to be a space where the boundaries that human beings have always liked to draw --in order to differentiate the same from the other, and to keep those who are in, in and those who are out, out-- are inverted (Ling 227). After a number of rituals ranging from religious instructions to taking the formal bath (also called *mikvah*), chanting her *Shema* Israel, burning her special four-stranded candle and having three witnesses sign her certificate, Mona becomes “known-as-Ruth, a more or less genuine Catholic Chinese Jew” (*Mona* 44). In suggesting the ancient Hebrew woman who moved with her mother-in-law “to Bethlehem [mostly a place of worship] and became the ancestress of David [a Hebrew shepherd who became the second king of Israel],” the name Ruth underscores not only the notion of female heroism, but also the significance of a religious rebirth for Mona’s *bildung* (*Webster’s Universal Encyclopedic Dictionary*). Thus, Mona’s religious switch exemplifies “a deconstruction of an old identity and a reconstruction of a new form of ethnic identity that is viable in face of the pressures and needs of a pluralistic, technological, stratified, mobility-oriented society” (Isajiw 21).

In essence, what most appeals to Mona in this reconstructed venture of a Jewish rebirth is that it represents a shift away from the standard switch from a minority group towards the larger society. It also happens that Judaism is assumed to be founded on “ask, ask, instead of just obey, obey [...] people are supposed to be their own rabbi, and do their business directly with G—d” (*Mona* 34). As the protagonist puts it, in contrast to the “undemocratic Japanese and Chinese, we Jews, we participate” (*Mona* 236). In such a way, the experience of a Jewish neophyte enables Jen’s protagonist to calibrate Helen’s conservative beliefs, denounced for being racist and ethnocentric.

As a matter of fact, the young protagonist reverses the so-called model minority quest, represented by Helen’s earlier impulse for implementing a fixed replica of American Westernization, to affirm that “we weren’t pure Chinese anymore, the parents had to accept we would be something else” (*Mona* 49). Counter to an assimilationist mother, she best pictures her subjectivity through an “unruly will that refuses any fixation” (Chih-ming 112). Part of a team spirit with a hippie generation, Mona celebrates multi-ethnicity as the bedrock of Americanness and goes through diverse

adventures such as her conversion to Judaism, which best exemplifies her dissociation from a monolithic ethnic affiliation.

To highlight the first generation's negative positioning *vis-à-vis* ethnicity in stark terms, Mona overtly undermines any preposterous imitation of the model minority philosophy she is confronted with. For one thing, she speaks out against the oppressive laws Helen recovers from Chinese culture to tame her. "'Mom,' Mona says. 'It's a free country. I can go to temple if I want. In fact, if I wanted to, I could go to a mosque,'" adding "'this is America. I can remember what I want, I can be what I want [...] It's my right'" (*Mona* 248, 250). For another, the issue also requires a close consideration of Camp Gugelstein as a hippie group that brings the protagonist together with fellows representing diverse ethnicities in group meetings wherein they chat, sport, and party in ways that seem "to break the racial and class boundaries in between" in an attempt at emphasizing the failure of notions like assimilation to hold together (Chih-ming 107). As a salient image of "the contesting terrain of multiculturalism and the recalcitrant atmosphere of the civil movements of 1960s" which is a condition "of flux, of change, of unpredictability," Mona's associative meetings stand out as explicit pointers to the incarcerating deficits within the mother's model minority mentality (Chih-ming 113).¹⁵

An intrinsic embodiment of subverting the Mother's work has much to do with the fact that Mona can be regarded as an activist in "an idealistic, socially-conscious group of young people who seek to live their beliefs in a more equitable world" and "create a utopia of racial harmony" (*Mona* 200-203; Ling 231, 232). In this respect, Mona develops an awareness of African Americans' sufferance which is best depicted in her offering an African American cook, evicted from her father's pancake house, a temporary home in Barbara Gugelstein's parents' house while they summer outside the town (*Mona* 144). From this associative achievement within Camp Gugelstein, Mona learns to implement her quest for a fair society wherein the ethnic barriers that her mother insists on, do fall down among oppressed minority people (*Mona* 141). She realizes that to "cross these boundaries is to demonstrate that you do not accept the hierarchical values associated with their erection: that you believe in the equality of all peoples, in a just, classless society" (Ling 229).

However, it should be considered that even the collapse of the protagonist's anti-bias project, which falls to pieces as soon as a silver brandy flask is gone from the Gugelsteins' while the Black cook is boarding there, still remains momentous to the issue of ethnic reconstruction (*Mona* 203-207). On the one hand, the project could be symbolic of the negative point that the association for "a house with no walls between the rooms" is merely utopian, especially with regard to Mona's recognition, in an evaluation of the outcome of her reversals, that she is "never at home," someone who is "not Wasp [sic], and not black, and not as Jewish as Jewish can be; and not from Chinatown, either" (*Mona* 208; 231). And on the other, the downfall of the project could also be interpreted as being transitory and an admonishment that crossing ethnic barriers is a continuous struggle, let alone recreating a multicultural self (*Mona* 268).

Afresh, if we bring to the fore the novel's deep affinities with a Civil Rights setting we should admit the fact that both Callie's ethnic quest and Mona's later option

¹⁵ Wang Chih-ming quotes Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds. *Modernity and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992): 1.

for a multicultural self are, originally, fostered by Naomi, Callie's African American roommate. At this stage, it is crucial commenting on the function of name symbolism as a positive reinforcement of alterity. It is not gratuitous that the name Naomi has Hebrew roots, since it literally means "the mother-in-law of the Old Testament heroine Ruth" (*Webster's*). This dictionary explanation unfolds the implication that Naomi, who is of an African American descent, is no way a representative African American character. On the contrary, she represents a living example of choosing one's "ethnic influence, layering [one's] identity with various cultural interests, both natal and learned, that are liberating rather than limiting" (Ho 125).

The appeal of liberated Naomi is bound to the fact that she is ethnocentric in no way. Naomi reads Lao Tzu, practices Tai Qi, "does meditation and yoga," can "tease cool jazz from free jazz, bebop from hard bop" and "also likes Chinese dumplings and diet soda" (*Mona* 186, 169). Upon encouraging Mona and Callie to "[f]orget your parents," Naomi both serves as a symbol of "the ultimate cultural-crosser" and the implication that "our ancestors do not have to be related to us by blood; we can choose them" (*Mona* 129; Ling 230). Such seditious reactions put into practice the notion that any attempt to erase one's ethnic hybridity remains both fallible and limited in scope.

To stress the above reading, the rest of my article will consider the symbolical motifs of naming and renaming. The latter ritual demonstrates that the tradition of ethnic disarray remains part of Mona's family line (Ho 135). Saluted by her aunt with a toast to "Mona Mandel," Mona insists that it should rather be "to Changowitz" and thinks "that Seth [her Jewish husband] would change his name to match" (*Mona* 303). Consider also Io, Mona's little daughter, whose name replays the I/EYE on the dusk jacket of the book. The name steers us to wonder "what else would be the favourite cuisine of a child part Jewish, part Chinese, barely off breast milk? But of course, Italian" (*Mona* 303). It is symbolic of telling the Changs' Chinese Jewish American grand-daughter, "just like her mother, to create her own self," that is, to pick for herself an ethnic affiliation that combines her Chinese, Jewish ancestry in a fusion with her chosen peer group (Gonzales 2001, 239). Wholeness, accordingly, is neither a victory of consent over descent, or descent over consent, rather a symbol of "a really hybrid form" (Gonzales 2001, 238).

Significantly for this debate, the dusk jacket of *Mona* depicts the image of a bagel superimposed onto a bowl of Chinese noodle soup. "In the hole of the bagel, the face of an Asian woman peers out, with just her eyes and nose visible; both bagel and soup bowl are projected against a background of blue skies and clouds" (Ho 121). Simal speaks of the novel's design front cover as a paradigmatic concretization of a hybrid blending while Jennifer Ann Ho interprets it as a hint to Mona as more of a fusion cuisine i.e. she "cannot be defined simply by the sum of her parts—she is an amalgamation of different ethnic influences" (231-34). Steeped in ethnic border crossings, the eye which the jacket cover shows through the hole of the bagel is a pun on the pronoun *I*. It expresses Mona's attempts to make herself and foregrounds a female protagonist's multicultural adventures as being adjusted according to the same deconstructive spirit of Gish Jen who explains, "a pattern of assimilation that appeals to me, for instance, abhors racism" (Interview with Rachel Lee 219).

It is also crucial noting the outstanding negotiation of a multiethnic ego in its emergence in relationship to a food context. The issue should remind us of Mona's

home visit, after a short-lived Harvard experience, and its function in demonstrating the symbolical significance of the culinary in denoting the protagonist's appropriation of multicultural blending. A sharper scrutiny of the messy state of the Changs' kitchen puts a striking emphasis on the piles of stuff lying everywhere, the cabinets crammed with food that will take years to consume, and the refrigerator filled with "shrivelly, pickley, primordial foods, all of them pungent and unlabeled, and probably unlabelable" (*Mona* 293). Amidst this pastiche of different cultures, Mona "feels as though she breathes differently," reminisces about "an astronaut, a pioneer exploring foreign terrain" and comes to grasp that her "iconoclast status, her conversion and multiethnic identifications are actually part of her family's tradition of ethnic disarray" (*Mona* 293; Ho 135). In this episode which is heavily suggestive of a learnt engagement to diasporic hybridity, Mona contrasts her family's kitchen with its "authentic Swedish cuckoo clock", also "Mediterranean-look cabinets" and Chinese foodstuffs to the Gugglesteins' spotless and orderly one and even wonders whether she "would have the kind of kitchen that bespoke law and order and recipes you can write down" or a kitchen like her family's (*Mona* 293, 294).

At its best, *Mona's* third space quest reverses the clear division between "two types of cultural cross-dressing [...] one we might call 'lateral' --from minority to minority, the other 'vertical'--from minority to majority" (Ling 232). According to Andrew Furman, it takes the characters' rift beyond "the flight from ethnicity" and towards "the countervailing rejection of an assimilated mainstream identity" (214). For this reason, the novel's epilogue mirrors the mother, who once cut off Mona for her sexual involvement with a Jewish fellow and now attends their belated wedding, assuring herself "[b]etter to turn Jewish than Asian American [...]. At least Jews don't walk around with their midribs showing!" (*Mona* 302). From a relatively positive position towards multiculturalism, Helen finds herself compelled "not only to recognize others as others, but also to be open to them and their perspectives" (Balkin 7).

Overall, this essay has tried to reinforce the disadvantages of internalizing the model minority anxiety and the assets of fostering "self-identity less as a given but more as a self-creation" (Chih-ming 106). Regarding the multicultural boom that coincides with the postethnic climate which characterizes the turn of the twentieth century, it is not surprising that "Jen's characters cling to whatever cultural identity might distance themselves from the increasingly nebulous, and toothless, 'mainstream'" (Furman 215). Nor is it astonishing to see them immersed in the pursuit of opposite ventures, that is, fusing deconstruction and reconstruction, ethnicity and multiethnicity.

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Özet

“Odaları Arasında Duvar Olmayan Bir Ev” Arayışı: Gish Jen’in *Mona in the Promised Land* Adlı Eserine Etnik Bir Yaklaşım

Kültürel ve söylemsel tanımlamaların kesiştiği bir zemine temellendirilen bu makalede, Gish Jen’in *Mona in the Promised Land* adlı eserinde etnisite kavramı, dikotomik etnik sınırlara meydan okunmasına odaklanılarak derinlemesine incelenmektedir. *Mona in the Promised Land* adlı eser, 1996’da yani yüzyılın bitimine yakın bir tarihte basıldığında, bir çokkültürlülük projesi olan “odaları arasında duvar olmayan bir ev” projesinin bütün katmanlarına yeterince sinmiş olan vatandaşlık-hakları sonrası dönemde ortaya çıkmıştır. Jen’in metninden yapılan bu alıntı, çoklu etnik kimliklerin ortaya konulmasını beslemesi bakımından bu tartışmada özel bir öneme sahiptir. Bir dizi ironi ve sembolle, *Mona in the Promised Land* adlı eseri “dışarıdakiler içeridekilere karşı” şeklindeki ırkçı antitezi çürütmekte ve kimliklerini tire işaretiyle (-) ifade etmek durumunda olanların bu işareti bir damga olarak belirlemiş hegemonyacı etnosantrik tutumların sakıncalarına dikkat çekmektedir. Roman, yapıbozumcu ruha sadık kalarak, model azınlık miti aracılığı ile standart Avrupa akıntısına karışmaktan kendisi de hoşnut olmayan yaklaşımın çelişkilerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bunu izleyerek, tamamen Batılılaşmaya karşıt olarak melezliği kendine mal eden bir duruşu dile getirir; bunu da, Hristiyanlıktan Yahudiliğe otantik bir geçiş yoluyla ve seçkin/etnik kutuplaşmasını yıkan olay örgülerinde gözlenen aktivist girişimler yoluyla gerçekleştirir. Yemek ve isim sembolleri, Jen’in başkallığı yapıbozumcu/yeniden yapılandırıcı olarak okuduğunu ve sunduğunu göstermek ve vurgulamak için kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Değişim, karşıtlılık, kabullenme, diaspora, çokkültürlülük, model-azınlık.

The Idea of Mothering and Mother-Child Relationships in “Matmazel Dimitra’nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi”¹

Hasan Baktır

Abstract: This paper discusses the idea of mothering and mother-child relationships in Ayla Kutlu’s short story “Matmazel Dimitra’nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi”. Referring to Nancy Chodorow’s idea of mother-child relationships, it is argued that present psychological and sociological approaches to mothering are incomplete and reflect only patriarchal attitude. Chodorow emphasizes the difference between the process of identity development in boys and girls contending that women have an advantage in identity development because girls form gender identity positively and does not have a serious oedipal crisis. Boys, on the other hand, form gender identity negatively because they have to face oedipal crisis. Also, women are provided with an opportunity to seek satisfaction in the peculiar experience of mothering. Boys have to differentiate themselves from the (m)other. Also, the identity developments in boys and girls have certain psychological and sociological consequences. The paper studies the resonance of Chodorow’s mother-child relationships in Ayla Kutlu’s story “Matmazel Dimitra’nın Bitmemiş Öyküsü”.

Keywords: Mothering, mother-child relationship, boys, girls, identity

The traditional idea of mothering and mother-child relationships needs further explanation because the present psychological and sociological understanding of “boys and girls’ identity development” is not satisfactory. Although women, according to existing views, are responsible for childcare, the contemporary feminist critic, Nancy Chodorow criticizes the present psychological and sociological approach to mothering for reflecting a patriarchal attitude. She maintains that “mothering” results in the oppression of women by men because motherhood in a patriarchal society is essentially assigned to women, and girls learn “maternal behavior” from early childhood through imitating and transforming their mother’s role; for example, they are provided with toys like dolls and cradles. However, Chodorow asserts that the psychology of women is radically different from that of men, and it is women’s “sense of self” that relates them to “motherhood and childcare” (1989, 32). This sense of self cannot be construed in biological terms because it is a product of social structure. Also, this sense of self is related to identity development in men and women and to the reason why a man may have an identity crisis and a woman may seek satisfaction in the peculiar experience of mothering. Chodorow’s interpretation of girls’ close relationship with mothering and childcare, and with the mother during their incomplete process of identity development, provides significant insights into women.

¹ “The Unfinished Story of Mademoiselle Dimitra” (my translation)

Chodorow's theory works with and against Freud's theory of the development of individual identity in boys and girls. She does not reject his ideas about the baby's relation to its parents, which involves its identity development and attainment of a specific gender role. However, Chodorow puts emphasis on the difference between the processes of identity development in boys and girls, and argues that girls form gender identity positively, and, therefore, do not experience a serious Oedipus crisis. This paper explores the resonance of Chodorow's view in Ayla Kutlu's story "Matmazel Dimitra'nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi" and analyzes the story in this context.

Freud's description of a boy's Oedipal crisis is concerned with the rejection of the mother/the feminine and with identification with the father. When the boy's mother "takes on phallic-sexual overtones" (Chodorow 1989, 51), and his father enters the picture as an "obvious rival" (51), the boy must really deny and repress his attachment to his mother and replace it with an identification with his "admired and feared" father (51). Therefore, the process towards the father's masculinity becomes and remains problematic for boys in the sense that the boy has to differentiate himself from the *(M)Other*. In this process, boys often come to define masculinity largely in negative terms, as "that which is not feminine or involved with women" (Chodorow 1989, 52). Identification with the father does not usually develop in the context of an "affective" relationship, because it results from "internaliz[ing] and learn[ing] components of immediately apprehensible role [of the father]" (Chodorow 1989, 34-5). During the process of "internalizing and learning" of masculinity, a boy tries to reject the mother, and deny the attachment to, and the strong dependence upon, her. He does this by repressing whatever he takes to be feminine and by "denigrating and devaluing whatever he considers to be feminine in the outside world" (51). Consequently, the process of identity development in boys leads to a psychological depression, whose social and cultural reflections can be found in literature.

Chodorow, on the other hand, claims that the development of a girl's identity is different from that of a boy's, since "the femininity and female role activities are immediately apprehensible in the world of her daily life" (1989, 52). Her final "role identification" is with her mother, with whom the girl has the earliest relationship of "infantile dependence". The development of her gender identity does not involve rejection of this early identification. Chodorow discusses this as follows:

Her later identification with her mother is embedded in and influenced by their on-going relationship of primary identification, which are mediated by and depend upon real affective relations. Identification with her mother is not positional -- but rather a personal identification with her mother's general traits of character and values. Feminine identification is put on the gradual learning of a way of being familiar in everyday life, and exemplified by the person with whom she has been most involved. (1989, 52)

Accordingly, the female Oedipal crisis is not resolved in the same way. A girl cannot completely reject her mother in favor of her father, but keeps her close relationship with her mother. In addition, she forms a very tentative relation in favor of her father, in such a way that it "acts as separation from and attachment to her mother" (Chodorow 1989, 53). The strength and weakness of her relationship to her mother and

father points to the fact that the girl “wavers in a bisexual triangle” (53) throughout her childhood.

As for the experience of mothering, it is another way of positive identification that underlines a double identification process in a woman’s identity development because woman identifies with her own mother and child, and she experiences mothering both as a mother and as a daughter. Chodorow states that in relation to her own child, a woman repeats her own “mother-child history”:

Given that she was a female child, and that identification with her mother and mothering are so bound up with her being a woman, we might expect that a woman’s identification with a girl child might be stronger: that a mother, who is, after all, a person who is a woman and not only a simple performer of a formally defined role, would tend to treat infants of different sexes in different ways. (1978, 48)

The development of feminine identity in girls has certain consequences. First of all, their socialization is gradual and continuous. Girls are brought up in a feminine world, with mothers seemingly powerful and prestigious, a world in which it is desirable to acquire feminine identity. They later go into a world where masculine virtues are important and where males dominate society and it is important to accept the male’s superiority. Such a situation seems to produce resentment and conflict in girls, and thus, anxious and resentful behavior. However, such a conflict does not present a challenge to the girl’s fundamental identity, because in a girl’s case her primary identity is feminine, and given to her naturally (Chodorow 1978, 34-7).

Girls and women “are”, boys and men “do” (Chodorow 1978, 33). Feminine identity is ascribed, and masculine identity is achieved. She plays her part by merely being, without doing. She can engage in sexual intercourse, and bear a child. The Oedipal stage is the little girl’s only period of doubt about her sexual identification. A man, on the other hand, has to do something in order to fulfill himself, and the boy’s period of simple sureness about his sexuality is brief, and short, but difficult. He has to face the crisis (the Oedipal crisis) before he realizes that he is different from the m/other. Unless he resolves the Oedipal crisis, he fails to develop the socially required male identity. Being socialized by women, boys retain within themselves feminine qualities, a practical identification with women, and often imagine a woman to be like their mother (Chodorow 1978, 112).

The difference between male and female identity development also affects children’s language development. Nina Baym in “The Madwoman and her Language” argues that the idea of female language as open, nonlinear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, and polysemic -- and of female discourse as silent, unconscious, and disoriented -- are not compatible because it is evidential that women are obliged to use and many times do not avoid using the rational sequential discourse of men (157). She states that such an idea seems to be congruent with the idea of irrational, weak women. According to her, women are competent both in male and female discourse and can speak in public life as organizers and rulers of social unions. The linguistic theory of gender difference and the misogynistic theory of female difference are both discriminatory and incomplete (157-59). Baym does not deny female difference; but she rejects the idea that women cannot compete with male discourse. Like Chodorow, Baym

thinks that the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal process of attachment and detachment of male and female children work on behalf of female children. A girl develops her character in negotiation with her mother whereas a boy does so in conflict with his mother (161). Since girls do not face conflict and castration, they develop fluid, conforming and tolerant characteristic traits, thereby having more close and intimate relations with “others”.

Like Nancy Chodorow and Dale Bauer, Luce Irigaray also claims that women have a certain peculiarity that distinguishes them from men. Women’s desire and pleasure are more diversified, more multiple, and less disseminating (352). Women do not sacrifice one desire in favor of another one, but they can also detach themselves from any definite desire. For instance, ownership and property are quite foreign to women. Irigaray thinks that thanks to this peculiarly female difference, women can develop a better relation with the other. In particular, ‘nearness’ is a familiar aspect of this difference which works on behalf of women. Women’s sense of nearness makes discrimination and ownership undesirable. Women may get a pleasure from what is near, but also from what she does not own. She may enter a relation with the other without a desire to own, to discriminate, to identify or to change the other. The fluidity and diversity of female perspective and voice are the other exclusive privileges that may illuminate much neglected aspects of cultures. According to Dale Bauer, voice can be reconceived as a means of power and activity:

[t]o open another’s discourse is to make it vulnerable to change [...] [T]he feminine voices [...] draw out the others’ codes by which their authority is formulated. These resisting voices violate the codes, and with those linguistic impulses, their views come into view [...] [I]dentity is always tested and altered [...] [A] feminist dialogic is a new paradigm which acknowledges an experience of others and challenges powers which force us to restrict the otherness. (673)

Therefore, Bauer refers to female dialogy as a powerful discourse which interanimates the foreign voice. Coming to know someone else’s social world and coming to know the beliefs of the other are the heart of the feminist act of dialogy (677). This unifying tendency creates a particular female perspective that makes her experience radically different from that of the male (Gilbert and Gubar 291): ‘in order to define herself’, she must re-assert the act of [...] seeing with fresh eyes (292).

The reflection of the opposing attitudes of boys and girls towards attachment and separation, which arise out of distinct personality development, can be seen in literature. For instance, Ayla Kutlu’s “Matmazel Dimitra’nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi” exemplifies the difference between male and female characters in terms of identity development. The way Nikola and Dimitra experience attachment to and separation from the mother in the process of their identity development leads to different ends. In the story, their father, who is pictured as a tyrannical figure, oppresses Dimitra; she therefore hates men. Because of her father, Dimitra cannot develop a proper gender role, and cannot get married. Instead, she is involved in (or is assigned) “mothering” her sisters and brother during her life, which gives her strength. Consequently, Dimitra, through mothering, resolves her identity crisis. Her brother Nikola, on the other hand, is unable to resolve his Oedipal crisis, and commits suicide in the end. These two characters reflect the

differences in the way men and women experience the attachment to and separation from the m/other and the consequences of this separation.

Nikola cannot detach himself from the m/other, and cannot resolve the Oedipal crisis. His entry into the Oedipus stage and the resolution of the Oedipus complex are prevented with the absence of his father, and his ongoing attachment to the mother. He is the only son in the family, and the death of his father makes it difficult for him to develop proper masculinity. In society, men are expected to develop an authoritative and powerful male identity. The representative of powerful and authoritative masculinity is always the father. The absence of the “father” creates a “lack” in Nikola’s life (he cannot find a model to be in conflict/identified with); thus, he cannot detach himself from the m/other and cannot attain a male identity. As the story unfolds, we see that he is sent to the town to learn his gender role: “[O]ğlunu *adam etmenin* yolunu soruşturmayaya koyuldu [...] aklını pek beğendiği damadının önerisiyle Lazkiye’de oturan akrabalarına gönder[di]”² (*MDBH* 73 my emphasis). However, Nikola’s detachment from the mother and his experience in the town (in a patriarchal society) result in a serious crisis in his life:

Bir yıl sonra hayallerini yitirmiş zenaati öğrenmiş bir fotoğrafçı olarak döndü evine Nikola. Oraya gönderilen o canlı, pırıltılı, inceliklerle dolu yeni yetme değildi o artık. Akrabalar hiç suçlamayı kabul etmese de hiçbir isteği kalmamış, evden çıkmayan, konuşmayan, dünya ile ilgisi kesilmiş, sevinci unutmuş bir delikanlıydı gelen.³ (*MDBH* 73)

In other words, Nikola has grown up with the m/other, and up to the time he is sent to the town he has not physically experienced the detachment from the m/other. He has lived in a completely feminine world with his mother, his sister and Birsan Abla; and the absence of his father/authority/model, has not given him the opportunity to experience otherness and develop the required male identity. Therefore, when he is sent to the town, to the world of authority where he for the first time physically experiences the detachment from the mother, he is “castrated”: “*Hadım* edilmiş bir Nikola [...] yitip gitmiş bir ruh, insanların hepsini hayatından silmiş”⁴ (*MDBH* 73 my emphasis). He could not stand the separation from the mother, and, hence, achieve the appropriate gender role “adam olmak” (grow into manhood) (73). He remains indifferent to the world outside (75).

In between two opposite worlds, Nikola fails to develop a satisfactory and proper gender identity and cannot resolve the Oedipus complex. He has neither a girlfriend nor a girl (female) friend; hence, he cannot develop a romantic relationship to fulfill himself as a “man”, and cannot achieve masculinity. For this reason, the symbolic presence of the father in Dimitra promotes her hatred. For instance, Dimitra by supporting the

² She was convinced not to make her son harmful to society. Upon the advice of her son-in-law, she sent him to her relatives in Lazkiye (my translation).

³ Having lost his ambitions and becoming a photographer, Nicola returned home a year later. He was no longer the ambitious and lively boy. His relatives [in Lazkiye] do not accept any accusation, though Nichola has returned home as a boy with no purpose and happiness in life, and who does not leave home and has lost his connection with society (my translation).

⁴ Nichola, a castrated boy [...] a lost spirit, eradicated people from his life (my translation).

family represents the authority in the house. Thus, Nikola accuses her of being like his father: “Tıpkı babama benziyorsun [...] [S]en hiçbir işe yaramaz bir köstebeksin”⁵ (*MDBH* 78).

The separation from the m/other is unbearable for Nikola. He is in search of the m/other to be in touch with. He first develops a relationship with Birsen Abla, who becomes another maternal figure for Nikola as noted by Dimitra: “Birsen Abla’ya daha yakındı, annesine daha yakındı”⁶ (*MDBH* 78). He tries to satisfy himself with the relationship with Birsen Abla, so as not to detach himself from the m/other. However, this relation does not provide him with the satisfaction he finds in the mother-child relationship. The possibility of his mother’s death is threatening and terrifying for Nikola. He appeals to Dimitra before he commits suicide: “Annem ölürse ne yaparız”⁷ (80). Dimitra also feels that the possibility of their mother’s death causes a feeling of “fear, loneliness, helplessness” (80) in Nikola.

Kutlu’s direct use and indirect depiction of a well in the narrative is multifaceted. The well in the story is quite suggestive in the sense that the well as metaphor evokes the mother’s womb, in which both Nikola and Dimitra find happiness (*MDBH* 80-1). The well in a sense reminds Nikola of the possibility to return to the mother’s womb. Therefore, he commits suicide the night he sits by the well. Nikola’s question of “Annem ölürse ne yaparız?” (What if our mother dies?), together with the suicide, symbolizes both his failure to detach from the m/other and to attain the required personality traits germane to the different mother-child bond between girls and boys before and after the Oedipal crisis.

Dimitra’s identity development is similarly problematic. Her father’s ineffectual and fierce personality prevents her entry into the Oedipus stage and the resolution of her Oedipus complex. His ongoing oppression produces hatred in Dimitra, because he treats her violently and limits her freedom. In the house, she feels like a prisoner: “Esirliğin anlamını öğreniyordu Dimitra. Kafesin gücü, içine aldığı çepeçevre sarıyor olmasından geliyordu. Açılan bir kapı olmasının özgürlükle hiçbir ilintisi yoktu. Değil mi ki o kapı başka iradeyle açılıyordu”⁸ (*MDBH* 62).

The only thing she likes where she is imprisoned is the well itself: “evde tek sevdiği şey kuyu [...] dipsiz aydınlıklara bayılıyordu”⁹ (*MDBH* 62), which symbolically evokes the mother-child bond. Kirye Dimitra (her father) is a representative of male authority and oppression, which makes it difficult for Dimitra to resolve the Oedipus complex. Hence, her Oedipal stage is prolonged. Even after Kirye passes away, she refuses to take part in the male-dominated society. As she gets older, she realizes that her dependence on her mother needs to be resolved by the transfer of maternal omnipotence to paternal omnipotence in the Oedipal stage. She tries to transfer her desire for the father first to Cengiz, who may enter and change her life. However, her

⁵ You are exactly like my father [...] you are a useless hobble (my translation).

⁶ He was closer to her mother and Birsen Abla (my translation).

⁷ What shall we do if our mother passes away? (my translation).

⁸ Dimitra began to realize what it means to be imprisoned. It was the force of the cage to imprison and surrender the victim. An open door did not mean a way to escape since that door was unlocked by some other will (my translation).

⁹ The only thing she loved about home was the well [...] it opened to a deep, bottomless light (my translation).

father-complex is so strong that her desire to overcome the Oedipal crisis ends in failure: “[B]abasının varlığı umutlanmaların tümünü yok edecek kadar güçlü bir baskı üstünde”¹⁰ (MDBH 66).

Dimitra is hampered from developing the required female “identity” and the appropriate gender role for several reasons. She is a woman who is rendered passive and oppressed by the father. Her female models _her mother and Birsen Abla_ do not develop happy relationships with their male partners. In addition, she has to work to support the family when her father dies, since she is the eldest one in the family. Nevertheless, she attempts to overcome this problem and resolve what we perceive to be her internalized Oedipal crisis. For instance, she exhibits this crisis at the age of forty: “kırk yaşına girdiği gün cinselliğini sonsuza kadar yadsımasından etkilendi, o hızla en şık elbiselerini giyinip kendini sokağa attı”¹¹ (MDBH 86). However, her gender limits her freedom: “bu şehirde hiçbir namuslu kadın deniz kıyısında, tek başına salınarak yürümemiştir”¹² (87). Being female, she has a more relational personality, and she can easily communicate with both sexes, but her ability to communicate easily with both sexes is not approved.

Once, at her sister’s wedding, she is blamed for talking to a man, Kanarsis. Moreover, when she decides to get married she hears Penelop’s criticism: “Taç mı takıyor şurana erkek milleti? Bu yaşından sonra kendini herifin birine düzdürmek için bütün hayatını, emeğini vermen akıl karı mı?”¹³ (MDBH 96). She admits that she is in conflict: “[B]ilmiyordu erkeğin var olmayışının getirdiği sıkıntıyı aşmış mıydı?”¹⁴ (91). When she falls in love with Cengiz, she feels that loving the other involves a splitting of the self, which makes it difficult for her to get married (89). In addition, men remind her of oppression and imprisonment. The patriarchal society, coupled with the lack of interest in what takes place outside, makes it difficult for Dimitra to extend her personality and develop the appropriate gender role. Yet the same situation creates the “merging and permeability with the m/other’s role” (216) in Dimitra and she overcomes the crisis through eventually mothering her own family.

For Dimitra, mothering turns out to be a solution to her problems: “Acılarını, çirkinlikleri, esirliği, yalnızlığını, yaşamadığı cinselliği örten son önemli şey”¹⁵ (MDBH 97). Her sex, in a sense, provides her with the opportunity to transform her desire, and gives her strength to resist the oppression. As Chodorow discusses, girls define themselves in relation to the mother and develop more fluid, relational and flexible selves. Then, Dimitra, thanks to her fluid, relational and flexible gender development

¹⁰ The image of her father was so strong a force that discouraged her making her lose her hopes about life (my translation).

¹¹ In her fortieth birthday she was startled with the infinite denial of her sexuality, she put on the most attractive clothes and went out to the streets (my translation).

¹² No woman of chastity has ever walked leisurely by herself on the shore in this town (my translation).

¹³ Does sex with a man ennoble woman [crown the vagina]? Is it reasonable, after so many hardships to grow up, to let yourself get fucked lifelong by a man? (my translation)

¹⁴ She was not sure whether she has overcome the pressure of not sharing her life with a man (my translation).

¹⁵ [Motherhood] is the last and most significant achievement which covers her maiden body, her imprisonment, all grief and ugliness in her life (my translation).

does not, like her brother Nikola, commit suicide: instead, she “mothers”, supports her family, and becomes mother and sister, respectively.

She never loses her relationships with her mother; she acknowledges the mother-role, and rears and cares for her sisters and brother. Although she does not get married, she experiences mothering throughout her life. Nothing provides her with the primary intensity she finds in mothering, which is the most important thing in her life: “hayatımın son önemli şeyi, belki de en önemlisiydi baştan beri”¹⁶ (97). The patriarchal society, the father’s tyranny, her brother’s suicide and Penelop’s criticism together prevent Dimitra from getting married and acknowledging her gender role. Yet, as a girl, her pre-Oedipal relationship with her mother, which is based on sameness, helps her to develop a more relational, fluid, and flexible personality, and her gender provides her with satisfaction in the experience of mothering, which gives her strength. She does not reduce her desire and needs to the boundaries of heterosexual relationships with a man. That is, her psychic difference (her sex and gender) enables her to find satisfaction in the experience of mothering others.

Consequently, the gender differences in mother-child relationships before and after the Oedipal crisis determine the way Nikola and Dimitra form and develop their identities and gender roles: thus, their characteristic social behaviour. Femininity becomes the main reason for Dimitra’s oppression, but at the same time it provides her with the strength to refuse and resist oppression, and to find satisfaction in something other than a heterosexual relationship. Nikola’s sex, on the other hand, prevents him from developing a fluid and relational identity. In addition, he cannot detach himself from the m/other and resolve the Oedipal crisis; he, consequently, commits suicide.

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¹⁶ [motherhood was] the last or even the most valuable thing in my life right from the beginning (my translation).

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Özet

"Matmazel Dimitra'nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi" Adlı Öyküsünde Annelik ve Anne- Çocuk İlişkileri

Bu çalışma Ayla Kutlu'nun "Matmazel Dimitra'nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi" başlıklı öyküsündeki annelik ve anne-çocuk ilişkisini ele almaktadır. Bu araştırmada günümüz psikologlarından Nancy Chodorow'un anne-çocuk ilişkisi üzerine geliştirdiği görüşler temelinde, anne-çocuk ilişkisini ele alan sosyoloji ve psikoloji çalışmalarının yetersiz ve erkek egemenliğini öne çıkardığı vurgulanmıştır. Chodorow erkek ve kız çocuklarında kimlik gelişiminin farklı olduğunu vurgulamıştır. Bu süreçte kızlar, Odişus krizi yaşamadıkları ve uyumlu bir kimlik gelişme süreci yaşadıkları için erkeklerden daha avantajlıdır. Erkekler Odişus krizini aşmak zorundadırlar, bu yüzden de uyumsuz bir süreç yaşarlar. Bu süreçte erkekler kendilerini annelerinden ayırtırtmak zorundadırlar. Erkeklerdeki ve kızlardaki kimlik gelişimi süreçlerinin psikolojik ve sosyal sonuçları da vardır. Bu çalışmada Chodorow'un görüşleri ışığında Ayla Kutlu'nun "Matmazel Dimitra'nın Bitmemiş Hikayesi" başlıklı öyküsündeki anne-çocuk ilişkisi incelenir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Annelik, Anne-çocuk ilişkisi, erkek çocuklar, kız çocuklar, kimlik.

Shakespeare Re-Positioned: The Demystification of the Canon and the Subversive Strategies in *Harlem Duet* by Djanet Sears

Eda Dedebaş

Abstract: This article discusses how intertextuality in the twentieth century has become both a challenge on the rewriting of the canon and a means to prevent these re-workings to become new canons. Focusing on the African-Canadian playwright Djanet Sears' *Othello* adaptation *Harlem Duet*, it analyses how Sears' play uses rewriting. With its double resistances against patriarchy and racism in *Othello*, *Harlem Duet* highlights its political aspect. Moreover, with the help of multiplicity of time, space, characterization and acting –use of metatheatrical elements–, the play avoids constructing a new canon and provides multiple perspectives. Thus, while subverting the canon, the play does not establish a new counter-narrative. This article concludes that Djanet Sears' *Harlem Duet* is located between deconstructivist postmodern intertextuality and constructivist political resistance.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Shakespeare adaptations, canon, subversion, Djanet Sears

Intertextuality, a word coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, has become a pivotal term in contemporary literature and postmodern theory. As the term suggests, intertextuality generally refers to an *inter*relation between two or more texts and/or one text alluding to other texts. Concepts of literary allusion and imitation have been much in use since the Classical times. Either reverence to the ancestors or parodying the previous examples has motivated authors to make allusions to the works of their predecessors. However, with the emergence of the *Tel Quel*¹ group in Paris in 1960s, allusions to other works have been theorized. As postmodernist theory states, a text can never be read or interpreted in isolation, but only in relation to other texts, and thus, intertextuality in the twentieth century emerges as a celebration of fragmentation and lack of a unified voice. It functions through both the rewriting of canonized and centralized texts and allusions to other texts. Starting with the second half of the twentieth century, allusion has been theorized and labelled as “intertextuality”. This article discusses how intertextuality in the twentieth century has become both a challenge on the rewriting of the canon and a means to prevent these counter-narratives/re-workings to become new canons. Focusing on Djanet Sears' *Othello* adaptation, it analyses how Sears' text is located between deconstructivist postmodern intertextuality and constructivist political resistance.

Influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and his definition of the

¹ *Tel Quel* is the name of a journal published in Paris during 1960s. It has become the epitome of the French post-structuralism and its theorists such as Kristeva, Barthes, Derrida and Foucault and has later given its name to the group. The *Tel Quel* group resists any kind of stable signification and highlights the existence of dominant power relations in language. *Tel Quel* attacks the bourgeois ideology of autonomy (Allen 30-1).

literary word “as an intersection of textual surfaces” (Kristeva 36), Kristeva defines intertextuality as such: “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (37). According to her definition, no text is “uncontaminated” by other texts, but rather each text is in a constant “process of being produced” (Allen 34). In this process of production, she underlines the significance of the reader as being necessary for the production of meaning. According to Kristeva, this production process involves the interaction of the author, the reader and the subject. In accordance with her idea of interaction, Roland Barthes challenges the ultimate sovereignty of the author. In his article “The Death of the Author”, he writes: “[a] text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not [...] the author” (171). Declaring the death of the author and de-centralizing his prevalence in a text, Roland Barthes, like Kristeva, gives priority to the reader and to the interaction of texts. For Barthes, assigning an author to a text is imposing a limit on it, closing the meaning and immobilizing the reader (171). The reader, thus, becomes the connection point where no line of a text is lost. Accentuating the multiplicity of texts underlines the disintegration of the hegemony of the authoritarian, one-sided and biased examples of Western canonical texts and writers such as Shakespeare.

In order to attain intertextuality and multifariousness in literary texts, it is essential that the canonical examples and the cultural and socio-historical codes that those texts bring forth should be analyzed. Adopting Bakhtin’s view of doubleness and interaction of centripetal and centrifugal forces, Kristeva theorizes that each text has a double meaning: the meaning within the text and within the socio-historical context (Allen 37). Therefore, since it is necessary to decipher the ideological codes residing within a text, which are closely related to the socio-historical context that Kristeva underlines, the notion of intertextuality exists within poststructuralist theory as well. Like Kristeva, poststructuralist critic Jonathan Culler regards intertextuality as a means to overthrow the ideological context embedded in the text. In *The Pursuit of Signs*, Culler states that,

Intertextuality thus has a double focus. On the one hand, it calls our attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of texts is a misleading notion and that a work has the meaning it does only because certain things have previously been written. [...] Intertextuality thus becomes less a name for a work’s relation to particular prior texts than a designation of its participation in the discursive space of a culture: the relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. (114)

The cultural codes become the backbone in the analysis of texts alluding to other renowned texts. Therefore, a text, unquestionably, places itself within “the discursive space of a culture”, and a text alluding to other texts or attempting to rewrite other texts serves as a catalyst and helps to unravel those “signifying practices of a culture” (114).

When we look at intertextuality from an ideological position as Culler does, then it is also possible to regard intertextuality as a form of rewriting, a form of resistance, a more subversive tendency towards the established canon and the dominant ideology. As

it becomes impossible to have “uncontaminated texts”, rewriting emerges as a subversive strategy in contemporary literature. Being aware of this non-existence of “pure writing without any allusions”, Edward Said underscores this contemporary inclination for “the release of something from a book in writing” rather than towards the “confining of something to a book” (135). Later on, he suggests that, “[t]he writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting. The image for writing changes from *original inscription* to parallel script, from tumbled-out confidence to deliberate fathering-forth [...], from melody to fugue” (135). In addition to this, and basing her arguments on Said’s distinction between “creative-original” works and “critical-interpretive” works, Chantal Zabus underlines the significance of rewritings and critical-interpretive works because they ensure the continuity of literature and its development: “[T]he rewriting of literature through criticism, such as critical-interpretive writing, is at least as important as creative-original writing, for the critic is ultimately ‘a writer who seeks writing in writing’” (4). It is this critical-interpretive writing that consolidates Kristeva’s “process of production” in which writing and meaning are regularly rejuvenated.

Therefore, in contemporary literature, rewritings of well-known texts has become very popular because they are regarded as tools for resistance towards the dominant canon, as subversive acts against the established values. At this point, it is apt to look at the definition of the canon. In Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins’s book *Post-colonial Drama Theory, Practice, Politics*, canon is said to refer “to the texts that are considered worthy of reading and studying, indeed the texts that ought to be read and studied, to the concomitant exclusion of other texts” (49). However, with this critical definition, canon or “being out-of-the-canon” is immediately connected to rewriting: “as issues of ‘value’ and ‘value judgments’ are no longer as clear cut as they were in the heyday of the British Empire, [...] other kinds of texts and discourses have become increasingly relevant as targets of potential rewriting” (Gilbert 49).

Contemporary literary theory has so far witnessed the proliferation of resistances and answers towards the established canon. One work that deals with the responses given to the former hegemony of the British Empire is Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s book *The Empire Writes Back*. In the book, Ashcroft regards the subversion of the canon as a complicated issue since the canon and its reading practices encompass “innumerable *individual* and *community* assumptions” and institutional structures (189, my emphasis). Thus, according to Ashcroft, “the subversion of a canon involves the bringing-to-consciousness and articulation of these practices and institutions, and will result not only in the replacement of some texts by others, or redeployment of some hierarchy of value within them, but equally crucially by the reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through alternative reading practices” (189). As a result, it becomes necessary to build up alternative reading practices and alternative responses, which would avoid replacing the canonical texts and becoming mainstream.

In their book, Gilbert and Tompkins put forth a difference between intertextuality and the so-called “canonical counter-discourse”. On the one hand, they support counter-discourses and rewritings as venturing to destabilize the established canon. On the other hand, it is stated that most of the counter-discourses dealing with the idea of rewriting bear the legacy of the empire as well (16). Those counter-

discursive attempts, inevitably, become canons themselves. That is, what those “canonical counter-discourse” texts actually resist is the hierarchical positions and power relations, but they usually tend to maintain some structures of the Empire and become canons (Gilbert 16). Therefore, for a rewritten work to be unique, it should be able to detach itself from what it opposes, since each allusion or reaction to the pre-existing texts draws upon the original text itself.

For the rewritten examples in drama, there emerges a crucial problem with the legacy of Shakespeare, whose plays have dominated the stage for centuries. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, decolonizing and restructuring the theatre should start with the dismantling of Shakespeare's impact on the stage (20). However, because of the innumerable contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare, those adaptations have become the canon as well. So, to dismantle the one-sidedness of Shakespeare and the adaptations of his works, it is necessary to provide as many varied perspectives as possible since one different reading of Shakespeare would fall into the same trap, direct the reader to a single path and obstruct him/her from making multiple interpretations of the text.

In *Post-colonial Drama*, Gilbert and Tompkins present three important features for a post-colonial play: the arrangement of vocal and visual dramatic language, the reorganization of time and space and the manipulation of the narrative (9). In the same manner, Djanet Sears' play *Harlem Duet*, an *Othello* adaptation refocusing on the race and gender issue in the contemporary world, fulfills those features that Gilbert and Tompkins discuss in their book and stands out as a post-colonial, anti-racial –critical of racial distinctions– and feminist rewriting. Set in three different places in Harlem, in three different time spans and with three different couples, *Harlem Duet* recounts the story of Othello's former black wife, Billie, whom he abandons to marry Mona instead. The play opens with a prologue set in a house in Harlem in 1928, portraying a couple, Billie and Othello –but they are referred to as “SHE” and “HE” throughout the play. They improvise various scenes from Shakespeare's *Othello* with some changes in the text. Therefore, right from the beginning, *Harlem Duet* heralds its deconstructive and metatheatrical nature, which bolsters its defiant position as well. Apart from this acting couple, there is another black couple, ex-slaves, referred to as “HER” and “HIM”, who have just gained their freedom in 1860 and are planning to flee to Canada. Yet, they cannot escape because “HIM” confesses that he cannot leave his white mistress. However, the main plot revolves around the third couple, Billie and Othello, who play the previous two couples as well, in an apartment at the corner of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X avenues in the 1990s. Their story takes place at their apartment from where Othello has already moved so as to start a new life with his fiancé Mona. Moreover, with the insertion of blues rhythms, music and a more vocal language, *Harlem Duet* becomes an example for a more “out-of-the canon” play.

In addition to this maze of multiple characters and plots, the play also reveals a multiplicity of resistances. With these complicated and intermingled plots, *Harlem Duet* elucidates that we cannot withstand the established canon with a monologic perspective. Therefore, in line with its multifariousness in plot and character, there is an entanglement of numerous resistances towards the canon, Shakespeare, dominant ideology, racism, patriarchy and Westernization. One of the main resistances of *Harlem Duet* deals with the racial issues of *Othello*. Trying to pass as white and to be

acknowledged by the white academy at Columbia University, Sears' Othello is constantly reproached by his ex-wife Billie, who regards his engagement with Mona as a stepping stone to admission into the white community. Remembering the day when she sees Othello and Mona together, she utters in a disillusioned tone: "Here, before me -his woman- all blonde hair and blonde legs. Her weight against his chest. His arm around her shoulders, his thumb resting on the gold of her hair. He's proud. You can see he's proud. He isn't just any Negro. He's special" (296). On the other hand, Othello substantiates his position as a racial passing² by saying that his culture is Wordsworth and Shaw. Repudiating his African background and cultural heritage, Othello states: "I am not minor. I am not a minority. [...] I mean my culture is not my mother's culture – the culture of my ancestors. My culture is Wordsworth, Shaw, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Dirty Harry*" (305). A few lines later, he states: "I am an American. The slaves were freed over 130 years ago. In 1967 it was illegal for a Black to marry a White in sixteen states. [...] Things can change, Billie. I am not my skin. My skin is not me" (305). On the verge of their divorce, Billie and Othello constantly argue about racial issues. Fed up with the negligence of his colleagues at the faculty meetings, Othello wants to prove his "sameness" and his search for respect from the white community becomes more reasonable. Billie, on the other hand, fervently disagrees with the idea of seeing the white people as the border to be crossed and with the idea of defining everything according to the perspective of white people. According to Peter Dickinson, their dispute could be likened to the discrepancy between Martin Luther King's milder and pacifist attitude exemplified by Othello and Malcolm X's rather fierce and fervent approach manifested in Billie (12). In other words, "where Othello [...] chooses to work within the system, the more revolutionary Billie [...] chooses to challenge it from without" (Dickinson 12). Thus, by depicting two different approaches in the racial debate, Sears gives an equal share to each view and shuns the establishment of a monolithic perspective.

Furthermore, each duet-like scene from three different time spans opens with famous speeches given by prominent black politicians such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X; with the news about the O. J. Simpson trial and Michael Jackson's marriage to a white woman; and with blues melodies. These political additions and associations between the characters and racial issues further validate the political and anti-racial aspect of the play. Though all those figures are male, Billie's utterance "Ain't I a woman?" in her monologue in Act I Scene 10 draws our attention to a female black figure, Sojourner Truth, which consolidates the existence of black female subjectivity as well (Dickinson 14). This juxtaposition of political figures and/or events and the scenes accentuates this opposition against racial distinctions in *Harlem Duet*.

Apart from the resistance towards the racial issue, which prevails in the first Act, the second Act of the play is mainly devoted to Billie's victimization by patriarchy. Being abandoned at the age of nine by her father and now by Othello, Billie is presented as going through a nervous breakdown in the play. Moreover, when she learns that Othello cannot finance her studies – although she has financed him till he finishes his Ph.D. – her disappointment reaches its peak. At the times when she talks about her

² 'Racial passing' is a term used for a member of a racial group accepted by the members of a different race.

nightmares to her friends Amah and Magi, she claims to have two different memories of being left all by herself: being abandoned by the husband and by the father (296). However, being a black woman, Billie has to undergo double oppression and she will, thus, be further objectified. Making a clear-cut difference between white feminism and black feminism, she fervently addresses Othello: "Your mother worked all her life. My mother worked, her mother worked... Most Black women have been working like mules since we arrived on this continent. Like mules. When White women were burning their bras, we were hired to hold their tits up. We looked after their homes, their children" (304). She stresses the fact that values and concepts are set differently for the white and the black women. Along these lines, in her article "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection in the Subordination of White Woman and Women of Color", Aida Hurtado marks the distinction made between the two groups of women who have unequal stances in a patriarchal society:

The definition of woman is constructed differently for white women and for women of Color. [...] White women are persuaded to become the partners of white men and are seduced into accepting a subservient role that meets the material needs of white men. As Audre Lorde describes it: 'White women face the pitfall of being seduced into joining the oppressor under the pretense of sharing power.' [...] For white women there is a wider range of pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools. (142)

In *Harlem Duet*, the discrepancy between Billie and Mona as black and white women has been widened as Othello decides to divorce Billie for Mona. However, Mona in *Harlem Duet* is represented only as an off-stage voice, and she waits outside the house while Othello and Billie suddenly start making love. Unaware of her victimization, Mona never appears as a flesh-and-blood character, and just like Billie she fails to vindicate her subjectivity as well. At this point, it is apt to look at Hurtado's quotation from an old black woman to illustrate an example of the relationship between a white man (in this case Othello since he wants to be acknowledged as a white man), white woman (Mona) and woman of color (Billie). In the quotation that Hurtado uses, a woman of color is likened to a white man's mule whereas a white woman is his dog. In that relationship, a woman of color does the heavy work whereas "the white woman is closer to the master and he pats them on the head and lets them sleep in the house, but he ain't got treat neither one like he was dealing with a person" (148). On the surface, Mona can be regarded as the victorious woman, who has been loved and patted by the male master; yet by being objectified by Othello in *Harlem Duet* and victimized in Shakespeare's *Othello*, she is no less oppressed than Sears' Billie.

Furthermore, the facts that Billie's landlady Magi and her sister-in-law Amah provide a sisterly solidarity during her depression, and that due to her depression Billie is labeled as "a mad woman in the attic" by the men around her, strengthen the feminist aspect of the play. Using stereotypical images of patriarchal society, Sears draws attention to the feminist resistance residing within the play. In the end, finding no way out, Billie, finally, leaves her books and turns to alchemy to prepare a poison for Othello and Mona; however she ends up in a psychiatric hospital. Likewise, if we tend to read *Harlem Duet* as a prelude to *Othello*, then Desdemona's tragic end due to patriarchal oppression will not be so much different from that of Billie's since both women are victimized by the patriarchy.

In accordance with these two apparent points of resistance, namely anti-racial and feminist perspectives of the play, there are some postmodern devices that the author uses to reflect this process of demystification and deconstruction, devices that also pave the way for the subversion of the canon. The most remarkable device used is the synchronicity of time and space, which opposes the unity of time and space in a classical tragedy. The fact that the play is constructed in three different time spans, in three settings with three different couples highlights its repudiation of a monologic, linear narrative. It is designed as if it gives three different answers to Shakespeare's *Othello*. Therefore, *Harlem Duet* not only criticizes the misogynistic and racial statements presented in *Othello*, but also it defies the linearity of the Shakespeare's play with its inclusion of multiplicity of time, space and characters.

Furthermore, the fact that Billie actually represents two different characters reinforces the reader's confusion. In Sears' play, she is both Othello's first wife and the Egyptian sorceress mentioned in Shakespeare's play since Billie prepares a poisonous handkerchief for Mona. When referring to the handkerchief, which represents marital fidelity, Shakespeare's Othello utters:

That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give.
She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. (3. 2. 55-58)

A few lines later he continues:

'Tis true. There's magic in the web of it.
A sibyl that had numb'ered in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sewed the work;
The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk;
And it was dyed in mummy which the skillful
Conserved of maiden's hearts. (3. 4. 69-75)

The fact that Billie gives up psychology and devotes her time to sorcery and to the preparation of the handkerchief enhances her shifting role in the play. Moreover, through the end, it is revealed that her first name is "Sibyl", which bolsters her supernatural and occult powers as a woman. As a result, she stands out as a character with two contrasting standpoints. She is both a woman victimized by her ex-husband and by her skin color, and a sinister woman who wants to take revenge on her husband. With this duality, Billie embodies both virtue and vice and makes it impossible to categorize her by conventions and stereotypes. Her presence and her handkerchief foreshadow the tragic end of Shakespeare's Othello and Desdemona, which provides the link between Shakespeare and Sears; and her occultism and use of alchemy serve as a foil to dismantle the harsh reality of life and academy.

Finally, the last tool that Sears uses for deconstruction is the metatheatrical aspect of the play: the couple rehearsing and changing Shakespeare's text in 1928. According to Gilbert and Tompkins, metatheatricality is widely applied in post-colonial drama. They state that:

[m]etatheatre reminds us that any performance stages the necessary provisionality of representation. Although often playfully postmodern as well as strategic, it should not be seen as simply part of the postmodern intertextual experiment. By developing multiple self-reflexive discourses through role playing, role-doubling/splitting, plays within plays, interventionary frameworks, and other metatheatrical devices, post-colonial works interrogate received models of theatre at the same time as they illustrate, quite self-consciously, that they are acting out their own histories/identities in a complex replay that can never be finished or final. (23)

Thus, in *Harlem Duet*, metatheatre and role playing emerge as devices to overthrow and unravel the illusion and the fictionality of the canon. The couple rehearsing *Othello* remind us of Shakespeare's text while defamiliarizing *Othello*'s fictional and theatrical world with the help of HE's remarks ("I am an actor"). Furthermore, the fact that all couples are played by the same actor and actress consolidates this attempt to problematize fictionality.

Therefore, the play does not solely stand out as the embodiment of postmodern intertextuality, but the post-colonial and feminist readings of the play and the quest for identity make it a political play as well. It heralds the death of Shakespeare as an icon and as the epitome of authority in Western literary tradition and beckons the reader to a more interactive reading as Barthes would suggest. Thus, this rewriting of *Othello* is constantly produced; it is in "a process of being produced" – as Kristeva defines it – with the help of its many allusions to Shakespeare and other popular figures. In her analysis of the play, Linda Burnett clearly differentiates between "the deconstructivist postmodernism" and "the constructivist postcolonialism" of *Harlem Duet*. In her essay "Redescribing a World: Towards a Theory of Shakespearean Adaptation in Canada", she writes: "[w]hereas postmodernism uses irony simply to tear down, postcolonialism uses it both to disassemble and to reassemble. It goes beyond the deconstruction of the texts that make up our cultural history to create new texts in which the old stories are reimagined and reinterpreted from formerly excluded perspectives" (6). The fact that no single character could be stigmatized as the oppressor and that even Mona, emerging as a silenced woman, awaits her tragic end in Shakespeare's *Othello* refutes the replacement of the oppressor by the victimized. Since there is no shift of roles between the victim and the victimizer, but rather a general depiction of many victims, the play refrains from any essentialism. Being aware of the danger of canonical counter discourses of post-colonial theory, Linda Burnett clarifies the supposed aim of post-colonial theory:

[Postcolonialism's]³ ultimate goal is not to defeat and replace these narratives (of colonialism, nationalism, patriarchy etc.) with its own master narrative. Its goal is not to vanquish the stories that have been told, even those that have been told from the perspective of the colonizer. Rather it is to advance narratives to stand beside (in addition to) earlier narratives. Its attempt is not so much to offer 'counter-narrative[s]' to the long tradition of European imperial narratives' – as it is to offer narratives that act to *counterbalance* those earlier univocal narratives. (7)

³ [Postcolonialism's] is originally written as "its" in Linda Burnett's text.

Through the delineation of a multiplicity of perspectives and choices, *Harlem Duet* does not simply present an anti-*Othello* by diminishing its familiarity and creating a counter-narrative, but rather it offers a new perspective to Shakespeare as the existing canon.

Standing beside the well-known, canonical writers such as Shakespeare is another form of intertextuality. Since authors are aware of the fact that it is impossible to avoid essentialist points while trying to resist the existing canon, they will either try to reveal multifacetedness as Sears does or they will try to locate themselves beside the canon, but with a different perspective. In *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen posits this double side of intertextuality; intertextuality as a form of resisting the established notions and intertextuality as maintaining the cultural stereotypes:

Intertextuality is an important term for describing the radically plural text, and is a crucial technique in the work of those writers who eschew notions of the unified work, yet it is also potentially what creates a sense of repetition, cultural saturation, a dominance of cultural stereotypes and thus of *doxa* over that which would resist and disturb the beliefs and forms and codes of that culture, the *paradoxa*. (90)

Thus, intertextuality and rewriting inherently embrace two different ways of re-looking at the canon: resistance and subversion towards the canon and reverence towards it in a different manner.

Quoting from Lyotard, Ashcroft states that a post-colonial work has to be post-modern as well so as to avoid creating its own new metanarratives (165-6). Likewise, in *Harlem Duet* the intermingling of post-colonialism and post-modernism is harmonized so well that no value dominates over the others. Placing itself at the crossroads of many theories and discourses, *Harlem Duet* emerges as a postmodern, feminist and post-colonial rewriting both resisting Shakespeare's dominance and appreciating his greatness. As the postmodern disruption of single time, space and character provides the play's liberal aspect, the feminist and post-colonial perspectives present us with the political side of the issue. Effacing herself as the author, Sears draws our attention to the fact that there is not a single authorial voice, but a multiplicity of unoriginal writings, which constantly blend and clash with each other (Barthes 170). As the title of the play suggests, what Sears tries to form is a duet; therefore every discourse has its counter-discourse in the play, which makes the play unique and causes it to liberate from firmly clinging to any essentialism or canon and from privileging any ideology.

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Özet

Shakespeare'in Yeniden Konumlandırılması: Djanet Sears'ın *Harlem Duet* Adlı Oyununda Kanonun Değişmesi ve Metinlerarasılık

Bu makale, yirminci yüzyılda metinlerarasılık kavramının kanonun yeniden yazılmasında bir karşı duruş ve yeniden yazımların kanona dönüşmelerini önleyen bir araç olduğunu tartışır. Dolayısıyla bu makale, Djanet Sears'ın bir *Othello* adaptasyonu olan *Harlem Duet* (Harlem Düeti) adlı oyununu ele alarak Sears'ın oyununda yeniden yazım kavramının nasıl kullandığını inceler. *Harlem Duet* adlı oyunun, *Othello*'daki ataerkil ve ırkçı söylemlere karşı çıkarak siyasal bir metin olduğunun altı çizilir. Öte yandan, kullanılan çoğul zaman, yer, karakterler ve üstkurmaca teknikleri sayesinde, oyun, çoğul bakış açıları sağlayarak yeni bir kanon oluşmasını engeller; bu nedenle, kanonu değiştirirken yeni bir karşı-metin ortaya koymaz. Son olarak, bu makale, Djanet Sears'ın *Harlem Duet* adlı oyununun, yapıbozumcu postmodern metinlerarasılık ve siyasal bir karşı duruş arasında konumlandığı sonucuna varır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Metinlerarasılık, Shakespeare adaptasyonları, kanon, Djanet Sears

Palahniuk's Desperate Men and the Gender Angst

Murat Göç

Abstract: This article aims to discuss the identity politics, particularly male identity, in postmodern culture in relation to the works of an important representative of transgressive fiction, Chuck Palahniuk. Mainly dealing with all aspects of contemporary urban life – crime, sex, drugs, sexual excess, media overload, consumer madness – transgressive fiction, or blank fiction, is believed to reflect the problems, anxieties, and dilemmas of men in American culture with its constant emphasis on the anger and hatred against consumer society, deprivation of individual freedom, feminization of culture, gender confusion, and false promises of power and patriarchy. Providing examples from a variety of Palahniuk's novels like *Fight Club*, *Choke*, *Diary*, *Survivor* and *Non-Fiction*, this article will try to point out the contemporary uncertainty about manhood and a loss of faith in patriarchal authority resulting in demasculinization and feminization and claim that postmodern forms of gender exist as forms of intermediations, swinging back and forth between masculinity and femininity.

Keywords: Masculinity studies, Chuck Palahniuk, postmodern gender, transgressive fiction

“The writer of originality, unless dead, is always shocking, scandalous; novelty disturbs and repels” writes Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (440). She obviously refers to feminist writing, but recently male authors also seem to deserve the title, *writer[s] of originality*, telling the stories of disenchanted men who feel imprisoned by social norms and expectations, and who use disturbing and/or repelling ways to break free of the chains of the illusion of individuality in just the same way feminist writers had done. Among these male writers are some familiar names like Bret Easton Ellis, Douglas Coupland, Irvine Welsh and Chuck Palahniuk, who are defined as the writers of a new lost generation or with a more popular term, Generation X writers. Elizabeth Young, for instance, calls their writings ‘blank fiction’, “a flat affectless prose which dealt with all aspects of contemporary urban life: crime, sex drugs, sexual excess, media overload, consumer madness, inner-city decay and fashion-crazed nightlife” (Young and Caveney vi). Their works are often classified under the title of transgressional fiction, a term that may be extended to include the range and the context of such counter-culture fiction to the writings of Charles Bukowski, Ken Kesey, William Burroughs or even classic writers such as D.H. Lawrence and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. More important than a literary classification and critical appraisal of these writers, however, is an analysis of their anger and hatred against consumer society, deprivation of individual freedom, feminization of culture, gender confusion, and false promises of power and patriarchy, which will be the main concerns of this paper.

With a particular Butlerian emphasis on the role of power relations and relativity in gender construction, blank-fiction writers have commonly iterated the idea that

relations between men and women do not necessarily involve domination and oppression, at least not to the degree so reflexively assumed. Manhood in American culture, in the works of these writers, has been molded by a web of power relations, and American men have been victims of the engenderment processes, which have seemingly objectified and confined their masculinities into hegemonic constructions. Interestingly enough, on the other hand, the loss of manhood and the crisis of masculinity have already been posed as a problem by a variety of (male) American writers for over a hundred years, including a vast literary history of manhood varying from Cooper to Melville and Fitzgerald and even from Hawthorne to Salinger and DeLillo. That the disillusioned male protagonist seeks to restore the manly order of American culture and pursues retaliation for the loss of masculine authority has been a common theme in American literature traditionally dominated by “dead white male” writers and recently has become a field of gender study for those who put a premium on discursive practices in positioning gendered subjects by acknowledging that “hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations” (Butler 125). Therefore, the so-called masculinity crisis of post-war America is, indeed, a “gender trouble”, which inevitably calls for “testing and challenging the universal applicability of many gender claims and describing and analyzing the range and variation in gender constructions” (Rabow and Stanko 408). Thus, for the purposes of the present discussion, I will explore the recent crisis of masculinity based on a gender analysis that inescapably necessitates an examination of the workings of power in gender construction by providing examples from the writings of Chuck Palahniuk as the spokesperson of Generation X, “a generation of men raised by women” (*Fight Club* 50), “the middle children of the history, raised by television to believe that someday they will be millionaires and movie stars and rock stars and they won’t” (166), who were “abandoned to their mothers and thus pretty much born married” (*Choke* 15).

Chuck Palahniuk did not attract much critical attention until the box office success of the movie version of his debut novel *Fight Club*. He immediately became popular among the underground subcultures, and his works were championed as the bibles of Generation X due to their violent, rebellious, and cynical tone and often shocking and disturbing themes and characters. Compared to other Generation X writers like Bret Easton Ellis and Douglas Coupland, Palahniuk generally writes about the underdogs of American society. His characters are mostly middle-class losers who try to hit the bottom and hope to achieve *the leap of faith*, a fundamental change from one state of being to another. Consequently, they hope to be able to rid themselves of their existential *angst* in order to “stop living as a reaction to circumstances and start living as a force for what they say should be” (*Non-Fiction* 215). In *Fight Club*, for example, Palahniuk tells the story of Tyler Durden, a schizophrenic anarchist setting up a Fight Club whose members are the guys who once used to be “slaves to their nesting instincts” (43). The answer is not perfection but self destruction for the yuppie members of this underground retreat camp “with perfect teeth and clear skin” who were “too young to fight in any wars” (55), and who “bash each other and gripe about their empty lives, their hollow careers, their absent fathers” (*Non-Fiction* 228).

In *Choke*, Palahniuk explores the world of a modern anti-Christ Victor Mancini, who toys with the idea of what Jesus Christ *wouldn’t* do and experiments with the limits of a human downfall, cheating, lying and having sex to excess. Victor, the sexoholic

protagonist of the novel, pretends to be choking in restaurants, letting people save him to save themselves; he lives on the money his saviors send as donations. He aims to “gain power by pretending to be weak” and plays Jesus being “fragile and grateful, so staying the underdog” (50). Like an outrageous Ahab who sails into heavy seas to find the meaning of his existence and rediscover his castrated masculinity in search of a “wicked white whale”. Mancini, too, rummages through the meaning of manhood and finds his “white whale” in committing every sin possible, denying the divine role attributed to masculinity by Judeo-Christian culture and razing the myth of American manhood by degrading his body, his soul, and masculine identity in servitude to others.

However, Victor Mancini isn’t the only character of Palahniuk’s novels who chooses demasculinization over the mediated idealizations of an exaggerated masculinity in denial of an omnipresent divine father figure. Tender Branson, a modern guru of redemption and chores in *Survivor*, has specialized in cleaning and cooking, saving people’s souls in television shows as a male Martha Stewart. Branson, like Victor Mancini, journeys into his masculinity through self-degradation, excessive consumption, a deviant sexuality, and self-destruction. Rejecting his Puritan responsibilities and the servile future that his ancestors drew for him, Branson explores his own manhood through a runaway with a companion named Trinity, an archetypal temptress figure and “a rental mother”. It turns out that his rejection of Puritan submissiveness and feminized masculinity ends up becoming a product of mass media and a representation of fabricated masculine perfection. Chuck Palahniuk takes his subject a step further and interviews the victims of commodified engenderment and simulations of masculine perfection and tells the real stories of amateur wrestlers, demolition truck drivers, bodybuilders, owners of the urban castles, and the all male personnel of a nuclear submarine in *Non-Fiction*, his collection of essays, interviews, and personal *pharmakon*. In *Non-Fiction*, Palahniuk documents the naïve and staggering stories of American lower-class men who have been wrestling with the idea that they will never be real men in the way their fathers used to be, and who can’t figure out how to deal with their manhood, “abrasive and hard on the outside but brittle and hollow” (94) like a dead cactus skeleton. Finally, in *Diary*, the main character of the novel is a crippled “brain-dead” husband, Peter Wilmot, a brain-dead man bound to a hospital bed, who has plotted a conspiracy to ruin a woman’s life—an artful deception full of pain and suffering. Misty Wilmot, Peter’s wife, struggles to recover from being a prisoner (in all possible senses) and needs to raise from the dead more than her husband in a place where both she and her brain dead husband have been entrapped in false utopias of gender roles and responsibilities.

Chuck Palahniuk goes beyond a seeming consensus about masculinity both within the hegemonic American culture and feminist tradition both of which have commonly expressed an uncertainty about the studies on masculinity, and often disdained masculinity studies as a fallacy, a deviation, or an ideological move to underestimate the feminist movement. Indeed, until recently, it was a common tendency to understand masculinity only in relation to feminist studies. However, the primary concern of masculinity studies is to broaden the focus of feminist studies so as to include men’s studies, and understand the fundamental underlying processes of engenderment, challenging the universality of many gender claims including those of feminism. A major difficulty with analyzing and discussing masculinity is to realize that

masculinity and masculine domination have been mystified and fetishized both by men and women. The myth of masculinity has “so overdetermined its social and cultural claims that they come to be seen as natural facts rather than the expression of particular social and individual constructions” (Catano 428). Therefore, American masculinity, in particular, has often been considered as the naturalized reification of ideological constructions in American society, and an amalgam of the Puritan work ethic, Horatio Alger type rugged individualism, and nativist Muscular Christianity. Nevertheless, masculinity in American culture has been obviously assembled on a *de facto* dilemma; while preaching a Jeffersonian simplicity and solitude with a strong emphasis on individualism on the one side, on the other side, the myth of American manhood appeals to “a collectively empowered middle class in which men feel personally powerless or unmanly except as they compete in the workplace [or in nature]” (Leverenz 268). The competitive spirit embedded in American manhood primarily targets “working class remasculinization” through hard work, elimination of the unfit (obviously including non-white males and females) and appreciation of the male gaze and male authority. Paradoxically, it is this very competitive spirit which makes American manhood the *object petit* for the men in America, an unattainable mystified object of desire around which men’s pursuit of happiness is constructed. In other words, the paradox of American manhood rests upon the assumption that men are traditionally perceived as the agency of hegemonic power, an embodiment of superego relying on strict emotional control, devotion, and self-discipline while American culture continually offers an exaggerated form of assertive individualism and manly independence, an uncontrollable collective id, which creates the anxiety of fulfilling the expectations and premises about being a man in an unmanly *society of spectacle*, eventually leading to the haunting crisis of masculinity in American culture.

The bizarre and often violent reactions of Palahniuk’s men can be regarded as the outcome of such a gender confusion and a reaction against the traditional masculine roles and expectations conferred on them in *the Name of the Father* (in a Lacanian sense). Their struggle in disguise of an exaggerated masculinity is for the most part an act of emancipating themselves from a feminized submissiveness and loss of power, which has apparently marked the second half of the twentieth century cultural life in America. Disillusioned protagonists of Palahniuk novels suffer from a loss of meaning, coupled with demasculinization in the definition of work, and a gender perception based upon “social and economic responsibilities” just like other baby boomers born into a society of tamed ambitions for men. Modern life in American society, indeed, lessened the opportunities for men to become Horatio Alger-style, larger than life heroes, which has detached them from their fathers as the god-like figure of omnipresent patriarchal domination. Especially after the 1960s, American middle class men began to experience a relative loss in their social prestige and economic status. Men lost their traditionally defined jobs and careers in the postwar era of economic insecurity, which was primarily caused by globalization, heavy use of technology, and economic recession. One of the striking consequences of the changes incurred in the mode of production was that men’s roles and their place in the social hierarchy of the Puritan chain of being were transformed into newly flexible, feminized roles, both in the workplace and in the domestic realm of women. More and more men started to take up positions in the service industry, which was once identified with women and femininity, because they

apparently had failed to keep up with the demands of the technological revolution which needed less masculine power, but more focus on the look and the presentation of the *ersatz value* of labor and products (Rutherford 23-4).

Nevertheless, with the constant loss of power in the social hierarchy, American men had to face the possibility that they might not fulfill the expectations of the traditional notion of masculinity based on self-control, hard work, and material progress, while the postwar service industry transformed a nation of self-made men who rose by self-reliance and individualism into a nation of hired office workers. In addition, commodified cultural significations, which present a world of mass-mediated images, emasculated men in America and made them more dependent on other men while pursuing independence and individual will (Hall 7). Therefore, while a domesticated workplace castrated men's power and replaced John Wayne-style masculinity with that of the dazzled husbands of *Bewitched* or *Ozzie and Harriet*, a parallel revival of masculinity, a backlash, produced Dirty Harries, John Rambos, and Snake Plisskens. But this backlash of the self-made man mythology only masked and perverted the reality and even masked the absence of real masculinity by turning it into an object of consumption away from the object of desire.

Postmodern masculinity, then, has been made up from fragmented pieces of diverse and often contradictory images of masculinity. The desire for personal growth and social acceptability has been replaced by the postmodern obsession with excess and fluidity, passivity, and the illusion of individuality and authenticity with an overemphasis on the consumption of images. The recent crisis of masculinity, in the light of the discussion so far, proves to be the crisis of authenticity and broken promises of masculinity and power. However, unlike previous crises of masculinity in American culture, which were indeed crises of replacement of male domination and masculine responsibilities, the postmodern crisis of masculinity appears to be a crisis of displacement because, in postmodern culture, representations of gender have been largely commodified and turned out to be narcissistic investments. (Baudrillard 129-32). Therefore, the postmodern crisis of masculinity will not seemingly yield new representations of masculine roles, but it will certainly produce gender as a performance and a blurred combination of masculinity and femininity, domination and submissiveness.

Palahniuk places his characters in the heart of turmoil of gender displacement, offering two visions of contemporary manhood in his novels. On the one hand, Palahniuk points out that "the middle children of history" are craving for ancestral violence, for Old West-style fist fights, which young urban professionals could replicate by meeting in dark basements and beating each other. The primary motivation for such a muscular nihilism is to destroy the human body as the premium social construction, so as to start bringing down all other social constructions as well. On the other hand, Palahniuk portrays the new men of the 1990s as the offspring of mass-mediated demasculinization and service-industry submissiveness. However violent or fragile it can be, the core meaning of being a man for Palahniuk's desperate men is to wrap their arms around other men and share with them their incarceration in IKEA homes and cubicles at work, exchanging their collective grief at being beaten down by women, consumerism, and their lost fathers.

In *Fight Club*, for instance, the “male body is a site where the meanings, limits and excesses of contemporary masculinity are tested, defined and redefined [...] *Fight Club* demonstrates the ways in which the afflicted body is directly involved in struggles of power and claims of ‘authenticity’ and identity in a social field” (Iocco 47). The need for male bonding is associated with a “homosocial desire”, which allows men to escape from the disillusionment and demasculinization caused by the postmodern obsession with bodily perfection. While “physical vanity leads to feminization” as the body builder Big Bob has his testicles removed and develops “bitch tits” because of using “steroids to manufacture the illusion of manhood” (Boon 271), the glorification of male body in *Fight Club* proves to be a spiritual escape into the authentic self rather than replicating the fake images of perfection as portrayed on television and magazines. Tyler Durden explains why *Fight Club* is more than a weekend retreat:

Fight Club gets to be your reason for going to the gym and keeping your hair short and cutting your nails. The gyms you go to are crowded with guys trying to look like men as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says ... Fight Club is not football on television. You aren’t watching a bunch of men you don’t know halfway around the world beating on each other live ... After you’ve been to Fight Club, watching football on television is watching pornography when you could be having great sex ... Fight Club isn’t about winning or losing fights ... isn’t about looking good ... it is about self-destruction Maybe we have to break everything to make something better out of ourselves. (50-52)

As evidently put in the quotation, *Fight Club* is not another all-male club where men celebrate their manliness through excessive use of violence and reinforce their sense of superiority. On the contrary, *Fight Club* is a place of healing and introspection where Generation X yuppies knock down each other in order to discover what lies beneath the aestheticized and commodified images of their bodies. In search of originality and authenticity, Palahniuk continues to keep the track of the real men of America in *Non-Fiction*, and interviews combine harvester drivers who gather once in a year to crush their vehicles in order to “die and be reborn. To be destroyed and be saved and come back next year. Tonight is about breaking things and fixing them. About having the power of life and death” (40). He rhapsodizes over amateur wrestlers in another interview, stunned by their desire to create an “umbilical” connection with other males amid the sweating and struggling muscular bodies and describes the wrestlers as :

[...] lying around on the edges of the mats and watch. Wearing baggy sweats. They stay together, arms around each other, or locked in practice holds, in the kind of laid-back closeness you see only in men’s fashion advertising anymore. Abercrombie & Fitch or Tommy Hilfiger magazine ads. Nobody seems to need “personal space”. Nobody throws off “attitude”. (*Non-Fiction* 18)

As Palahniuk recounts the stories of these amateur sportsmen, it becomes incontestable that their dedication for wrestling, even sometimes for the sake of putting their life in danger, can simply be explained with a spiritual motivation, only comparable to a religious pursuit of the self. Palahniuk continues to interview ordinary

men in *Non-Fiction* who left their careers and decided to build their own castles, phallic monuments of stone, with a motivation similar to that of amateur wrestlers. Interpreting these men's attempts to build castles as "a statement or a mission, a nesting instinct or a penis extension" (63), Palahniuk reminds his readers that Carl Jung went through such a rite of passage and built a castle for himself upon his mother's death as his "own confession in stone, [his] memoir" (91).

Moreover, in *Survivor*, Palahniuk tells the story of the member of a hidden cult, Tender Branson, serving in people's houses as a religious duty to reach spiritual salvation. He finds shelter in denial of his masculinity by degrading himself in this service, leading a virtually sexless life except for his sterile relationship with a Maria Magdalena figure, Fertility. Through their archetypal journey into "the holistic reunion", we witness his becoming a public figure, his ascension from unmanliness to become the absolute symbol of masculinity. As a Jesus Christ Superstar, Tender Branson's revival comes through plastic surgery and botox, hormones and cosmetics, which have already become routine medical interventions for American men of the 1990s. His agent convinces Branson that he represents more than an ordinary celebrity:

But you still look terrific. And you are, you're the American Dream. You are the constant-growth economy.

According to the agent, the people out there looking for a leader, they want vibrant. They want massive. They want dynamic. Nobody wants a little skinny god. They want a thirty-inch drop between your chest and waist sizes. Big pecs. Long legs. Cleft chin. Big calves.

They want more than human.

They want larger than life size.

Nobody wants just anatomically correct.

People want anatomical enhancement. Surgically augmented. New and improved. Silicone-implanted. Collagen-injected. (*Survivor* 91)

As shown in the quotation, Tender Branson's "anatomically correct" and silicone implanted masculinity is, indeed, meant to cover his previous emasculation. His weak, impotent, and docile body is transformed, by his agent and the media industry into a Calvin Klein perfection and sterility, which has been suggested as a role model for American men for over 20 years. Nevertheless, Calvin Klein masculinity stands for a cultural misrecognition, a hyperreal masculinity which manipulates subjects, both male and female, to enjoy their gendered roles at play with a fabricated *jouissance*. Sex and power in this new type of masculinity are not something one can possess, but which, one can only experience at different levels structured in the form of a web of blurred domination.

Chuck Palahniuk relates such misrecognition of masculine power and manhood to the absence of a father figure and an omnipresent and vigorous paternal authority, which is often used analogously to the absence of God. The recurrent analogy between paternal authority and God in Palahniuk's fiction not only unveils the haunting memories of a single-parent nation, but also requires a closer psychological and philosophical analysis. For Lacan, for instance, the Law of the Father serves as both the chief signifier of (gender) difference in language, according to which the child must position himself, and a God-like omnipresent authority in the social order on the basis

of which the hierarchy of gender and power must be grounded. Hence, the absence or presence of phallus/God determines the core meaning of all subject positions in terms of linguistics as well as the realm of subject's existence as a social being.

From the early examples of American literature, such as sermons, journals, and religious teachings, which have burdened the American male with a historical and theological role, to contemporary examples of the American fiction which provide disillusioned wanderers like Dean Moriarty or Daniel Quinn, male protagonists of American novels have mostly pursued the idea of an originality of American manhood in an existentialist struggle in search of a confrontation with the omnipresence of the phallic authority, that is, God the father. This confrontation has, in the first place, been a challenge to the meaning and authenticity of masculine identity, which has essentially been based on self-esteem, self-control, and moral responsibility. However, changes in the mode of production also brought about a remodification of masculine roles by crushing down the fundamental premises of masculinity and paving the way for a new model based on the feeling of imperfection, excessive joy and consumption, the irremediable feeling of guilt and dislocation. Accordingly, the previous crises of masculine identity offered new role models and new responsibilities, thus replacing one grand narrative of masculinity with one another; late capitalist culture announced the death of all grand narratives including the death of phallus/God, which was equal to the death of masculine power.

And yet Palahniuk believes that the loss of the father and authority in postmodern American culture rests in the core of the *zeitgeist* beyond archetypal representations of phallus/God. As the foremost spokesperson of Generation X, "a generation raised by TV", never knowing their fathers, Palahniuk is mainly concerned with the intriguing stories of the characters who have grown up fatherless or struggle against a false father figure. Tyler Durden, the subliminal anti-hero of *Fight Club*, has never known his father, and after an imaginary fight with his father on the first night of the Fight Club, he concludes that "maybe we didn't need our fathers to complete ourselves" (54), despite feeling that "if you are male and you are Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And sometimes you find your father in your career" (186).

In addition, Victor Mancini, the irremediable anti-Christ of *Choke*, struggles to defy the fate that his mother has prepared for him for years. This makes him go to extremes in everything in order to feel the real power of his masculine side, his abrasive and hard manhood. For him, "you had to get right to the edge of death to ever be saved" (3) and masturbation and sex is the only way to escape into "the confidence, the courage ... the comfort and genuine honesty" (119) that one can only find in mother's womb. For little Victor, who has grown up fatherless and has been kidnapped once in a while by his half lunatic mother, consummation means masculine ideals of power, perfection, and domination as the prerequisites of being a man in America:

More and more, for the stupid little kid, that was the idea ...

That if enough people looked at you, you'd never need anybody's attention ever again.

That if someday you were caught, exposed, and revealed enough, then you'd never be able to hide again. There'd be no difference between your public and your private lives.

That if you could acquire enough, accomplish enough, you'd never want to own or do another thing.
 That if you could eat or sleep enough, you'd never need more.
 That if enough people loved you, you'd stop needing love.
 That you could ever be smart enough.
 That you could someday get enough sex.
 These all became the little boy's new goals. The illusions he'd have for the rest of his life. These were all the promises he saw in the fat man's smile. (*Choke* 38)

Little Victor's unfulfilled ideals of being a man lead him to deny the sanctity of masculinity and masculine power by exercising it indiscreetly and indecently. He eventually becomes a pathetic liar, a sexaholic, and an impostor. His denial of the divinity of masculinity also implies a denial of the virtues exhorted by both religious and secular founding fathers of the Westerns civilization. Considering the denial of the monolithic subject positions marked the postmodern culture in the last 50 years, it may be reasonably deduced that postmodern gendered positions, too, are deprived of the major determinant of signification along with "every opposition that is central to Western thought, essence vs. appearance, truth vs. ideology as false consciousness, signifier vs. signified etc.," which "Fredric Jameson sees as the cultural dominant of late capitalism" (Moore 175). Representations of gender in postmodern culture are mediated by images replacing reality and, therefore, postmodern gender is often represented as chimeras, or collages of masculine images and objects of desire that are virtually unattainable. Therefore, postmodern forms of gender exist as forms of intermediations, swinging back and forth between masculinity and femininity and life and death.

The central character in *Diary*, Peter Wilmot, exists in a similar position of intermediation. He is the impotent hero of the diary of his wife, Misty Wilmot, who "is the queen [bee] of fucking slaves" while Peter is lying in his bed as "brain dead vegetable ... hooked to a zillion very expensive gadgets that keep him alive" (38), "a skeleton curled on its side, ... mummified in blue-white with dark lightning bolts of veins ... [with] tubes of clear and yellow loop to and from the arms, the belly, the dark wilted penis, the skull" (155). Misty writes her diary as a third person singular narrator, sometimes directly addressing Peter and sometimes distancing herself from the world her husband has created for her. In a very similar manner to God in Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, to whom all these letters of suffering and frustration are written, Peter Wilmot is everywhere in this diary, acting as the divine architect of Misty's world of pain and suffering. Nevertheless, similar to other attention-seeking Palahniuk characters, such an image of a paper tiger divinity ends up being a sign without a signifier, or a paradise lost of the phallus becoming a misapprehension of masculinity. Palahniuk's God-like father, or father-like God, promises American men nothing but a see-through authority, leaving them aloof and helpless in this world. In *Fight Club*, the mechanic echoes Tyler Durden on their way to a car crash, perfectly exemplifying Palahniuk's view on the lost fathers of American youth:

The mechanic says "if you are male and you are Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never know your father, if your father bails out or dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God?..."

“What you end up doing” the mechanic says, “is you spend your life searching for a father and God.” (141)

In conclusion, Chuck Palahniuk introduces us to the world of men who are “bored bad boys who’d try anything to feel alive (*Non-fiction* 213)”, of asexual masculinity and submissive supremacy, a world of images which can only be experienced with the consumption of a series of deferring images. Palahniuk tells the stories of a bunch of angry young men who seem to be stranded between the myth of self-made man and postmodern masculinity, which brings about an uncertainty about manhood and a loss of faith in patriarchal authority (Moore 179) resulting in demasculinization and feminization. The dilemmas of masculinity in Palahniuk’s novels then point to an existential crisis in a world in which God, the central figure of authority and power, and the panoptic tower of masculine identity, doesn’t exist any more, which has inescapably resulted in questioning the authenticity of subject positions and offered a remedy to reconstruct the authentic male identity only by replicating the images of masculinity reflected on the mass media. The only possible salvation for the man of our age, then, is to destroy what has been offered to him, and to experience the excessive in order to perceive the limits of his being. As Slavoj Žižek successfully points out in his article “*Homo Sacer* as the Object of the Discourse of the University”:

Is this not the attitude of the hedonistic Last Man? Everything is permitted, you can enjoy everything, BUT deprived of its substance which makes it dangerous. (This is also Last Man's revolution — “revolution without revolution.”) Is this not one of the two versions of Lacan’s anti-Dostoyevski motto “If God doesn’t exist, everything is prohibited”? (1) God is dead, we live in a permissive universe, you should strive for pleasures and happiness — but, in order to have a life full of happiness and pleasures, you should avoid dangerous excesses, so everything is prohibited if it is not deprived of its substance; (2) If God is dead, superego enjoins you to enjoy, but every determinate enjoyment is already a betrayal of the unconditional one, so it should be prohibited ...

Today’s hedonism combines pleasure with constraint — it is no longer the old notion of the “right measure” between pleasure and constraint, but a kind of pseudo-Hegelian immediate coincidence of the opposites: action and reaction should coincide; the very thing which causes damage should already be the medicine. (pars. 5-6)

Chuck Palahniuk’s violent and exaggerated representations of masculinity thus may explain the postmodern crisis of masculinity: a sense of “displacement within the rapidly changing milieu of contemporary American culture and [a] sense that ancient traditions are threatened with extinction and can only be preserved by breaking the rules” (Boon 275) and by becoming more of a man in order to emancipate from the constraints of being a man. Palahniuk’s problematic solution for this crisis is a reaction by the disillusioned young men not only to their frustrating mothers and lost fathers, but also to the late-capitalist consumer culture in America which is deprived of great heroes or goals, great wars or a great depression. Palahniuk’s portrayal of gender comes with an existential *angst*, an absurd Sisyphean task to attain the ultimate object of desire, the

phallic authority and power, which offers no fulfillment, no perfection and no consummation, but neither does our age.

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Özet**Palahniuk'un Umutsuz Erkekleri ve X Kuşağında
Toplumsal Cinsiyet Sıkıntısı**

Bu makale, postmodern kültürde kimlik politikalarını, özellikle de erkek kimliğine dair politikaları Aşırılık (transgressive) Edebiyatı'nın önemli bir temsilcisi olan Chuck Palahniuk'un eserleri çerçevesinde incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Suç, cinsellik, uyuşturucu, cinsel aşırılık, medyanın yol açtığı imge bombardımanı, tüketim çılgınlığı gibi çağdaş şehir hayatının farklı yönleri üzerine hikayeler anlatan Aşırılık Edebiyatının günümüz Amerikan kültüründe yaşayan erkeklerin sorunlarını, endişelerini ve ikilemlerini yansıttığına inanılır ve temel vurgusunu erkeklerin tüketim toplumuna karşı kızgınlık ve nefreti, bireysel özgürlükten yoksun oluşları, kültürün dişilleşmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet karmaşası ve iktidar ve ataerkil kültürün yerine getirilmemiş vaatleri üzerine kurar. *Dövüş Kulübü*, *Tıkanma*, *Günlük*, *Gösteri Peygamberi* ve *Kurgu Dışı* gibi Palahniuk romanlarından örnekler verecek olan makale erkek iktidarının yitimi ve kültürün dişilleşmesi ile sonuçlanan ataerkil otoriteye olan inancın yitimi ve erkeklığe dair muğlaklıklara işaret edecek ve postmodern kültür içinde oluşan toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin erkeklik ve kadınlık arasında gidip gelen arada kalmışlıklar yarattığını iddia edecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erkek çalışmaları, Chuck Palahniuk, postmodern cinsiyet rolleri, aşırılık edebiyatı

**Language, Experience, Identity:
Contemporary Indian women poets writing in English**

Dimple Godiwala

Abstract: The article charts a historical and sociological background to Indian poetry in English in a post-Independent India. It traces nineteenth century English poetics through to the contemporary and speaks of the major post-Independence poets. It then focuses on four major women poets, Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Eunice DeSouza and Imtiaz Dharker. The article links these poets to the ancient Indian tradition of verse as well as the more contemporary influences of Euro-American forms.

Keywords: A 'Minor literature'; history of Indian poetry; post-Independence poetry; social context; women poets

The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. [These are] the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called (great or established) literature. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 18)

Historical background

Indian poets writing in English in post-Independence India wilfully dismissed what they called the dead tradition of early poetry attempted in the newly learned Imperial language between 1825 and 1945. Seen as derivative and deadly, early poets like Sarojini Naidu and Aurobindo Ghose have not been an influence on post-Independence poets, but are regarded as part of a cumbersome tradition that aped English Romantic poetry. These early writers have been portrayed as 'whoring/after English gods' and are the period of 'youth' of Indian writing in English. The very phrases used to describe poetry and fiction written in English are frowned upon by the post-50s critics and poets alike. As Mehrotra narrates, Adil Jussawalla said of the epithet "Indo-Anglian": "Kill that nonsense term, and kill it quickly" (1-2). The contemporary dismissal of these hybrid terms linking Indian writing to England is, I think, significant in that it establishes the indigeneous localization of the poetry written in English in India today. It also signifies an acceptance of a self that is Indian, not necessarily in a nationalist sense, but as an unburdening of the yoke of Imperial English

(the prison of 'their' *langue*) and establishing an independent linguistic identity in a post-Imperial hybrid space.¹

Contemporary Indian critics often dismiss nineteenth century Indian poets as mawkish, imitative and lacking originality.² However, English translations³ of Rabindranath Tagore, Toru Dutt, and Sarojini Naidu reveal a skilled verse form which contains a spirituality which is to be found in lesser known English Romantic poets such as Robert Bridges.⁴ The early Indian poets' use of Indian words and metaphors in their English verse (the vina strings in Tagore as quoted in the footnote, Sarojini Naidu's lyrical celebration of the exoticity of bangles in an otherwise patriarchal poem "The Bangle Sellers") points to the sense of self they were said to lack. The localization

¹ Urdu, a hybrid language which is a fusion of Persian and Hindi, is widely accepted as an Indian language. If the language which developed during Mughal rule can be accepted as one of the many Indian languages, a similar status may be accorded to Indian-English, which is now one of several languages spoken in India.

² See e.g., Keki N. Daruwalla's Introduction to *Two Decades of Indian Poetry 1960-1980*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1980. pp. xi-xvii. However, K. Ayyappa Paniker is one of those who accepts that the tradition of 19th century Indian poetry in English is an antecedent of post-Independence poetry. He traces the popular theme of childhood and the use of Indian legends to Toru Dutt's poetry, and acknowledges the legacy and influence of Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyay. Introduction to *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1991. pp. 16-17.

³ Early translations of the Indian romantics rendered Rabindranath Tagore's lightness of spirit into a very heavy verse devoid of an elegance of rhyme or rhythm which Tagore undoubtedly possesses, as demonstrated in the hundreds of Bengali songs he wrote. See the more contemporary English translations of his poems in David Owen, ed., *Seven Ages: Poetry for a Lifetime*, London: Michael Joseph 1992; London: Penguin 1995; *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems*, trans. William Radice, London: Penguin, 1994; *On the Shores of Eternity: Poems from Tagore on Immortality and Beyond* which is a creative contemporary translation by Deepak Chopra, New York: Harmony, 1999.

We two lay sunk

The morning will appear with its early star
on the far distant sky of loneliness.

The pain of this farewell night has been captured in my vina strings,
The lost glory of my love will remain woven in my visions.
Open with your hands the door towards final separation. (Tagore)

⁴ Love can tell, and love alone,
Whence the million stars were strewn,
Why each atom knows its own,
How, in spite of woe and death,
Gay is life, and sweet is breath:

'This he taught us, this we knew,
Happy in his science true,
Hand in hand as we stood
'Neath the shadows of the wood,
Heart to heart as we lay

In the dawning of the day. (Robert Bridges 1844-1930: "My Delight and Thy Delight")

of the metaphors and imagery render to this poetry an Indianness which a merely imitative and unoriginal poet would tend to lack.

The English Romantic poets honoured in twentieth century England seem to possess a strain of modernist sentiment, as in William Wordsworth's evocation of "the still sad music of humanity": the sense of decay, a Europe in ruins, so characteristic of early modernist writing (Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot). The English twentieth century appreciated, perhaps, those most like it in sentiment and feeling, those who belonged to that particular spiritual collapse of a historical moment even if they wrote in quite another century, anthologizing those poets of the past who made meaning to the modern sense of the ennui of European existence. Thus also, the Indian poets celebrated in the burgeoning anthologies of post-Independence India exclude the so-called nineteenth century Indian romantics as the poets celebrated are similarly modernist in sentiment, their sense of a culture in decay perhaps derived from the sense of futility after the multiple ravages of colonialism.

However, in and around the turn of the twentieth century, whilst the older poets like Nissim Ezekiel ("Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher") and Eunice DeSouza ("The hills heal as no hand does") approach an aesthetic appreciation of nature, and the younger generation self-reflexively dwells on syntax and dark ink (Smita Agarwal, C.P. Surendran, Jeet Thayil) whilst they continue to write in a modernist exile⁵, Indian poets are still far from the deep spiritual and metaphysical sense of stillness which both, Rabindranath Tagore and the later T. S. Eliot displayed in their individual acceptance of the spirituality of their own culture as well as an appreciation of the spirituality of the other. A Shakespearean "marriage of true minds" reveals itself in the best poets of India and England at a time which was still dominated by the spirit of 'colonialism'. Whilst traders traded, politicians played political chess and industrialists exploited, the creative intellectuals of India and England engaged in the true spirit of wisdom, learning the best from each other and making it their own. Thus T.S. Eliot's "The Four Quartets", although still received in England as a poem which celebrated the best of the Christian spirit, is densely infused with the concepts of Indian philosophy.⁶ Similarly, Rabindranath Tagore is known as a celebrated Indian poet and writer, winning the Nobel prize for Literature, writing prolifically both in English and his native Bengali in an equal appreciation of both cultures, bringing to his linguistic borrowing a sense of the deeply spiritual traditions of Indian poetry.

Post-Independence poetry

Having accepted the style and rhythms of English poetry during Empire, post-Independence Indian writing saw an age where poets made English a language of their own with its different idioms and inflexions. It is poetry which reflects the poets' own

⁵ See Ranjit Hoskote (ed.), *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking, 2002.

⁶ There are various critical works on the influence of Indian philosophy on Eliot, especially in *The Four Quartets*. See, e.g., Amar Kumar Singh, *T.S. Eliot and Indian Philosophy*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1990; Damayanti Ghosh, *Indian Thought in T.S. Eliot: An Analysis of the Works of T.S. Eliot in relation to the major Hindu-Buddhist religious and philosophical texts*. New Delhi: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1978; Paul Foster, *The Golden Lotus: Buddhist influence in T.S. Eliot's "Four Quartets"*. Brighton: The Book Guild, 1998.

local concerns. Indian poetry written in English since the 1950s occupies a necessarily hybrid and ambivalent space where the sense of a purity of culture becomes a myth. Indian poets are for the most part University educated and some even teach English Literature in Indian Universities. We are aware of course that the first British-Indian Universities were set up in the nineteenth century as what Gauri Viswanathan has famously called a “mask of conquest”.⁷ The teaching of English literature in Indian Universities was a colonial discursive practice which sought to impose hegemony as colonial subjects were interpellated by European values which were supposedly ‘universal’. The normalization of the middle-class imperial Indian subject led quite directly to the imitative qualities cited by critics as marking the early tradition of Indian poetry in English. The contemporary poet is quite a different kind of writer who naturally inhabits the cultural space of the Independent Indian subject whilst writing formalistically and stylistically in hybridized forms of American and European traditions: the Indian poet writing in English has transformed into a hybrid and ambivalent writer with a sense of self valorized in political freedom.

One aspect of Homi Bhabha’s definition of hybridity⁸ is of course no more than acculturation: any culture exposed to or located within another culture must needs change and transmute itself into a hybrid space. Bhabha contends that both colonizer and colonized, especially in the Imperial moment when they were so closely interconnected, must change and modify themselves. This hypothesis denies the hierarchy and power of colonial discourse: in the context of our discourse on poetry, (English poetry written by white English poets today for example, seldom if ever references previously colonized countries, or even the indigenous British Black and Asian population. It certainly never adopts an African or Indian idiom, is not affected by the regional styles and forms of, say, Indian poetry.)⁹ However, most Indian poets do

⁷ See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

⁸ See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London & New York: Routledge, 1994.

⁹ There are stray exceptions: the English poet, Stephen Michael McGowan reverses linguistic and cultural hierarchy as he writes, evoking Caliban:

My *jaan* are you

And yes, you taught me that word too.

An idyllic Indian summer’s sun

In my perpetual English winter.

(“A Happy Christmas”, published in India in *Taj Mahal Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 2004 and in England in *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*, December 2004).

McGowan also evokes India in a later piece:

Melodious and enriching is the music born of your India –

Full of the reverberation of your laughter’s refrain,

Which is somewhat more akin to the sweet sitar’s strain;

It’s absence alone can cause me heartfelt pain;

For your laughter, words and movements are as a mesmerizing aria.

(“Comprehend”, unpublished poem, 2004).

Jon Stallworthy evokes the fluid grace of the “Sindhi Woman” as he writes of “they [who] stand most straight/ who learn to walk beneath a weight.”

look to Europe for style and form, often experimenting with it as they bend it to their service, as some novelists like G. V. Desani and later, Salman Rushdie have famously and successfully attempted. This difference displays the hollowness and superficiality of Bhabha's argument: that both, colonizing and colonized cultures hybridize equally.¹⁰ The psychological effects of the hierarchies insinuated by colonial discourse, predicated subversively on the insidious dissemination of English Literature and, indeed, the English language itself, governed the enunciation of creative writing in English especially in the colonial moment. Today's writers, ever conscious of the attempted normalization, carve morphologies and flex language and grammar to reflect the contemporary hybrid middle-class English-speaking Indian self.¹¹

Moreover, Indian poetry today does not display the consciousness of colonialism so important to western postcolonial theory and criticism: after all, the very word 'postcolonialism' locates Empire and Europe at the centre of current western critical thought. The educational, social, political and economic structures that were established during Empire certainly do continue to affect the cultural life of postcolonial India making post-Independence India a hybrid nation-state. However, as Anne McClintock so forcefully establishes in her essay, "The Angel of Progress", the very word 'postcolonial' implies that it was the period of European colonization which was of utmost importance historically. The term "postcolonial" "confers on colonialism the prestige of history proper"; it implies that it is colonialism which is the "determining marker of history". It further implies that previously colonized cultures "share only a chronological, prepositional relationship to a Euro-centred epoch which is over [as implied in the 'post'], or not yet begun [as implied in the prefix 'pre']". In other words the world's multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them, but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to [Europe]". It is as if those cultures that were colonized have no present identity unmarked by colonial rule.¹² As Kamala Das said of her experience at a reading of her poetry in Germany: "[The German professor] made the poem he read some kind of postcolonial thing. I didn't understand a word." (DeSouza 1999, 39). And indeed, why should she: her poetry is not written in awareness of a colonial or postcolonial Europe, but speaks of a modern Indian life.

Rather than characterize Indian poets as 'postcolonial,' it might be more accurate to define them as part of a process of India's modernization: "as an independent national culture emerges it also participates in the international, modern, usually westernized

'Barefoot through the bazaar,
And with the same undulant grace
as the cloth blown back from her face,
she glides with a stone jar
high on her head
and not a ripple in her tread.'

(*Rounding the Horn: Collected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1998)

¹⁰ See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West*. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

¹¹ See Dimple Godiwala, "Postcolonial Desire: Mimicry, Hegemony, Identity" in *Reconstructing Hybridity*. eds., Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

¹² Anne McClintock, "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'", *Social Text*, 31/32 (Spring 1992): 84-97. Also in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts*, ed. Diana Brydon. London & New York: Routledge, 2000. p. 177.

world” (King 3). The Indian poets are part of India’s cultural élite, educated for the most part in English language schools and Universities, often abroad. They are the modernizing, westernizing, educated, intellectual classes of contemporary India (King 52).

That western critics like Bruce King have written favourably about their work may be true, but western critics have, since the publication of Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, their own vested interests in righting the balance. ‘Postcolonial literatures’ have entered the canon, and it is very fashionable right now to be speaking of eastern cultures (especially if they were previously colonized cultures) in western academe. Thus Indian writers writing in English would be fodder for the white western critic’s machine: accessible through their use of language they offer lines of flight for the application of critical postcolonial theory. Even Bhabha, a critic of Indian origin, characterizes Adil Jussawalla’s poetry as “postcolonial” (45 ff) in a tendency which characterizes all creative work coming from previously colonized lands as having a relation to what is centrally Europe: namely, Empire. That most contemporary work does not bear any relation to the brief Imperial moment (a mere 300 years? A blip in the history of Indian civilization.¹³) except in the use of language – which is, as has been variously stated, often modified and hybridized when it is put to use, as was Urdu, which is a hybrid langue forged from colonial Persian and indigenous Hindi– is often overlooked by most western critics. “English is no longer the language of colonial rulers; it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognized national rather than imported significances and references, alluding to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling” (King 3).

Indian poetry found an international audience fairly early: Penguin published Dom Moraes in 1962. Soon after, British anthologies included Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and P. Lal. By the 70s with Arun Kolatkar’s “Jejuri” having won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, Indian poetry had become well established internationally. The mid-70s saw Oxford University Press publish individual volumes of poetry as well as anthologies of Indian poetry “giving the Oxford seal of approval to a canon of authors, thus [...] putting an end to quibbles over the worth, validity and nature of the post-War English-Language poetry” (King 19, 36-7).

Poets writing in the 80s and 90s have a strong sense of their own milieu and culture (e.g., “Catholic Mother” which is from Eunice DeSouza’s first book *Fix*) and are writing in English merely because it is a language Indians speak – although one Indians have made their own with different inflexions and idioms which are reflected in poetry. Language is unhooked from the originary syntactic construction to be forged anew on a new line of flight.¹⁴ As in Jayanta Mahapatra, sometimes there is a complete departure from the rules of formal English.

¹³ See Dimple Godiwala, “The Sacred and the Feminine: Indian Women Poets since 600 BCE” in *Atenea*, 2007.

¹⁴ Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, [*Critique et Clinique*, 1993] trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. p.58.

It has been said that unlike the western poet, Indian poets writing in English chart a more personal journey than a political or social one.¹⁵ Around 1980, K.N. Daruwalla comments on the lack of social iconoclasm: Indian poetry in English is “a middle class brew”. He says that perhaps the Indian muse is not sick because society is not sick unlike the west “[w]e have been spared the ravages of drugs, divorce, alcoholism and the complete breakdown of values which has affected western society” (Daruwalla xxxiii-iv). However, we often see the malaise of Indian society reflected in the work of our poets: this may not be as stark as the western disorders afflicting family and society in an obvious disintegration, but are present in insidious and orthodoxly traditional forms, especially in the work of the women poets represented in this essay.

Nissim Ezekiel’s poetry is seen by many critics as the beginning of the age when Indian verse in English came into its own.¹⁶ The moral seriousness of criticism, the rational, modern, intellectual consciousness, technical competence, concern for high standards and precision of language were introduced into Indian critical thought by Ezekiel, and through him spread, and were developed by others (King 75). Although Ezekiel was accepted as “the first Indian poet to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom” (Daruwalla xvii) he often seems not to accept the India he was born into, and he rejects the culture (though ostensibly documenting the conflictual social aspect, as e.g., in the “Night of the Scorpion”) and sometimes mocks the local Englishes spoken around him, although in later interviews he says it is in the spirit of representing the English spoken around him.¹⁷ Celebrated as the leading “Indian” poet by many, this Jew brings western rationality into Indian poetry at a time when it becomes acceptable in post-Independence India. In an interview Eunice DeSouza queries if it is T.S.Eliot’s “city of urban despair” which has had an effect on Ezekiel’s poetry. Ezekiel maintains that his idea of god is being with nature:

God grant you trees
to live among
If not in reality
Then in imagination,
Trees of such variety and beauty
That you can’t help

¹⁵ This is not true of the younger generation of poets such as Bhaya Nair et. al., in Ranjit Hoskote ed., *Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets*. New Delhi: Viking, 2002.

¹⁶ See e.g., Bruce King, *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. p.15.

¹⁷ See Ezekiel’s 1965 review of V.S. Naipaul’s *An Area of Darkness* (1964) where, despite his acerbic critique of Naipaul’s book, he confesses that for him, as for Naipaul, India is darkness. “I acknowledge without hesitation the existence of all the darkness Mr. Naipaul discovered. [...] My background makes me a natural outsider: circumstances and decisions relate me to India. In other countries I am a foreigner. In India I am an Indian.” Thus, for Ezekiel, it is always the force of circumstance and the lack of acceptance by any other nation which gives him his Indian identity. There is no accompanying realization that India has always, by and large, accepted outsiders and named them her own. “Naipaul’s India and Mine”, *Imprint*, 1965; *New Writing in India*, ed., Adil Jussawalla, India: Penguin, 1974. Nissim Ezekiel in conversation with Eunice DeSouza, *Talking Poems: Conversations with Poets*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1999. pp.5-6.

Ezekiel's "Poet. Lover, Birdwatcher" seems a mawkish and superficial imitation of Robert Frost's poem "The Birches". He was obviously uninfluenced by the later T. S. Eliot, who of course turned back to what was the combined spirituality he found in both, Indian philosophy as well as Christianity in his last poem "The Four Quartets", nor by the spirit of Rabindranath Tagore's lyrical and celebratory spirituality, a blend of the best of English romantic poetry with the essence and very soul of Indianness, so scorned by the 'modern' Indian English poet. How can Ezekiel's prose-like rational banality compare with the deep restful spirituality of Tagore's "Thou Shalt Dwell in Silence":

... Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven... (Robert Frost, "Birches")

[T]he problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us [is] how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a

¹⁹ See Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London & New York: Routledge, 1995. On p.5 Young explains the displacement of English colonial authority over the language in colonized terrain in terms of creolization and pidgin posing as acculturated forms of linguistic contact. Also see p. 26.

nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17)

Of course, hybridity in Indian languages goes back to the very many colonial impositions on language, from the racial hybrids of early Aryan civilization to the later Mongol, Turkish, Persian and Mughal mixed races, making every Indian in part a linguistic nomad or a gypsy.

Indian Women Poets

India has a rich tradition of women writing poetry, and the earliest extant verses go back to c. 600 BC when there exists verse and poetry in Pali, Tamil and other Indian languages.²⁰ Tharu and Lalita's anthology records poetry in translation through the centuries to the present day. Adopting the Persian and Urdu of our previous colonisers, and writing in English well before the British government introduced English language education, elite Indian women, monks, nuns as well as working class women have never been denied the freedom to write in a language of their choosing.²¹

The linguistic, geographical and cultural space of writing for women poets in contemporary India is one of a free post-Independence identity. Unlike the non-white writing of the west, these poets do not need to dwell on their identity as constructed in a space which is Eurocentric. In contrast with the minoritarian literature of the west, the writing of our Indian poets is one of self-reflexivity in a cultural milieu which is undeniably their own.

Eunice DeSouza's anthology is the best selection of contemporary Indian women poets writing today. *Nine Indian Women Poets* contains poems by Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Melanie Silgado, Eunice DeSouza, Imtiaz Dharker, Smita Agarwal, Sujata Bhatt, Charmayne D'Souza, and Tara Patel.²²

Kamala Das (1934-)

Adept at Malayalam as well as English, Kamala Das has had critics who have for the most part based their reading of her poetry upon an intense subjectivity which focuses on her sexual biography. Her mostly male critics have been fascinated by her intensely sexual metaphors and focus on love and sensuality. In spite of maintaining that her critique will be different and more objective, based purely on a critical reading of the poems, Vrinda Nabar cannot help but fall under the usual spell of biographical detail and subjectivity, coupled with personal judgements about Kamala Das in her book *Endless Female Hungers* (vi). M.K. Naik admits that Das's poetry "is one of a

²⁰ For an anthology of Indian verse from 600 BC to the present see Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India*, Vols. I and II, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991. Also see my essay "The Sacred and the Feminine: Indian Women Poets Writing since 600 BCE" in *Atenea* 2007.

²¹ Indeed, for the nuns writing in 600 BCE freedom is a constant refrain. See Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, eds., *Women Writing in India*, Vol. I, New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1991. pp. 39-69. Also see my article "The Sacred and the Feminine: Indian Women Poets Writing since 600 BCE" in *Atenea*, 2007.

²² Eunice DeSouza, ed., *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997.

bold, ruthless honesty tearing passionately at conventional attitudes” (210). It is Eunice DeSouza’s critique which does Das most justice: “The blurb on the cover of Kamala Das’s latest book [...] says that ‘Kamala Das is the first Hindu woman to write honestly about sexual feelings and love...’ Presumably, the writer of the blurb means the first *modern* Indian woman. That Indian women have been writing frankly about love and sexual feelings from [the period of the writing of] the *Vedas* [sic] onwards is now established fact.” DeSouza points out that it is because of the intensely brooding personal subject matter that Das’s poems have “been greeted with surmise about her life rather than a discussion about the quality of her poetry. But [Das...] feels free to invent herself, so any attempts to make a one-to-one equation with her life is fairly simplistic” (DeSouza 1997, 40). DeSouza’s brief but trenchant analysis slices through the many biographical responses to Das’s poetry, from the scopophilic male critics to the self-appointed ‘feminist’ judgements of Vrinda Nabar.

Das is a sensual poet for whom the world of the senses manifests itself in everything she writes. For Eunice DeSouza, “The ‘I’ of the autobiography is as much a persona as the ‘I’ of the poems” (1997, 7). Das corroborates this quite early in her poems: “Be Amy, or be Kamala. Or, better/ Still, be Madhavikutty. It is time to/ Choose a name, a role.” (“Summer in Calcutta”). The personae created by Das play aspects of love in the roles of lover, the beloved, the rejected, the wife and the mistress.

... I am sinner.
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no
Aches which are not yours. I too call myself I. (“Summer in Calcutta”)

She enacts betrayal and masquerade in the death of the self by the loss of love:

At sunset, on the river bank, Krishna
Loved her for the last time and left...

That night in her husband’s arms, Radha felt
So dead that he asked, What is wrong,
Do you mind my kisses, love? And she said,
No, not at all, but thought, What is
It to the corpse if the maggots nip? (“The Maggots”)

King’s assessment of Das is that she writes in a tradition of Indian love poetry which had been “reinvigorated” from the sentimentality that Victorian verse had lent it (20). Das’s frankness about love and sex then traces a venerable and ancient tradition of women writing about these very topics, which entirely escapes the influence of the British. The English-educated Indian critics, both male and female, so keen to be ‘modern’ in their outlook, similarly internalise the codes of Victorian sexual repressiveness and treat Das’s poetic *jouissance* with a scopophilic or scornful eye, forgetful that this is the land in which the *Kama Sutra*, the world’s first treatise on sex, was written. Kamala Das evokes a tradition which goes back to at least c. 100 BCE – 250 AC when the Sangam poets such as the sensual Velli Vitiyar Kuruntokai (“but my pain/ is like butter melting/ on a ledge scorched in the sun.”) and Venmanipputi

Kuruntokai wrote their verses of desire and longing in Tamil. “The Maggots” darkly alludes to Venmanipputi’s poem which is dappled with shaded emotion:

On beaches washed by seas
Older than the earth,
In the groves filled with bird-cries,
On the banks shaded by a *punnai*
Clustered with flowers,
When we made love
My eyes saw him
And my ears heard him;

my arms grow beautiful
in the coupling
and grow lean
as they come away.

What shall I make of this? (Translated by A.K. Ramanujan) (Tharu and Lalita, Vol. I, 73-4)

... Ask me, everybody, ask me
What he sees in me, ask me why he is called a lion,
A libertine, ask me the flavour of his
Mouth, ask me why his hand sways like a hooded snake
Before it claps my pubis. ("The Stone Age")

Kamala Das's bilingual directness which flowers in her English verse has perhaps influenced the younger Mamta Kalia and Eunice DeSouza. But "even if [s]he has *paredre* – brothers [sic] of blood and affection – [s]he has no predecessor [in the tradition of English poetry by Indian poets...] it is not only a question of tapping libidinal energy but also one of opening up new registers of thought and action [...]" (Bensmaia in Deleuze and Guattari 1986, xvi). That this libidinal 'thought and action' were tapped and poetically forged in ancient India is a fact that her English educated critics are oblivious of.

Mamta Kalia (1942-)

Mamta Kalra has been said to “capture the tragicomic nitty-gritty of routine”. Writing in Hindi and English, she humorously says, evoking Rushdie, that she has “no transit problems”. Her poems are “tightly constructed, and make their points [...] economically” (De Souza 1997, 19).

Mamta Kalia's "Tribute to Papa", which is, according to Eunice DeSouza, one of the most compelling poems Kalia writes in English, reveals the dichotomous relationship between the west and the east, especially with the insidious satanic influence of Freudian thought on western culture. Sylvia Plath's "tribute" in "Daddy" reveals not only the hold of nazi thought on the western psyche but also the Freudian Oedipal complex invented and borrowed from the Greek myth. The penetration and

dissemination of this myth in western culture promotes penetrative paedophilic thought,²³ compared in Plath to the most extreme form of German nazi-ism.

Not God but a swastika
 So black no sky could squeak through.
 Every woman adores a Fascist,
 The boot in the face, the brute
 Brute heart of a brute like you.

[...]

There's a stake in your fat black heart
 And the villagers never liked you.
 They are dancing and stamping on you.
 They always *knew* it was you.
 Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through. (Sylvia Plath, "Daddy", *Ariel*)

Juxtaposed with the violent images of Nazi horror, penetration and rape of Plath's poem combined with the images of incarceration, Kalia's ironic rejection of the non-materialism of the "father" is a po(r)tent prefiguring the current state of India: newly opened to the west (mid 1990s) India lost her economic self-containment as the country displayed an overt materialism. India's traditional spiritual philosophic identity which the English-educated Indian critics never seemed to possess, as they internalised humanist notions of Reason and Logic, was long lost, now combined with a loss of the abhorrence to foreign influence since so-called Independence in 1947. American ideological and material colonization of the east proceeded in mid 90s India to destroy the country's belief, however fragile it may have been of late, of secularity and a tolerance for other cultures. The apartheid practiced by the United States of America, in its still separate bus stops and buses and the careful hierarchization of race and culture, the Hispanics now fashionably at the bottom of the list (yes they still have the Jim Crow car practised concretely and non-verbally – the white person never makes eye contact with a black – and even subliminally – as reified in the epithet *The White House* that the authors of the constitution so carefully thought up to exclude the blacks from even aspiring to occupy the helm) seems to have raised again the spectre of the originary practice of ancient India which was put into place to exclude the threat of germ and disease. The subliminal influence of Hollywood film in every middleclass Indian household via the cheap and ubiquitous cable and satellite dish transmits the ideology of apartheid and raises the spectre of communal conflict to destroy the secularity enshrined in the ideal of Independent India by the makers of the nation. Mamta Kalia's persona's rejection of the non-materialist father – however ironic in its tone – is a "tribute" to the contemporary materialistic *Father* India. The Führer practised, fully aware, the *inverted*

²³ The popularity of Freud's theory of incestuous desire, the Oedipus complex is ironic. Sociological theories of his time already had evidence to establish that the deleterious effects of inbreeding which led to genetic mutations had led several species including primates and homo sapiens to adopt the practice of exogamy, which was more 'natural' than incestuous endogamy. See L. H. Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*. Washington: Washington, 1871; Richard A. McCabe, *Incest, Drama and Nature's Law 1550-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.

swastika, the original swastika being a sign of peaceful devotion and spirituality never to be reversed.

Who cares for you, Papa?
 Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean words, clean teeth?
 Who wants to be an angel like you?
 Who wants it?

You are an unsuccessful man, Papa.
 You are an unsuccessful man, Papa.

Despising the low economic status encoded in the “third-worlding” of the fatherland, “Papa” is urged towards capitalism prefiguring India’s economic liberalism:

I wish you had guts, Papa;
 To smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke,
 I’d proudly say, ‘My father’s in import-export business, you know.’
 I’d be proud of you then. (“Tribute to Papa”)

The deep irony of the piece is a critique of Indian materialism, and brings to centrestage the stereotype of the corrupt businessmen and traders as it simultaneously evokes the image of another stereotype: the ascetic, clad perhaps in homespun cotton, symbolic of India’s lost spirituality, as the nation turned to ideals of humanist-turned-capitalist thought.

These days I am seriously thinking of
 Disowning you, Papa,
 You and your sacredness.

[...]

But I’ll be careful, Papa,
 Or I know you’ll at once think of suicide. (“Tribute to Papa”)

DeSouza’s appraisal of this piece as important is quite right. Kalia foreshadows the near-apartheid preached by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the communal tensions and frictions, the “suicide” of India’s integrative secular ideals, the newly practised western capitalism and the country’s newly demonstrated affiliation with the ideology of the USA which encodes all of the above.

Eunice DeSouza (1940-)

DeSouza’s poetic voice slices through the many prejudices which make up Indian society and culture and ruthlessly exposes them. Caste prejudices and colour prejudices dominate contemporary Indian society and parallel the race and colour exclusions of western culture. DeSouza’s poetry also reveals the gender-based prejudices which are reflected in stereotyped attitudes to women. The male voices in “Bandra Christian Party” are cast in the sexist typology which defines a woman’s personality by her physical attributes:

What personality says Dominic
Such pink lips men and
Look at that chest

She writes about the tradition that Catholicism has steeped Indian families in to repeat the structures of rural Indian life in “Catholic Mother” as the woman has to bear child after child: “By the Grace of God [...] we’ve had seven children/ (in seven years)”. This parallels many rural families as well, regardless of the religion they practice. The silenced wife is the haunting figure of the subaltern, who returns again and again in the collection, *Fix*.

Pillar of the Church
Says the parish priest
Lovely Catholic family
Says Mother Superior

The pillar’s wife
Says nothing. (“Catholic Mother”)

The colour prejudice governing arranged marriage is satirically revealed in “Marriages are Made” and in “Mrs. Hermione Gonsalves”. The silenced voice of the subaltern – here, a cousin Elena – is the subject sans agency as is the vocal Mrs. Gonsalves who is normalised into acquiescence of the colour-coded social structures:

Her complexion it was decided
Would compensate, being just about
the right shade
of rightness
to do justice (“Marriages are Made”)

just look at my parents
how they married me to a dark man (“Mrs. Hermione Gonsalves”)

The clash of cultures that is India is revealed in a snapshot-like image. Here are the first four lines:

My Portuguese-bred aunt
Picked up a clay shivalingam [phallic representation of Shiva]
One day and said:
Is this an ashtray? (“Conversation Piece”)

DeSouza’s long tenure as an academic at St Xavier’s College causes her to write such early pieces as “My Students,” which reflects the reluctance of not just the students to appreciate Indian literature but also, perhaps, the slowness of the academic establishment to introduce its study on the University syllabus. The clever, dense allusions to Keats and the feminist harking after dead white women make this a

remarkable poem in the skilful execution of metaphoric economy. The sharp suddenness of the end line shocks as it mocks conservatism in poetry and literature. Unlike Kamala Das, DeSouza forges her craft in a very assertive and western use of language, hybridized only by the Indian nomenclatures evoked, tempered by the bitter irony which characterises her poetry:

My students think it funny
That Daruwallas and de Souzas
Should write poetry.
Poetry is faery lands forlorn.
Women writers Miss Austen.
Only foreign men air their crotches. ("My Students")

She evokes T.S. Eliot's theory of poetry which requires an intellectual distance from emotion ("an escape from emotion") only to mock it as she acknowledges that art can be forged from emotion itself:

Poems can have order, sanity,
Aesthetic distance from debris.
All I've learnt from pain
I always knew,
But could not do. ("Don't look for my life in these poems")

Of the first collection, *Fix*, Adil Jussawalla says "Eunice DeSouza's poems have an accuracy of detail and something of the quality of photographs taken at a decisive moment – with individuals or groups fixed at their most acute moments of pretension, cruelty and loneliness – that make them memorable".²⁴

De Souza writes strongly emotional poems about love and the lack of love, agreeing with western feminists that "the personal is the political". "When you write about yourself," she says, 'you are also evoking others who have known similar experiences of claustrophobia, alienation, devaluation' (DeSouza 1999, 33).

Keep cats
if you want to learn to cope with
The otherness of lovers. ("Advice to Women")

This poem is for you.
It's a reprieve.
It says
Nothing in your little black heart
Can frighten me,
I've looked too long
into my own. ("Reprieve")

²⁴ Adil Jussawalla, review on rear jacket, Eunice DeSouza, *Fix*. Bombay: Newground, 1979.

The self-castigation of the earlier poems later displaces itself, as here, into the mythical figure of Medusa:

Remember Medusa,
Who could not love
even herself?

Better the flailing
The angry words
Burning through the brain
The certain sorrow

Than letting go than the fall
Slow-motion
Into that abyss

Each life-line of words
Years in the making ("Remember Medusa?")

And later, the emotions and love poetry mellow and lighten though constituted in characteristic self-conscious irony:

I could pinch a line from Neruda for you:
'I want/ to do with you what spring does/
with cherry trees.'
There you have it: the apparent ease
Of love and poetry. ("Unfinished Poem")

The persona of DeSouza's poetry, the figure who identifies with "the lame ducks" becomes increasingly more embracing of the world, and, looking outward, she celebrates the geography and ancient culture of the India she knows and loves.

The hills are splattered with
Sacred linga, silicon-breast domes, [sacred representations of male and female
fertility]
Rivers sucked dry. ("Aravalli")

The women take on a softer, gentler aspect from the previously scathing autobiographical tone.

Luminous new leaf
May the sun rise gently
On your unfurling ("For Rita's Daughter, Just Born")

The afternoon sun is on their faces.
They are calm, not stupid,
Pregnant, not bovine.
I know women like that ("Women in Dutch Painting")

The landscape, though sometimes arid, barren, is also emblematic of spirituality and hope. The poet transcends self, connects with myth, history (“Transcend Self you say”) as her persona now finds, at certain moments, an identity in others. With *Women in Dutch Painting* and *Bequest*²⁵, DeSouza’s poetry also breaks out of the prison-like clutch of the orthodox Christian community to find identification with the symbols of an other India which beckons and claims her as its own. As the search for an inner calm spurs the poet on:

God rock, I’m a pilgrim.
Tell me –
Where does the heart find rest? (“Pilgrim”)

the poet finds “ways of belonging”. Her literary need to evoke the subversive saint Tukaram becomes apparent as her poet-protagonist in *Dangerlok* muses:

Tukaram argues with God, attacks the Brahmin establishment, and has manuscripts thrown into the river for his pains. Of course his family starves. He ends every poem with “says Tuka”. She liked that. Says Tuka. He is colloquial, down-to-earth, irresistible. The voice set something in her free. (DeSouza 2001, 34)

In *Women in Dutch Painting*, DeSouza evokes the Hindu iconoclasts of time long past, which serve to take her away from the erasure of history of the converted Indian Christians:

Sarla Devi, Kusum Bala, Rani Devi,
All of ill fame.
[...]
You refuse to wear ankle bells worn for generations
[...]
I know something of how you feel.

[...]

Tuka, forgive my familiarity
I have loved your pithy verses (“Return”)

De Souza’s poetry is as pithy as Tuka’s, and, with the depth of memorable lines such as:

Avoid, friend, the man who has never known
A dry season. (“Songs of Innocence”)

the deep sense of irony never ceases.

²⁵ *Bequest* in Eunice DeSouza, *Ways of Belonging: Selected Poems*, Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990.

De Souza's later poetry is more reflective and meditative and displays a poetic maturity founded in the practise of the craft to near perfection:

The hills heal as no hand does.
The heart is stilled by the blue flash
Of a lone jay's wing.
Impossible to forget you think,
The shadows of the sun here ever purple,
The receding plains where the wind still blows. ("The Hills Heal")

But green can be
Humid as the womb... ("Songs of Innocence")

Here, as in her early poetry, she dwells on life and love, oftentimes unfulfilled, in a typically ironic and distanced way:

Yet the world will maul again, I know,
And I will go gladly for the usual price,

Emerge to flay myself in poems,
The sluiced vein just a formal close. ("The Hills Heal")

Her commitment to her art is obvious:

Poets don't write for an audience. They write. The audience is both Indian and international for poetry and it is being taught in various parts of the world. [...] The poet writes to write a good poem, and goes on doing so even if she is not published for years.²⁶

Recently, Eunice DeSouza has turned to the novel form, as *Dangerlok* and *Dev and Simran* supply a supplement to her poetic endeavours.

Imtiaz Dharker (1954-)

Born in Lahore, brought up in Glasgow, Dharker now lives in India where she writes poetry, and is an artist and a documentary film maker. She speaks of growing up in Glasgow where she had "a fairly traditional Muslim upbringing. We had freedom in terms of the education we wanted, but less social freedom." She speaks of the Protestant-Calvinist girls school as one which "meshed with [her] background" in that the "emphasis on simplicity, austerity" and giving, was akin to an Islamic attitude (DeSouza 1999, 111-12). Her experience of multiple cultures and the alienation she feels in them, elicits poems such as "Minority":

I was born a foreigner,
I carried on from there
To become a foreigner everywhere
[...]

²⁶ Eunice DeSouza in an email to the author, 16 December 2002.

I don't fit
 Like a clumsily-translated poem;
 [...]
 There's always the point where
 The language flips
 Into an unfamiliar taste;
 Where words tumble over
 A cunning tripwire on the tongue;
 Where the frame slips,
 The reception of an image
 Not quite tuned, ghost-outlined,
 That signals, in their midst,
 An alien.

It has been said that Indian poetry in English remains marginal to both, Indian language poetry as well as the global mainstream of poetry in English. Alienated by their English language education in India, or exiled into the west where their writing is subsumed under a larger rubric of postcolonial writing, the Indian poet is always in exile, at home or abroad.²⁷ Dharker perhaps best exemplifies this feeling of being and remaining an outsider in the cultures she inhabits, writing being the one act which links her to a world outside which may acknowledge her solitary efforts:

And so I scratch, scratch
 Through the night, at this
 Growing scab of black on white.
 Everyone has the right
 To infiltrate a piece of paper.
 A page doesn't fight back.
 And, who knows, these lines
 May scratch their way
 Into your head –
 Through all the chatter of community,
 Family, clattering spoons,
 Children being fed –
 Immigrate into your bed,
 Squat in your home,
 And in a corner, eat your bread. ("Minority")

The metaphoric *purdah* is raised as a spectre in her poetry to denote the feeling of being beside herself, alien to even the self, the *purdah* itself a thing of disguise:

Purdah is a kind of safety.
 The body finds a place to hide.
 [...]

²⁷ See K. Ayyappa Paniker's Introduction to *Modern Indian Poetry in English*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1991.

She stands outside herself,
 Sometimes in all four corners of a room.
 Wherever she goes she is always
 inching past herself, ("Purdah I")

Having worked in the impoverished slums of Dharavi for the making of a documentary film, she writes poignantly of the precarious unaligned spaces which are the dwellers' "Living Space".

There are just not enough
 straight lines. That
 is the problem.
 Nothing is flat
 Or parallel. Beams
 Balance crookedly on supports
 [...]
 Into this rough frame,
 Someone has squeezed
 A living space ("Living Space")

Chillingly pre-figuring the Bombay riots of 1993, Dharker writes of bomb blasts in *The List*.

Sudden impact.
 The city flies apart.
 [...]
 Loaves of bread explode from bakeries.
 Fishes catapult out of the sea.
 Buses, suburban trains and taxis
 Spit out their load.
 Things lose their names. ("The List")

The list continues, in imagery at once stark and grimy in its horror, like the social documentaries the poet-filmmaker produces:

And this is left:
 Blackened saris, trousers, petticoats,
 The shell of a television set,
 A tin box of bangles
 And face cream,
 A blistered cupboard
 Like a looted face
 That opened its mouth

 In a scream
 That never found an end. ("8 January 1993")

The stratifications of contemporary women's verse in English, comprised as it were of the themes of desire and the body, the world, the socius (the abstract space of lived relations), nature, construct a

field of immanence or plane of consistency [which] can take place in very different social formations through very different assemblages (perverse, artistic, scientific, mystical, political) [...] It is constructed piece by piece, and the places, conditions, and techniques are irreducible to one another. The question, rather, is whether the pieces can fit together, and at what price. Inevitably, there will be monstrous crossbreeds. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 157)

The monstrous crossbreeds of contemporary women's writing are sometimes located, almost anachronistically, in alien lands, and one of these is the Australian-based Leela Gandhi's "poetry". She writes in a derivative and unoriginal, even banal form and style. As Eunice DeSouza's protagonist in *Dangerlok* puts it:

Someone only has to publish something and he or she becomes not just a poet but an eminent poet, and if one can keep up the bluff long enough, the doyen of literature, one of a galaxy of stars who have scaled pinnacles never soared before. (DeSouza 2001, 17)

In metaphors glibly borrowed, the lamentably named Gandhi adorns the surface of her poems, as her tropes hesitate to partake of their literary, cultural or mythological density to enhance the texture of her poem:

A long time ago, when my father, a magician,
Taught me to whistle the 'Ode to Joy'
[...]
The old mask – Lear's? – as though some jester
Turned adversary, inverts 'a smile'.
[...]
Now a lesser Ulysses behold:
Just a little man growing old. ("The Gift II")

Whether the "Ode to Joy" can actually lend itself to being whistled is not what I wish to split hairs about here. The next two lines confuse the figure of Lear with that of a jester who is in turn confused with a circus clown. Enid Welsford revealed Shakespeare's fool to be the wisest person in the plays.²⁸ Here however, Lear's philosophical fool (reduced to a mere jester) seems to be the adversary of the persona herself, as she links yet another myth to her tenuous litany, betraying the banality of her thought as she peppers her poetry with a confused conglomeration of great figures of the western and Greek literary imagination.

The tautological content of the following poem, encased in a repetitive metrical stanza is enough to demonstrate that like some lesser known, perhaps forgotten poets,

²⁸ Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*. Illinois: Atlantic, 1935.

there are many writing today, in the east and the west, who perhaps do not deserve to be published.

These songs of Summertown
 Rise from the ground:
 Hail rain, hold Sun,
 Let my vowels resonate
 My verbs resound
 Until the singing's done,
 My songs sung. ("Invocation")

However, despite this occasional published monstrosity, there are many original female voices in Indian poetry and I have chosen to focus on those who write from India. The poets discussed above may, to some essentialists, be seen to embody the "authentic" Indian woman's voice; not discounting which I assert that the poets I have discussed: Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Eunice DeSouza, and Imtiaz Dharker make an arid language 'vibrate with a new intensity'. Writing in a language they have made their own, they have compensated, in Deleuzian terms, "for its deterritorialization by a reterritorialization in sense", sometimes a spiritual reterritorialization as well as a physical (linguistic) one. In the best of their poetry, "*language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits.*" English, then, in the language of the contemporary Indian is no longer an accumulation of stereotypical nouns and clichés; but is

a creative process that directly links the word to the image; a technique that surges up at the end of sequences in connection with the intensity of the limit [...] and a generalized intensification, coinciding with a panning shot where the camera pivots and sweeps around without leaving the spot, making the image vibrate. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 19-20, 23)

***This article is dedicated to my ex-tutor and friend Eunice DeSouza.
 With thanks to Adil Jussawalla and Stephen Michael McGowan.***

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Eunice DeSouza, email to the author, 16 December 2002.

Özet**Dil, Deneyim, Kimlik: İngilizce Yazan Hintli Çağdaş Kadın Şairler**

Makalede, bağımsızlık sonrası dönemde Hindistan’da İngilizce yazılmış Hint şiirinin tarihi ve sosyolojik arka planı ana çizgileriyle ortaya konulmaktadır. Ayrıca, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl İngiliz politikası geçmişten günümüze kadar olan dönem içerisinde değerlendirilmekte ve bağımsızlık sonrası dönemin önde gelen şairlerinden söz edilmektedir. Bunu takiben, Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Eunice DeSouza ve Imtiaz Dharker gibi önemli dört kadın şaire yer verilmektedir. Makalede, bu şairler, eski Hindistan şiir geleneğinin yanı sıra Avrupa-Amerika kökenli formların Hint şiiri üzerindeki son dönem etkisi ile ilişkilendirilmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: ‘Azınlık edebiyatı’, Hint şiiri tarihi, bağımsızlık sonrası dönem şiiri, toplumsal bağlam, kadın şairler

**Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*:
Defiance vs. Conformism**

William S. Haney II

Abstract: In Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, Berenger alone manages to resist rhinocerotism by not conforming to the urge to give up his humanity and become a rhino like each of the other characters. Only Berenger has the self-sufficiency to avoid the over-indulgence, gluttony and intemperance that impels the other characters to transmogrify into beasts. Although the play shows the absurdity of defiance as much as the absurdity of conformism, Berenger has the strength of character to remain an individualist by not joining the happy throng of less sensitive people. Through Berenger's taste of the void of conceptions beyond cultural constructs seen in his selfless support of the best interest of others, the audience also glimpses a state of unity beyond duality. The real freedom of a unified, transpersonal self approached by Berenger and the spectators, derives from a sense of the connection between the local field of matter and action and an underlying nonlocal field of consciousness.

Keywords: Pure consciousness (*turiya*), transpersonal self, aesthetic rapture (*rasa*), level of language (*pashyanti, para*), knowledge-by-identity, metamorphosis

Consumerism and the Anticipations of Joy

Critics have pointed out that *Rhinoceros* dramatizes Ionesco's aversion for the Fascist movement in Rumania when he left in 1938 (Esslin 181). From a twenty-first century perspective, however, the play not only demonstrates how public opinion can pressure an individual into conformism, it also suggests how present-day consumer society can transmogrify an individual into a monster with an insatiable appetite. The play sets up a contrast between the necessity to consume in order to sustain biological existence within a certain standard of social decency, and the extravagant desire to consume as a means of wish fulfillment. In this contrast between self-sufficiency and over-indulgence through gluttony and intemperance, the play impels the audience to experience a gap between the basic needs of human existence on the one hand and on the other the desire to gratify the appetites in a bestial, uninhibited manner as symbolized by the rhinoceros.

In terms of conformity to public opinion, as in the case of Fascism, Ionesco says of *Rhinoceros*,

As usual, I went back to my personal obsessions. I remembered that in the course of my life I have been very much struck by what one might call the current of opinion, by its rapid evolution, its power of contagion, which is that of a real epidemic. People allow themselves suddenly to be invaded by a new religion, a doctrine, a fanaticism. ... At such moments we witness a veritable mental mutation. I don't know if you have noticed it, but when people no longer share your opinions, when you can no longer make yourself understood by them, one

has the impression of being confronted with monsters—rhinos, for example. They have that mixture of candour and ferocity. They would kill you with the best of consciences. And history has shown us during the last quarter of a century that people thus transformed not only resemble rhinos, but really become rhinoceroses. (Esslin 181-82; Sarrute 1960 interview)

Esslin notes that the characters in the play choose a pachydermatous existence because “they admire brute force and the simplicity that springs from the suppression of over-tender humanistic feelings” (182). Some conform to the herd of rhinos because they feel it is the only way to learn how rhinos think in order to persuade them to revert back to their humanity, while others like Mlle Daisy conform because they cannot resist conforming to the majority (182). Berenger, a character who appears in several other Ionesco plays, watches as his friend Jean and then his colleague Dudard turn into rhinos, with more and more people converting until he and Daisy, a colleague he is in love with, are the last remaining humans. Everyone but Berenger and Daisy has been infected by rhinocerotitis, a mysterious disease that makes them want to abandon their flabby, weak, pale humanity and become vigorous, hardy, thick-skinned pachyderms. As Deborah Gaensbauer says, “Berenger is an anti-hero whose immunity to rhinocerotitis, having begun as the cloud of a hangover, is an instinctive resistance to ideology and propaganda for which, according to Ionesco, ‘it is probably impossible to give any explanation’” (104; Ionesco 199).

In the end, even Daisy cannot resist the temptation of joining the majority in their insensitive and aggressive lifestyle. Left alone, Berenger rebelliously asserts that he will never capitulate. To his friends Jean and Dudard, Berenger defends his desire to resist becoming a rhino and live on as a human being, but after everyone including Daisy has become non-human, he regrets being unable to change into a rhino himself. Ultimately, though, he reasserts his defiant preference for the qualities of humanity, yet not as some critics believe without a strong hint of the fox’s scorn for unattainable grapes. As Esslin puts it, “Far from being a heroic last stand, Berenger’s defiance is farcical and tragicomic, and the final meaning of the play is by no means as simple as some critics made it appear. What the play conveys is the absurdity of defiance as much as the absurdity of conformism, the tragedy of the individualist who cannot join the happy throng of less sensitive people, the artist’s feelings as an outcast” (183). Esslin goes on to compare Berenger to Kafka’s Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis*.

While Samsa finds himself transformed into a giant bug as everyone else remains normal, Berenger soon discovers that the definition of normalcy has undergone a radical modification: the innate qualities of a human are no longer considered to be as normal as the attributes of a rhino. Ionesco both reacts against conformity and derides the individualist who flaunts his or her superiority as a sensitive human. In addition to highlighting the absurdity of the human condition, however, Ionesco creates a gap between what the audience feels intuitively as the true nature of its own humanity and the conditions that consumer society has imposed upon humanity. Although Berenger’s final stand emphasizes the ambivalence of our need to conform while simultaneously preserving our individuality, the play suggests that consumer society has artificially induced this ambivalence as a way to insure its success in the production of consumers. Unlike the characters who transform into rhinos, the audience would generally resist identification with the rhinos because they would appreciate the gap between humans

and beasts, which constitutes a gap between ordinary existential needs and extravagant desires based solely on the transitory nature of wish fulfillment—as if Freud’s “reality principle” were being replaced by the “pleasure principle”. Rhinos are characterized by the lack of that dimension of cognitive reflection that would allow them to be spontaneously aware of their indulgence. Humans, in contrast, may at times suffer from the sense of gluttony and bestial behavior found in rhinos, but the play induces a self-awareness in them of the excessive nature of this indulgence and the fact that they can manage without it. Indeed, this indulgence becomes a factor of conformity, with the majority following their appetites because of an inability to resist the pressure from others to conform, not because of any inherent satisfaction or pleasure derived from their indulgence.

Bauman argues that consumer society has created a new relation between Freud’s reality and pleasure principles. The pleasure principle, in which pleasure has to adjust itself to the limitations of reality, has undergone a radical transformation. Today the pleasure principle has itself become the ultimate reality. In this scenario, the reality principle must now sustain pleasure by way of privileging instant as opposed to delayed gratification, which was previously held to be the basis of social reality. Bauman observes that “[c]onsumer life is a never-ending sequence of *new beginnings*. The joy of shopping is greater than any joy the purchased product, brought home, may bring. It is the shopping that counts. [...] Pleasures are at their best, most alluring and most exhilarating when encapsulated, as *anticipations* of joy, in the exhibits on display” (154, original emphasis). He concludes that capitalist market society, while originally based on the greed for possessions, has paradoxically “ended up denigrating material possessions and replacing the value of ‘having’ with that of living through a pleasurable (yet volatile and fast evaporating) experience” (155). Ionesco’s rhinos live for the pleasurable experience of sheer bestiality, not for acquiring possessions. They represent a society, as Bauman puts it, in which pleasure has been “miraculously transmogrified into the mainstay of reality,” and the search for pleasure has become “the major (and sufficient) instrument of pattern maintenance” (187). In other words, the fluidity of moving from one new pleasurable beginning to another has become the “ultimate solidity—the most stable of conceivable conditions” (187). On the basis of the substitution of the reality principle by pleasure, Ionesco’s play suggests that the universal condition of rational thought and action is being replaced in today’s market society by the free reign of irrational pleasure as represented by the rhinos.

Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, however, does not wholeheartedly embrace the rational strategies of a solid modernist society, as evidenced by Berenger’s dilemma when at the end of the play his will to save humanity weakens and he feels tempted to conform to the irrationality of the rhinos. Although he finds it impossible to renounce his humanity and become a rhino, Berenger realizes that he needs to respond sensibly to the conditions of an irrational society, that rational strategies may not always be the most effective in dealing with the irrational passions of consumerism and the pleasure principle. As Bauman notes, “under certain conditions irrational behavior may carry a trapping of rational strategy and even offer the most immediately obvious rational option among those available” (189). Ionesco’s audience does not have a clear option in choosing one side of the equation or the other, but rather finds itself in a gap between them. As the play demonstrates, logical analysis does not help characters or spectators

in coping with a situation of a growing number of people becoming rhinos. This gap arguably represents and indeed constitutes a taste of the void of conceptions, that qualityless state of pure consciousness beyond thought. Berenger as we shall see undergoes a transformation in the play from an aimless, alienated, apathetic Everyman who drinks too much and suspects life to be a dream to a morally strong individual who even in the face of absurdity refuses to surrender his human identity. Throughout the play he finds himself oscillating in and out of conceptual gaps as he grapples with the mystery of his friends and fellow citizens turning into beasts. The gaps occur at several points during the play: in the discussions on logic with his friend Jean and the Logician, in the debate with Jean and his colleague Dudard about the reasons for choosing rhinocerotis over humanity, and in Berenger's amorous relation with Daisy and their tentative decision to resist relinquishing their humanity.

The Will to Power

In Act One, Berenger meets Jean at a café when suddenly a rhinoceros runs by through the town square (off-stage), shocking everybody but Berenger. Jean begins to lecture Berenger on a list of failings—his being a semi-alcoholic with no will-power, no interest in culture and no sense of purpose—when a second rhinoceros runs through the square and tramples a woman's cat. As Jean harangues Berenger on will power, the Logician on a related note explains the concept of syllogisms to the Old Gentleman as he attempts to account logically for the rhinoceros and whether the two that ran through the square were the same or different, and whether they came from Asia or Africa. Ionesco reveals that the Logician, who represents the rationalist characters of the play—namely Jean, Botard and Dudard—comically fails in his logical analysis, proving that logic can't explain everything. While berating Berenger, Jean comes across as hypocritical and full of contradictions like the Logician. He accuses Berenger of being irresponsible yet arrives late for their meeting and refuses to take Berenger out for a day of culture because he wants to snooze before going out drinking with his friends. Nevertheless, Jean claims, "I'm just as good as you are; I think with all due modesty I may say I'm better. The superior man is the man who fulfils his duty" (13). By emphasizing his rational intellect and strength of will, Jean symbolizes the "will to power" of Nietzsche's "super-man," a powerful being standing beyond human morality, which foreshadows his metamorphosis into a savage rhinoceros that violently attacks Berenger when he tries to save him. This will to power also prompts the other rationalists to transmogrify into rhinos, including the Logician, Dudard and Botard, Berenger's skeptic colleague who dismisses the newspaper story about the rhinos as pure fantasy. These men succumb to the fascist rhinos through an attraction to their strength and a primal state of nature beyond morality. With the ineffectual logic of the Logician, Jean rationalizes his lapses in moral conduct to his lackadaisical friend and resists accepting that the universe is not logical but rather absurd, as recognized by Berenger.

While Jean and the rationalist metamorphose into rhinos, however, their transformation is merely physical, for on the level of moral values they were already savage and vicious animals. The rhinos thus symbolize a prior inner transformation of humans who believe that brute force can render them super-men and place them above the laws of nature, when in fact the only power they have is their strength in numbers.

Ionesco suggests that the collective consciousness of the rhino-men gives them a false sense of security through the illusion of power, considering that this power is only that of collective violence, reminiscent of the totalitarian governments of WW II. This power, moreover, is also associated with pleasure, which derives not only from the pleasure principle but also from wielding control over others. The world of rhinos therefore represents a reality in which the pleasure principle has usurped the reality principle by replacing logic, reason and delayed gratification with their polar opposites. Instant gratification, however, comes in two forms: physical and metaphysical. The rhinos achieve the former while Berenger and through him the audience achieve the latter by seeing beyond physical attachments. Through the rhinos' pseudo power and pleasure, then, *Rhinoceros* produces a conceptual gap that attenuates the audience's attachment to any particular concept or thesis—namely, the gap between the physical power/pleasure of the rhinos based on personal desire and the spiritual power/bliss awakened within the audience and Berenger based on a transpersonal freedom from the bondage of desire. Through a taste of the void of conceptions beyond cultural constructs as suggested by Berenger's selfless support of the best interest and wellbeing of others, the audience glimpses a state of wholeness beyond duality by bridging the gap in ordinary waking consciousness between the three elements of knowledge: a separate object of experience, a process of experience and the experiencer. The real freedom of a unified, transpersonal self approached by Berenger and the spectators thus derives from a sense of the connection between the local field of matter and action and an underlying nonlocal field of mind and consciousness. As R. W. Boyer puts it, "brain and mind are no longer just in the head, because brains, minds, and all material objects are no longer just localized physical matter, but rather are also more abstract but real nonlocal processes in a subtler underlying field of existence" (4).

Only Berenger demonstrates a connection to this underlying field of existence through his sense of responsibility for humanity at large. Although indecisive at times, his love for Daisy suggests not only an emotional desire for somebody, but a sense of responsibility for her wellbeing, a selfless kind of love that indicates an unconditional caring for all humanity. Berenger feels guilty that he may have pushed his friends including Daisy out toward becoming rhinos, but as the play suggests they would have metamorphosed into savages even without him. Jean and the others become rhinos not so much because they want to conform, given that rhinos are solitary creatures to begin with, but rather because of the desire for power and mindless pleasure. Berenger on the other hand doubts his own existence, contradicting Descartes' claim, "I think, therefore I am." Through statements such as "Life is a dream," "I don't even know if I *am* me," and "I sometimes wonder if I exist myself" (20, 24, 26, original emphasis), Berenger not only questions the power of thought but also suggests a modification of the formula in existentialist philosophy, "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 101-103). According to this principle, physical birth as a human being comes before acquiring a soul or any essential meaning in life. Berenger's search extends beyond both physical and mental existence toward that subtler underlying field of existence associated with his love for humanity. As discussed below in terms of Samkhya Yoga, dualism does not consist of a mind/body opposition, which are both considered physical, but rather an opposition between mind/body and consciousness. Berenger's selfless love, as a field of unity consciousness, subsumes existence as well as essence.

Through its nonlocality and interconnectedness, this unified field creates all the parts of human existence. In other words, Berenger goes beyond thought to a level underlying both existence and essence. As Boyer puts it: "From the holistic perspective of levels of phenomenal nature, gross is a limitation of subtle, and subtle is a limitation of the unified field. With respect to the entire cosmos, the big bang thus could be considered not an *explosion* but an *implosion* or *condensation*—because everything resulting from the big bang remains *inside* the unified field" (7, original emphasis). Berenger remains the only character who plumbs the depths of the unified field of consciousness beyond essence and existence, ideology and materialism—or the collective life and power-mongering of the rhino fascists. In conforming to fascism, the rationalists have all fallen for a rhino's existence, even though in their pre-metamorphosed state, like Jean in his hypocrisy toward Berenger, they have already adopted the rhino's essence in what Botard in Act Two refers to as "[a]n example of collective psychosis" (54).

Love for humanity, moreover, does not comprise an essence in the existential sense of having a conceptual significance. Berenger's experience of selfless love, being a nonpluralistic state of interconnectedness that everyone would experience in the same way, constitutes a state beyond finite meanings and interpretations. As Jonathan Shear says, "the experience of pure unboundedness is phenomenologically unique. This is because two experiences of qualityless unboundedness cannot be phenomenologically different, since there is nothing in either to distinguish it from the other" (136). He goes on to say that, given the overall correlation between accounts of a void of conceptions experienced through a phenomenon such as selfless love, "it appears reasonable, in the face of any reference to differentiating content, to think that the unbounded components of the various experiences are also the same, even where ... such components are not explicitly identified as qualityless" (137). Berenger's role in *Rhinoceros* serves to take the audience beyond the realm of finite self-identity to a more subtle underlying human identity devoid of ego. According to "logical fiction" theories, the notion of "I" often works as a linguistic fiction. As Shear says,

[s]imply put, the fact that verbs such as "think" require a grammatical subject naturally suggests that there is some "I" (in the first person case) doing the thinking. However, it is argued, it may well be that this "I" is merely a "schematic convenience," required by ordinary grammar but not representing any real thing. For example, when we say "It is raining," we neither need nor want to postulate any separate "It" doing the raining. Similarly, unless we have reason to think otherwise, it is quite possible that the "I" (in "I think," etc.) is also superfluous, and that statements such as "Thoughts are occurring" may reflect facts of mind more accurately than those using the term "I". Thus, if despite careful introspection we cannot locate anything that could properly correspond to the term "I," we should recognize that this "I" is nothing but a logical "placeholder" (a mere "schematic convenience") and not be misled into improperly inferring the existence of any real thing corresponding to it. (108)

Berenger's doubts about his existence, about the world being anything but a dream, and about the logical arguments of becoming a rhino all suggest that he has transcended the conceptual dimension of the finite "I" and taken his stand on the basis of the subtlest

nonlocal level of human identity. Human in this sense refers to the phenomenologically unbounded state of nonpluralistic being. Throughout *Rhinoceros*, Ionesco dramatizes Berenger's resistance to the self-interest of the part in favor of the selfless whole.

Evidence of Berenger's penchant for wholeness emerges frequently in his non-logical remarks. In conversation with Jean, he says, "Solitude seems to oppress me. And so does the company of other people," to which Jean replies, "You contradict yourself. What oppresses you—solitude, or the company of others? You consider yourself a thinker, yet you're devoid of logic" (25). In going beyond the logic of non-contradiction and either/or, Berenger assimilates to the wholeness of both/and. To wonder if he exists implies that he both does and does not exist: his finite socially constructed self is a dream, while his infinite better Self as pure consciousness, even though devoid of qualities, exists as the ultimate real. Most Western philosophers, particularly constructivists like Steven Katz (1978) and others, argue that consciousness always has an intentional object, and that even mystical experience is constructed by language and culture. As Robert Forman argues in *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness*, however, mystical or sacred experiences "don't result from a process of building or constructing mystical experiences ... but rather from an *un*-constructing of language and belief ... from something like a *releasing* of experience from language" (99, original emphasis). By language he implies what the *Rig-Veda* and Indian grammarians such as Bhartrhari call the lower levels of language that involve space, time and the duality of subject and object. As Bhartrhari notes, language consists of four levels corresponding to different levels of consciousness, ranging from the spoken word in ordinary waking consciousness to the subtlest form of thought in pure consciousness (Coward 1976). As we move from the ordinary waking state toward pure consciousness (*turiya*), the unity of sound and meaning, name and form increases. Of the four levels of language, the first two are *vaikhari* and *madhyama*, which belong to the ordinary waking state and in Saussurean terms correspond to the general field of *parole* and *langue*, which consist of a temporal/spatial gap between sound and meaning. The two higher levels of language are *pashyanti* and *para*, which can only be experienced through non-intentional pure consciousness. They are transverbal in the sense of being without a temporal sequence between sound and meaning. In *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*, Harold Coward notes that the main difference between the two higher levels is that *pashyanti* consists of an impulse toward expression because it lies at the juncture between Brahman and maya (illusion or expressed form), while *para*, which has no impulse toward expression, lies within Brahman itself (90). Both of these levels, however, are conveyed in theatre through the power of suggestion.

The notion of intentionality in ordinary waking consciousness from which Berenger begins entails a subject being conscious of an object, event or other qualia. William James classifies this into two kinds of knowledge: "knowledge-about," which we gain by thinking about something; and "knowledge-by-acquaintance," which we gain through direct sensory experience (Barnard 123-34; Forman 1999, 109-27). Forman refers to the pure consciousness event suggested by Berenger's experience as a non-intentional experience or "knowledge-by-identity," in which there is no subject/object duality; "the subject knows something by virtue of being it. ... It is a reflexive or self-referential form of knowing. I *know* my consciousness and I know that I am and have been conscious simply because I *am* it" (1999, 118, original emphasis).

As a truly direct or immediate form of knowledge, non-intentional pure consciousness is devoid of the dualism of the subject-perceiving-object and subject-thinking-thought (Forman 1999, 125). When Berenger transcends his socially constructed identity by doubting its existence, he intuits a nonlocal underlying real Self through knowledge-by-identity, and in the process induces a move toward the same experience in the spectator.

Berenger's reliance on alcohol, although detrimental to his health, is a form of escape that serves as a trope for his metamorphosis from a finite socially induced identity based on knowledge-about and knowledge-by-acquaintance to a knowledge-by-identity of the big Self liberated from the ennui of a deadening routine. This knowledge-by-identity, as a field of all possibilities, is intimated by Botard who in Act Two says Berenger has "got such a vivid imagination! Anything's possible with him!" (53). Jean and the other rationalists also try to escape their oppressive jobs through their metamorphosis into rhinos, but however powerful their new identities may appear on a physical dimension, Berenger alone becomes a true super-man by establishing his identity on a selfless love for his fellow humans. Although the rhinos become more beautiful as the play progresses while humans become uglier, their beauty derives only from brute physical strength, but as we know from modern physics, "*matter doesn't have a material basis*. [...] the paradigmatic belief in materialism—a core feature of much of modern scientific history—is untenable at more fundamental levels of nature" (Boyer 3, original emphasis). By the end of the play, Berenger demonstrates that true strength and beauty depend not on the material but rather on the immaterial essence of nonpluralistic being, the basis of all love and compassion.

The Source of Resolve and Responsibility

The fact that Berenger exhibits willpower in the face of strong opposition from his friends and colleagues not only indicates that he has committed himself to a significant cause but also suggests that he acts spontaneously from a self-referral level of consciousness beyond the boundaries of conceptual meaning. Working within the theatre of the absurd, Ionesco reflects this subjective self-referral through the structural self-referral of *Rhinoceros* being aware of itself as a play. Throughout the production, for instance, the rhinoceros heads back-lit on stage produce an alienation effect among the spectators by making them conscious of the fact they're watching an atypical drama. More explicitly, Jean tries to reform Berenger by suggesting that, "Instead of squandering all your spare money on drink, isn't it better to buy a ticket for an interesting play? Do you know anything about the avant-garde theatre there's so much to talk about? Have you seen Ionesco's plays?" (30). This formal self-referral of the stage drama mirrors the self-referral of the characters themselves as they reflect upon their self-identity. While the rationalists such as Jean, the Logician and Dudard examine themselves on the ordinary level of language and thought, Berenger operates from a more subtle self-referral level that goes beyond ordinary language and interpretation. Self-referral here signifies the self knowing itself as pure consciousness through knowledge-by-identity, or as the Upanishadic text says, of knowing "That which is non-thought, [yet] which stands in the midst of thought." In the Advaitan tradition it also means that pure consciousness (Atman) is fully awake to itself, undifferentiated and self-shining, beyond space and time, "aware only of the Oneness of being" (Deutsch 48). As we shall see, Berenger's self-identity and social reactions are often trans-

conceptual, based on a self-referral connectedness with deeper levels of the Self beyond the ideologies of socially induced identity or the thinking mind.

In his book *On Drama*, Michael Goldman analyzes the Brechtian process of recognition and identification in theatre in terms of “making or doing identity” (18). Although Goldman defines identity as an aspect of mind, his model touches on my analysis of the self through its emphasis on the “most inward” part of mind (77)—or pure consciousness in Vedic psychology. Theatre, as the performance of Jean and the other rationalists demonstrate, portrays the confusions of self-identity. Berenger, on the other hand, displays a self-referral that establishes what Goldman calls “a self that in some way transcends the normal confusions of self” (18). Contrary to the popular poststructuralist view, Goldman defines “subtext”, or the “mutual permeability of actor and script”, as not reducible to text (49). An actor’s performance can always be treated semiotically,

[b]ut in drama one finds inevitably an element in excess of what can be semiotically extracted—something that is also neither irrelevant to nor ... completely independent of the text. No matter how exhaustively one tries to translate what an actor does with a script into a kind of writeable commentary on it, there will always also remain the *doing* of it—the bodily life of the actor moving into the world, at a specific moment in time, to set in motion these words, these gestures, these writeable ideas, this other identity. And, if the doing were itself to be reduced to a text, there would still remain the doing of the doing. The actor enters the text. (Goldman 50, original emphasis)

Berenger performs the script self-reflexively in excess of the text, while through him the spectator receives a taste of non-intentional consciousness in excess of the play’s constructed identities. If the actor’s physical entry into the text as subtext exceeds what can be extracted semiotically, then his entry as self-reflexive consciousness must exceed it to an even greater extent.

Not only does Berenger’s entry into the text, moreover, exceed what can be extracted semiotically; the rationalists also exceed the text through their metamorphosis into rhinos. Although operating on a physical level, both the back-lit heads of the rhinos on stage and the actual transformation of the characters into rhinos exceed what the text can semiotically extract, just as Berenger’s self-referral exceeds it by pointing toward the nonlocal level of the unified field of consciousness underlying material existence. This self-referentiality of the text, by highlighting the absence of a physical referent, causes the audience to experience a corresponding self-referral on the level of consciousness. This self-referral has the effect of swinging the spectator’s attention from the concrete to the abstract, from referentiality to self-referral; that is, the spectator’s vision moves from looking *at* the concrete dimensions of the stage drama toward looking *into* its abstract dimensions of a more subtle nonlocal level of reality behind the surface. This distinction between looking *at* stage drama as opposed to looking *into* its structural features corresponds to Colin McGinn’s theory developed in *The Power of Movies* of looking *into* rather than *at* the images projected on a screen. McGinn argues that unlike cinema, theatre requires no more looking *into* than do people sitting in a room, except in terms of looking *into* the actor’s eyes. Watching a film entails seeing an object embedded as a referent in the image, so that in seeing the image

we actually look through it to the embedded object. Unlike the actors in a stage drama, the images in movies are transparent insofar that they invite us to look *into* them and not *at* them as in the case of actors on a stage. McGinn's argument holds for theatre in terms of physical sight, perhaps, but not necessarily in terms of the mind's eye, which focuses more on what is absent than what is present. Through the experience of self-referral, theatre can induce the spectator to look not merely *at* the stage drama but also *into* it, that is, *through* the actors on stage to an abstract nonlocal level of experience evoked through knowledge-by-identity. Ionesco employs this self-referral strategy of looking *into* rather than *at* because Berenger's experience of an underlying nonlocal truth, although describable as a commitment to a significant cause, is essentially unsayable. It belongs to a trans-conceptual level of knowledge that can be shared intersubjectively only by being it, not through ordinary language and interpretation.

In Jacques Derrida's deconstructive definition, the unsayable (as well as the language used to convey it) has clear affinities with the Brahman-Atman of Advaita Vedanta. Shear (1990), Forman (1998), Deikman (1996) and others have explained the Advaitan definition of consciousness and its derivative in perennial psychology in terms of higher states of consciousness. As Charles Alexander notes, Vedic psychology proposes "an architecture of increasingly abstract, functionally integrated faculties or levels of mind" (290). Advaita and Samkhya-Yoga, moreover, distinguish between mind and consciousness. The term "mind," as in the case of the Logician's reasoning or Berenger's humanitarian cause, derives from the latter of the two following uses in Vedic psychology: "It [mind] refers to the overall multilevel functioning of consciousness as well as to the specific level of thinking [*buddhi*] (apprehending and comparing) within that overall structure" (Alexander 291). The levels of the overall functioning of mind in Vedic psychology extend from the senses, desire, mind, intellect, feelings, and ego, to pure transcendental consciousness, or self as internal observer as suggested by Berenger's self-referral experience. Pure consciousness (*turiya*), which is physiologically distinct from the three ordinary states of waking, sleeping, and dreaming, is immanent within yet transcendent to the individual ego and thinking mind. During their arguments in Act One, Jean implies that Berenger transcends the logical boundaries of the mind:

Jean: If you think you're being witty, you're very much mistaken! You're just being a bore with ... with your stupid paradoxes. You're incapable of talking seriously! [...]

Berenger: You really can be obstinate, sometimes.

Jean: And now you're calling me a mule into the bargain.

Berenger: It would never have entered my mind.

Jean: You have no mind!

Berenger: All the more reason why it would never enter it.

Jean: There are certain things which enter the minds even of people without one.
(21-22)

This accusation suggests that Berenger indeed responds to the world from a level deeper than the thinking mind, the faculty through which the rationalist are led to give up their humanity and metamorphose into rhinos. Thus, as mentioned earlier in terms of the existentialist notion that existence (body) precedes essence (mind), Berenger exceeds

both through a taste of the nonlocal, transrational self. What enters Berenger's mind enters from a more subtle level of consciousness within, not from the senses through which the rationalists are mesmerized into emulating the rhinos' brute strength.

Like the subtext of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, then, the aim in Advaita Vedanta is to establish the oneness of reality and to lead us to a realization of it (Deutsch 47). This realization comes through the "experience" of consciousness as qualityless Being or Atman (*turiya*). As Shear notes, such an experience corresponds to what Plato intends by his fourth level, the "Forms," as reached through the "dialectic," a faculty which is "radically different from thinking and reasoning as we find them in mathematics and science" (14). Arguably, this expansion of the mind toward an experience beyond duality is not unlike the way a deconstructive reader moves toward the unsayable in literature, or the way Berenger and the spectator undergo the rites of passage in the transformation of identity. Given that by definition the mind consists of thoughts, in dispensing with the thoughts that obsess the rationalists, Berenger moves toward attenuating thought and thereby in stages emptying the mind to produce a taste of consciousness in its pure form. In Sanskrit Poetics, the spectator's experience of this taste is known as *rasa* or aesthetic rapture.

Riding on the Back of Rhinos

The notion of suggestion (*dhvani*) in Sanskrit Poetics operates in connection with aesthetic rapture (*rasa*). The theory of *rasa* is comparable to the notion of defamiliarization in Russian formalism and to the alienation effect in Bertolt Brecht, which Tony Bennett describes as a way "to dislocate our habitual perception of the real world so as to make it the object of renewed attentiveness" (20). By remaining detached from any specific emotion through aesthetic rapture, a theatre audience will appreciate the whole range of possible responses to a play without being overshadowed by any one in particular. As such, the taste of *rasa* involves an idealized flavor and not a specific transitory state of mind. It invokes the emotional states latent within the mind through direct intuition and thus provides an experience of the subtler, more unified levels of the mind itself. In terms of the connection between consciousness and language, *rasa* moves awareness from the temporal to the unified levels of language, from *vaikhari* and *madhyama* toward *pashyanti* and *para*. As aesthetic experience, *rasa* culminates in a spiritual joy (*santa*) described by K. Krishnamoorthy as "wild tranquility" or "passionless passion" (26). *Rasa* allows consciousness to experience the unbounded bliss inherent within itself, those levels of awareness associated with *pashyanti* and *para*. As S. K. De says, "an ordinary emotion (*bhava*) may be pleasurable or painful; but a poetic sentiment (*rasa*), transcending the limitations of the personal attitude, is lifted above such pain and pleasure into pure joy, the essence of which is its relish itself" (13). As described in Indian literary theory, this experience is the nearest realization through theatre and the other arts of the Absolute or *moksa* (liberation). As Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe notes, "The spiritual aspect of the meaning of *rasa* is emphasized in Shankara's commentary of the Upanishadic use of the term: '*Rasa* is here used to mean such bliss as is innate in oneself and manifests itself [...] even in the absence of external aids to happiness'" (Meyer-Dinkgräfe 95; Rhagavan). In *Rhinoceros*, Berenger moves the audience from specific thoughts and emotions associated with conformity to a collective psychosis toward a release from specific

emotional attachments in the self-referral experience of *rasa*. We see this happening in his arguments with Jean, Dudard and Daisy as he tries to prevent them from changing into rhinos under the false pretext of enhancing their power and beauty.

Aesthetic rapture as argued here can be induced in a manner unrelated to the notion of the sublime understood as a quality of conscious content. Ultimately *rasa* emerges from the qualityless gap between thoughts as the awareness transcends mental content. For instance, after the second rhino kills the Housewife's cat in Act One, Jean and Berenger argue over whether it had one horn or two, with other characters interjecting their own observations between their insults. Jean claims that the first one was an Asiatic rhino with two horns while the second was an African rhino with only one horn. Berenger replies, "You're talking nonsense ... How could you possibly tell about the horns? The animal flashed past at such speed, we hardly even saw it ..." (36). Berenger later regrets his enraged verbal assault, which he suspects may have pushed Jean over into becoming a rhino himself. For spectators, however, his quarrel has the opposite effect of directing them toward the essential nature of humanity through *rasa* as a taste of the void of conceptions.

Jean: I don't have to grope my way through a fog. I can calculate quickly, my mind is clear! [...]

Berenger: But it had its head down. [...]

Jean: Precisely, one could see all the better. [. . .]

Berenger: Utter nonsense. [...]

Jean: What me? You dare to accuse me of talking nonsense? [...]

Berenger: Yes, absolute, blithering nonsense! [...]

Jean: I've never talked nonsense in my life! [...]

Berenger: You're just a pretentious show-off—(*Raising his voice.*) a pedant! [...]. (37-38)

As they continue arguing, Jean says that if anyone has two horns it's Berenger, who he calls an "Asiatic Mongol!" Berenger replies: "I've got no horns. And never will have," to which Jean retorts, "Oh yes, you have!" (38). What this dispute foreshadows and confirms in retrospect is that Jean is indeed full of nonsense and that Berenger is the only one who will remain hornless. In addition, this argument like all the arguments of the play serves to shift the spectator's awareness from the level of thought toward the void of conceptions in the manner of a Zen koan. As Berenger and Jean argue about whether a rhino has one horn or two, the audience would no doubt find this question absurd in light of the more critical issue of where the rhinos came from in the first place, what causes them to multiply in a small provincial French town, and how many more of them might appear to the risk of not only pet cats but the entire population. Spectators may feel superior to the characters who engage in such an absurd argument, but they would also be hard-pressed to answer these questions for themselves. The difficulty of solving an absurd paradox, one that becomes even more absurd as the characters begin changing into rhinos, would preclude not only a logical solution but also the possibility of the audience piecing together a meaningful life based on the intellect absorbed in the finite material values of daily life as opposed to the nonlocal experience of pure awareness. Boyer, as mentioned earlier, says that "Brain and mind are no longer just in the head, because brains, minds, and all material objects are no longer just localized

physical matter, but rather are also more abstract but real nonlocal processes in a subtler underlying field of existence" (4). Ionesco's play through the device of *rasa* allows the audience to swing from the thinking (apprehending and comparing) level of mind to a more subtle underlying field of existence where conventional logic no longer obtains. In other words, the audience experiences aesthetic rapture (*rasa*) not through the sublime as a qualitative conscious content of the mind, but rather through a process that transports them beyond the mind toward a void in thought. This void constitutes the source of Berenger's intuition of the moral superiority of retaining his humanity in the face of pressure to conform to a collective psychosis.

In Act Two we first learn that humans are metamorphosing into rhinos when the wife of one of Berenger's colleague, Mrs. Boeuf, arrives at the office to announce that her husband is ill. She tells her husband's office mates, including Berenger, that she was chased all the way to the office by a rhinoceros. Suddenly she recognizes the rhino as her husband: "It's my husband. Oh Boeuf, my poor Boeuf, what's happened to you?" When questioned by Daisy, Mrs. Boeuf says, "I recognize him, I recognize him!" (61). She exclaims that "He's calling me," and instead of abandoning him she jumps from the window landing to join him and by implication become a rhino herself. Ionesco combines absurdity with humor when he has Papillon, their boss, say, "Well! That's the last straw. This time he's fired for good!" (61). Later in Act Two, scene two, Berenger visits Jean, who is ill at home with a headache, and apologizes for their quarrel, explaining that "in our different ways we were both right" (71). To his amazement, Berenger finds Jean undergoing a distinct transformation, with his breathing becoming boorishly heavy, a bump growing on his forehead and his skin turning green. Obviously turning into a rhino, Jean accuses Berenger of "scrutinizing me as if I were some strange animal," and then begins to distance himself from his friend psychologically; "There's no such thing as friendship. I don't believe in your friendship" (74-5). When Berenger comments on Jean's "misanthropic mood," Jean displays a change of attitude that indicates a transformation on the level of body that reflects a pre-existing state of mind: "It's not that I hate people. I'm just indifferent to them—or rather, they disgust me; and they'd better keep out of my way, or I'll run them down" (75-6). The play suggests that no matter how morally weak and disgusting the human race, how boring and empty the life of the bourgeois working world, and how susceptible the human race is to conforming to collective psychosis, when humans transform into rhinos they will take all these negative attributes and situations with them.

In defending Boeuf's transformation into a rhino against Berenger's feeling that it won't improve his life or enhance his pleasure, Jean says, "You always see the black side of everything. [...] I tell you it's not as bad as all that. After all, rhinoceroses are living creatures the same as us; they've got as much right to life as we have!" (78-9). Berenger goes back to the innate sense that "we have our own moral standards which I consider incompatible with the standards of these animals" (79). Although in one sense Jean is right in wanting to replace morality with nature, his interpretation of nature, which does not extend beyond the ordinary levels of language and conceptuality, consists of no more than extending morality from mental to physical laws, which as we have seen belong to the same category. As Berenger puts it, Jean goes for "the law of the jungle" (79). Berenger observes that unlike animals, human civilization has evolved a philosophy of life, but Jean rejects the value of this idea: "Humanism is all washed up!

You're a ridiculous old sentimentalist" (80). Again, on a purely conceptual level Jean has a point, but the alternative provided by a new philosophy based on a different set of laws associated with rhinocerotis proves ineffectual in lifting humanity out of the jungle, whether of the natural or concrete variety.

In terms of aesthetic response to this dramatic turn of events, the audience will find itself in a dilemma. Ionesco suggests that any material change in life, which applies to both aspects of the formula "existence precedes essence," would only leave humans in the same benighted condition. Changing existence on a physical level does not differ from changing essence on a psychological level in the sense that both mind and body constitute a physical element as opposed to consciousness, which comprises the only nonphysical, nonlocal underlying dimension of the human condition. Through *rasa*, Ionesco's play alters the level of consciousness of the audience through the change undergone by Berenger, the only character who transcends the physical mind/body component of life through a transformation based on knowledge-by-identity. As mentioned earlier, Samkhya-Yoga (the third system of Indian philosophy), states "there are two irreducible, innate, and independent realities in our universe of experience: 1. consciousness itself (*purusha*); 2. primordial materiality (*prakrti*)," which includes the thinking mind (Pflueger 48). Advaita Vedanta and Samkhya-Yoga elaborate on this distinction between mind and consciousness, with the mind including the intellect, emotions, and all the qualities (*qualia*) of phenomenal experience: perceptions, memories, sensations, moods, etc. In contrast, consciousness (*purusha*) is distinct from primordial materiality (*prakrti*) with its twenty-three components, including mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*, *mahat*), and ego (*ahamkara*) (Pflueger 48). Intellect, mind, and ego along with thought, feeling and perception like those adhered to by the rhino/rationalists comprise different forms of nonconscious matter, all of which make up the *content* of witnessing consciousness (*purusha*). This tradition underlies the model for theatrical experience presented in *The Natyashastra*. The mind/consciousness distinction, in which both mind and body are unequivocally material, differs as mentioned earlier from the garden variety of mind/body dualism in Western thought (Pflueger 49). The material content of experience related to the intellect, mind, and ego comprises only part of experience, which is made whole by the element of consciousness itself. Ionesco's theatrical devices—the absurdity, humor, dis-identification, and unpredicatability—serve to heighten the sense of a distinction between mind and consciousness, if only subliminally. Spectators are encouraged to leapfrog into a trans-conceptual space after language has run its course, to witness the mind reflexively as it plays with logical conundrums. We find the sacredness of Ionesco's theater, then, in its pointing away from the agitated mind toward the joys of unbounded consciousness.

Humanity's Last Stand

In Act Three, Berenger has a similar confrontation with Dudard, who in the end also decides to metamorphose into a rhino. Berenger calls this metamorphosis a nervous disease that one can avoid, but Dudard tells him he's overreacting, over-nervous and has no sense of humor. He also repeats Jean's allegation that he can see only the dark side of things, accuses him of playing Don Quixote and tries to persuade him to be more

detached. But Berenger, who says he “can’t be indifferent” (92), is not attached in the conventional sense that derives from intellectual self reflection. Having had a taste of pure consciousness through knowledge-by-identity, as the play suggests, he unlike the other characters can operate from a level beyond the division of mind, body and consciousness. In this state of unity, as Meyer-Dinkgräfe says, “self-reflection is no longer needed and will automatically subside. Mind and body are functioning together as a unit, without impediment; energies can flow freely” (89). Never having studied, Berenger catches himself using the wrong word when he says, “I feel it instinctively—no, that’s not what I mean, it’s the rhinoceros which has instinct—I feel it intuitively, yes, that’s the word, intuitive” (99). He knows that the rationalists can run circles around him, but on the basis of his intuition he still holds his ground against becoming a rhino.

The main field of play in Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, then, is not confined to the realm of ideas, but rather leads the audience beyond conceptuality toward a taste of the gap between socially constructed identities. These identities consist of thoughts that hold us to the world of wish fulfilment and material desires. Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* induces in the audience an aesthetic experience (*rasa*) through devices such as absurdity, the dream-like nature of reality, illogical argumentation and duplicitous wrangling between friends that swing the awareness between ordinary day-to-day psychological consciousness, and a more highly developed spiritual consciousness. On the one hand we have the rationalists who operate out of ordinary self-interested cravings, and on the other hand Berenger who exhibits an increased ethical discernment based on a greater purity of consciousness. Through *rasa*, the audience shares in Berenger’s unconditional love, egolessness, purity of compassion and even in the taste of an experience beyond a knowledge-by-acquaintance of socially induced identities.

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Özet

Eugène Ionesco'nun *Rhinoceros* Adlı Eseri: Muhalefet Konformizme Karşı

Eugène Ionesco'nun *Rhinoceros* adlı eserinde, yalnızca Berenger zorla insanlığından vazgeçirilmeyi ve diğer bütün karakterler gibi gergedan olmayı kabul etmeyip gergedanlara direnmeyi başarır. Diğer karakterlerin canavarlara dönüşmesine sebep olan aşırı bağımlılık, açgözlülük ve ölçsüzlükten kaçınabilecek öz yeterliliğe sadece Berenger sahiptir. Oyunda muhalefetin absürlüğü kadar konformizmin absürlülüğünün de ortaya konulmasına rağmen, Berenger daha az duyarlı insanların mutlu kalabalığına katılmayarak bireyci karakterini koruyabilecek güce sahiptir.

Diğerlerinin menfaatleri için verdiği bencil olmayan mücadelesinde görüldüğü gibi, Berenger kültürel yapılandırmaların ötesindeki kavramları hükümsüz kılar ve bu yolla izleyici, ikililiğin ötesinde bir birlik durumu olduğunu fark eder. Berenger ve izleyicilerin birleşmiş ve benötesi benliğin gerçek özgürlüğüne kavuşmaları, madde ve eylemin sınırlı alanı ve bunun altında yatan bilincin sınırsız alanı arasındaki bağ hissinden doğar.

Anahtar Sözcükler: saf bilinç (*turiya*), benötesi benlik, estetik coşku (*rasa*), dil düzeyi (*pashyanti, para*), kimlik ile edinilen bilgi, metamorfoz

**An Act of Union?:
Conflicting Depictions of Scotland and England in Ali Smith's *Like***

Carla Rodríguez González

Abstract: Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha has defined “home” as a form of living that is “[...] more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism (140). Such binary representation has traditionally affected the methods employed in England and Scotland to portray difference within the British State. *Like* is one of Ali Smith’s most “Scottish” texts, a novel that was published in 1997, the same year that the Devolution of Scotland’s Parliament was generally approved in the referendum that modified the Act of Union of 1707. The aim of this paper is to analyse its contribution to wider debates on the hybridisation of cultural traditions, using as a frame of reference the cultural context of Scotland at the end of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Contemporary Scottish literature, Ali Smith, national identity, gender.

Scottish culture has witnessed the appearance of an abundance of texts written by women in the last decades. Contrary to the highly masculinised Scottish Literary Renaissance of the interwar period (Carter 1995), Jackie Kay, Janice Galloway, or A. L. Kennedy have become engaged in the negotiation of their national identity and have provided Scottish literature with new perspectives that had only been explored with some consistency by Liz Lochhead in previous years. Likewise, during the 1990’s, Scottish identity began to be analysed from postmodern and postcolonial perspectives (Schoene 1995, 1998; Murray and Riach 1995), in order to incorporate its idiosyncrasy to the international debates on the crisis of the modern state (Anderson 1983; Bhabha 1994). Even nowadays such debates enjoy mixed reception due to the historical relations of mutual dependence between Scotland and England, as well as the participation of Scottish subjects in the expansion of the British Empire, but it seems undeniable that these reflections have filtered in the works of many Scottish artists. At the same time, Scottish culture was studied as an example of the processes that are common to all nationalist projects, where internal differences tend to be obliterated in order to construct a homogeneous collective identity, as declared by Berthold Schoene: “there can be no doubt that Scotland itself is informed by deeply ingrained postcolonial tensions that are often conveniently played down in order not to unsettle a sense of wholesome national unity” (1998, 58).

In this context, Ali Smith’s first novel, *Like*, followed her nomination for the Saltire Award with the collection *Free Love and Other Stories* (1995), which brought her immediate recognition and inaugurated a literary career that now includes nominations for the Booker and the Orange Prizes (*Hotel World* (2001) and *The Accidental* (2005)). *Like* is her most “Scottish” novel and was published in 1997, the same year that the Devolution of Scotland’s Parliament was generally approved in the

referendum that modified the Act of Union of 1707. It offers an interesting perspective on the historical relations of representation between Scotland and England through a story of love and friendship between two women of different backgrounds from their childhood years into early adulthood. In fact, as this paper aims to analyse, it could be argued that their conflicts mirror the stereotypical construction of otherness within Britain, as well as the damaging consequences of such a split. The structure of the novel, being divided into two independent, yet simultaneously complementary parts concerning each of the protagonists, reinforces this representation, but it also reflects on the construction of “home” as a strategy of survival when the cultural references at hand lose their meaning for the subject who is constructing its identity. Recent theoretical works have considered the significance of this concept in the age of global exchanges, many of them elaborating on Homi Bhabha’s description of its internal contradictions as:

a form of living that is more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’; more connotative than ‘country’; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less homogeneous than hegemony; less centred than the citizen; more collective than ‘the subject’; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism. (140)

Indeed, *Like* presents both protagonists deciding to abandon their homelands in a moment of crisis, leaving in search of an opportunity to construct a new definition for their experience, and thus rejecting the space where their identities had been developed according to norms they could not recognise. Therefore, Ash leaves the strict morality and the intolerance of her northern town behind in search of an educated and liberal life in southern England, whereas Amy escapes her bourgeois environment, where she has struggled for an academic career, so as to enjoy anonymity and the tranquillity of a small Scottish village by the sea. Such radical changes allow them to create a new web of identifications and transcend the local and class restrictions of their former lives. These unexpected reactions serve to reveal the mechanisms employed in the construction of identities when there is an intentional subversion of the roles transmitted from one generation to another. In such processes, as Stuart Hall has stated, the power of circumstantial identification replaces the restrictions of normative identity:

Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us ... They are the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of the discourse. ... Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always ‘knowing’ ... that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a ‘lack’, across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate –identical– to the subject processes which are invested in them. (5-6)

Consequently the novel acquires a meaning in the insistent repetition of the title word when the different voices in the text find it hard to articulate their identity; their

experience cannot be described according to any established system of representation, and therefore they are forced to make innumerable comparisons as the story progresses. There is an overall sense of improvisation in the lives of its characters and their comparisons inevitably evidence an observation of normative reality from an external perspective. Yet at the same time, *Like* implicitly bears the mark of willingness, of a desire to stand up for the right to defend an alternative way of life and escape the constraints of the acceptable, even in the naive voice of Amy's daughter and her abuse of the colloquialism "like" throughout the first part of the book.

Although it is not until the second part that the story makes sense for the reader, Amy's section is essential as it provides the open conclusion for the text. It shows her and her daughter Kate living on the margins of a very traditional Scottish village, where they are observed by the community: "They live on a caravan site. There's no father anywhere in the equation. They're so English-sounding" (13), although their presence is tolerated on the basis that they are not taking part in the new colonisation of the land started in the 1970's by some English down-shifters: "To be fair they're not English like the troupe with the goats that moved into the Paterson's farm are English, and do the juggling and the massage and talk to their vegetables" (13). In fact, as her boss Angus remarks, "some English people can be nice, when you get to know them individually" (32). The destruction of the stereotype of confrontation between both identities is caused by the continuous exposition to the other, that is, to the unquestionable piece of evidence that difference can only be constructed upon coincidence.

Having rejected her background and cultural inheritance, Amy has developed a psychological barrier to her past knowledge of the world that has made her lose the capacity to read. Her rejection to participate in the social had strengthened the bond with her child in her early years, and, in fact, the "last written words to mean anything" (53) had been Kate's name and surname on the card around her ankle when she was born. Amy has abandoned the realm of the symbolic she had mastered as a promising young literature lecturer, and has replaced it with an experiential approach to life after a symbolic death provoked by the shock associated with the furious act of revenge taken by Ash when she set her friend's apartment on fire. With this new birth, this sort of emotional resurrection, Amy has had to rise from the ashes of her previous self immersed in silence, making the people in the village imagine stories about her reason to emigrate. In the mind of Angus, her secret admirer, they are connected to the existence of a mistreating husband "with a suave English smooth-dressed smooth-talker," and with an "East-End accent, or his posh water-resistant surface of a posh restaurant voice" (33), whom he is ready to fight away in case he comes looking for Amy. Angus is very much a caricature of the "belligerent, proud, strong, skilled, susceptible, yet resilient and elusive" Scotsman that Alan Riach has identified in Scottish literature (37), and according to the stereotype he represents, he has pictured this invented Englishman as the embodiment of the evils stereotypically associated with the English in the discourse of simplistic nationalism. He projects his own romantic masculine fantasies on the fight between two modern warriors over the love of a defenceless woman, a reaction that is grounded in the traditional construction of national identities, where gender roles are determinant in their connotations of passivity or activity assigned to women and men, as Nira Yuval-Davis has pointed out (1997).

The narrator in the first part develops a changing voice that oscillates between the optimism and energy of the girl and the muteness of the mother. Both their observations are focused through its omniscient perspective that fuses their voices in a complementary manner. However once Kate realises she has found a home in Scotland and socialises with the other children at school on a regular basis, her immense thirst for knowledge will no longer be exclusively satisfied by her mother. At this stage, Amy has to accept the inevitable transformation her daughter is about to undergo, and as a result decides to face her past bringing Kate to her parents' house in England in order to ask for some money to travel to Italy. Her decision is motivated by the projection of her own wishes on the life of her daughter, that is, it is a consequence of her eagerness to allow the girl to experience directly what she has read about in books, so that she can save the distance between life and its textual representation, a distance that Amy was unable to notice herself before her transformation. The journey across the country becomes particularly remarkable as they cross the border between England and Scotland, that space defined by Ewan Hague –very much inspired by postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha–, as:

an uncomfortable 'no-place' between the 'Welcome to Scotland' and 'Welcome to England' road signs – a gap a few metres wide that, I assume, is the space of the 'border' itself. ... This small strip of space is, of course, one of the few truly 'united' parts of the United Kingdom.' ... This 'no-place,' the border, is the place that separates 'Scotland' from 'England' –but the same strip of land also unites the two countries. ... In some circumstances this section of space called a 'border' (even though it may not look like a 'border') becomes impossible to cross, in others it slips by unnoticed. ... But the border is also a perplexing place both geographically and culturally, because as line drawn only on a map, not one drawn on the landscape, serves to separate one nation from another, and thus one set of national identities from another. Neither of the nations facing each other across a border can own it. Instead the common parlance is to speak of nations 'sharing' a border. (126)

Even if Kate could be considered a cultural hybrid, metaphorically represented by this interstice, she has a strong sense of belonging for the first time and feels Scottish in a personal way. For her, Scotland is “just about gone when they got to Edinburgh,” naively inverting what Christopher Whyte has identified as the “perpetual opposition to a metropolitan centre” (63) experienced by Scottish intellectuals coming from areas outside the central belt. Yet in her observation, the girl also highlights the artificial construction of otherness within Britain when she remarks in disappointment that she “had been looking out of the window at England as if it was still Scotland” (51). Her crossing the Borders brings to light the existence of some undetermined space equally influenced by the discourse of two opposing forces, as well as the denial of any hypothetical fusion of contraries in an area that could be perceived as a “contact zone” for centuries, if Mary Louise Pratt’s postcolonial term (1992) was adapted to this context. It has been argued that “the idea of a distinct identity for the Borders within Scotland is doubly marginalised. Subsumed first by the invisibility of Scotland within England’s Britain, and then lost within a Scotland marked out by its central belt, and signified by its Highlands and Islands” (Smith 1996, 24). However, in the novel this

hierarchy is undermined by Kate's half-English and half-Scottish charismatic personality. Being in between cultures, her *a priori* marginal position becomes central in the story as she personifies hope for a future dialogue in the country. Her newly acquired Scottishness filters in the strong accent she has developed, when she notices the connotations of her former RP for her schoolmates, who believe this register is used "when she wants to pretend she's a snob or she's very rich" (57). Cairns Craig has stated that the main sign of difference for Scots within Britain is the colour of their vowels:

It is not by our colour, of course, that we have stood to be recognised as incomplete within the British context, it is by the colour of our vowels: the rigidity of class speech in Britain, the development of Received Pronunciation as a means of class identity, is the direct response of a dominant cultural group faced by a society in which the outsiders are indistinguishable by colour. (12)

Such difference becomes evident during their visit in England. Amy's parents' house stands as a symbol of this "dominant cultural group," where she has to confront her upper-class Englishness through the objects she once used to display her identity: namely selective pieces to signify her exclusive taste, but most remarkably, her own book ironically entitled "*The Pain and the Pleasure of the Text*" (86), given the catastrophic consequences of her former incapability to see beyond the scope of the textual representation of her life. Yet if the experience turns out to be painful for Amy, Kate perceives it rather differently. It is not her vowels that become "coloured" in the conversations with her grandfather, an English professor who lives surrounded by books, but his. Indeed, Kate symbolically reverses the hierarchy between the two cultures in the pronunciation of her own name, that is, in the expression of her most evident sign of identity.

I'm Kathleen Shone, Kate says.
It's *shown*, not *shon*, the man says. You say *shown*.
We say *shon*, Kate says.
Oh, we do, do we? The man says. (88)

Scotland has become the centre of her life, the reality against which she contrasts any new experience, as evidenced in their holidays in Italy, where its landscape and the ruins of one of Europe's foundational civilisations are judged according to her own understanding of the culture of Scotland. Having met the ignorance of other non-Scottish people before, Kate feels urged to explain to her old grandfather some "truths" about her new homeland, including her understanding of the political changes that are about to happen in the near future.

Perhaps the man is a bit stupid. Perhaps he doesn't know about Scotland, perhaps he has never been. Do you know about it? She says. It has the highlands and the lowlands. It has mountains and its own songs and everything.
She explains about how it is a completely different place and for instance there is the border, which has been there since history and could make it a completely

separate island when they vote to dig it so that the sea can run in. This is going to happen soon. (92)

On their return to the northern Scottish village, the incident that connects this first part of the novel with the second one has to do with a telephone call inquiring about Dr Amy Shone. Amy's identity is discovered by a journalist who intends to write a sensationalist biography of Mrs Aisling McCarthy, the famous Scottish gay actress who has been missing for some time, and who asks for the cooperation of one of her closest friends. At this point, Amy has already re-entered the symbolic, although she has decided to carry on with her retired life, selecting what influences she is ready to accept. The appearance of the journalist, which very much resembles the disrespectful investigation made by Sophie Jones into the life of Joss Moody in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998), motivates a final crisis with which this first section climatically concludes in a ritual burning of her old diaries. Her burning down to ash the cause of the estrangement between the two friends links the scene with the only text that will be rescued: the diary left by Ash before her mysterious disappearance, which constitutes the second part of the novel.

Following a chronological structure, Ash's diary recalls her eventual reconciliation with Scottish culture after a period in England. Having left Inverness, where "everything changes, nothing changes" (197) in search of Amy, Ash returns to her town, where she becomes aware of the fact that she no longer belongs in "the decent, upright, capital of the Highlands [...]. Land of my soul and my formation, the Highlands" (158), where her sexual difference still remains a controversial issue and where national identity and politics are often reduced to simplistic interpretations, as expressed by the many questions she is asked by her old acquaintances: "When is it you go away? I can't wait to leave. Not Scotland, though. I wouldn't like to leave Scotland. Not for any money. Did you hate England? I'd hate it. All the, you know, English people. You know what I mean?" (276). Their rejection of a culture that symbolises oppression is now partially patronised by Ash, who has a more cosmopolitan understanding of her identity, although she is aware of the tensions inherent in most nationalist identifications. Such conflicts, as Ernest Gellner has stated, depend on the accumulation of details in the course of the asymmetrical dialogue between cultural groups:

the main sphere of operation and transmission of nationalist sentiment is not the ideological, but the level of ordinary, daily, personal life. People really become nationalists because they find that in their daily social intercourse, at work and at leisure, their 'ethnic' classification largely determines how they are treated, whether they encounter sympathy and respect, or contempt, derision and hostility. The root of nationalism is not ideology, but concrete daily experience. (123)

The relationship between Amy and Ash ultimately relies on some stereotypical representations of Scotland and England, that is, on the depiction of the power difference between the two nations, as well as their mutual dependence. Thus Amy becomes the embodiment of sophistication and high culture, whereas Ash represents the uncontrollable, the overemotional and the natural world of her Highland background: "Amy's voice sometimes, if a rose could speak, that's its voice, clipped, velvet, deep-

tinged red. The intonation that makes things how they are just by saying so, quite, yes, quite. I don't think I'd heard my own voice till then. Rough, coarse, unfeminine, brave and different" (235). There is a clear hierarchy between them, with Amy controlling Ash in every respect, to the extent that she has even provided her friend with a new identity in transcribing the erudite references she has found about her name: "Because in telling me my name like she did, in letting me know what it meant, my friend Amy carved her own name in me like a scar" (228). This form of emotional colonialism, which parallels the strategies of cultural colonisation described by Beveridge and Turnbull (1995) in Scotland, is indeed a most successful tool in the hands of Amy, who manages to make Ash abandon her home in an impulse. When Ash learns from her friend that "there is magic on the borders where the opposites meet, and there's bloody war" (231) she is emphasising the struggle for power they maintain throughout the book, and which will only come to a reconciliatory "Act of Union" (298) in the sexual scene Ash imagines. Moreover it is remarkable that the English town where they live is Cambridge, one of Britain's most identifiable centres of knowledge:

I was in England. And not just in England, but the epitome of England. Flags flying off turrets, the land of *Blue Peter* and the Royal Family and *Sunday Times* colour supplement advertisements for glossy Barbour's. The south east. The place of learning. [...] The money. The smart clothes. The light. The expensive shops. The bookshops. Bookshop after bookshop, a place where bookshops belonged as if naturally. As if they were a special culture grown there. (229)

However in this temple of culture, where other European or transcontinental references are easily accessed by the students, Scotland has been erased, being only known as the "favourite leisure centre" of the upper classes (237). Ash becomes a curiosity, an exotic souvenir that Amy either exhibits to her English colleagues or rejects in public as a proof of power. Yet Ash's submission to Amy's wishes contradicts her inner strength, revealed in her small acts of sabotage in the library where she works when she realises there are no Scottish titles on the shelves: "It called for a grand gesture. A glorious blaze. It called for me to play my part, be the disruptive heroic rebel of a Scot I knew I was born to be" (271).

Such obliteration is connected to the climax in this second part of the novel, that is, to the moment when Ash burns her friend's apartment down after reading her diaries and discovering she has never been recorded in them. Her absence from Amy's personal texts is interpreted as an intentional attempt at eliminating her from the record of her experience, which metaphorically applies to the marginal status of Scotland's culture within Britain. Ash's reaction is to disappear from Amy's life in order to become independent at last, free from "this blind obsession with something or someone; a decadence, a kind of adolescent luxury, the self-torture that helps you not see the real torture" (326). Her return to Inverness is marked by reconciliation, but also by the painful awareness of her difference and an urging desire to leave again, this time heading for the United States.

The bond between the two women has eventually been broken by an act of violence, and the consequences of such a split are pessimistically regarded by Ash, who at the time when she writes the last pages of her diary still does not know that Amy will follow her steps to the north. Even if it seems unlikely that the two women will befriend

again, the novel offers an optimistic end in the hybrid Anglo-Scottish presence represented by Kate, who will most likely manage to overcome the difficulties of the previous generation, being free from the oppressing influx of a social class or a normative national identity. Her capacity to decide over her own life, even at this early stage, demonstrates how there is hope for the future of a more plural Britain, so that, as Eleanor Bell has described in her analysis of Scottish identity, the relation between the two nations can “be regarded as part of the process of the overall shifting, global world, where the ‘nature’ of imagined communities are necessarily becoming more open-ended” (94), and, therefore, more dialogic.

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Özet

Birleşme Yasası mı?:

Ali Smith'in *Like* Adlı Eserinde İskoçya ve İngiltere'nin Çelişen Tasvirleri

Sömürgecilik sonrası eleştirmenlerinden Homi Bhabba "yurt" kavramını "[...] kültürel farklılıkların ve tanımlamaların söyleminde, toplumsal düşmanlığın hiyerarşik ya da kutupsal yapılandırılmasında temsil edilenden daha melez" bir yaşam şekli olarak tanımlar (140). Bu tür kutupsal temsiller İngiltere ve İskoçya'da Britanya Devleti'ndeki farklılıkların aktarılmasında kullanılan yöntemleri geleneksel olarak etkilemiştir. Ali Smith'in 1997 yılında, yani 1707 Birleşme Kanununu değiştiren İskoçya Parlamentosu'nun İntikali'nin referandum ile onaylandığı yılda yayınlanan *Like* adlı eseri onun en 'İskoç' yapıtlarındandır. Bu makalenin amacı, yirminci yüzyılın sonunda İskoçya'daki kültürel ortamı temel alarak, eserin kültürel geleneklerin melezleştirilmesi ilgili daha kapsamlı tartışmalara yaptığı katkıyı ele almaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Çağdaş İskoç Edebiyatı, Ali Smith, ulusal kimlik, toplumsal cinsiyet rolü

Adoption and Reconstitution of Lives: Jackie Kay's "The Adoption Papers"

Şebnem Toplu

Abstract: Regarding the controversial debates on identity, this article focuses on Jackie Kay's poem "The Adoption Papers" (1991). Similar to Kay's own life, "The Adoption Papers" is about a black baby's adoption by white Scottish parents. In her poem, Kay projects the emotions of a mother in giving her baby for adoption, the adoptive mother's feelings and questioning motherhood in conjunction with the adopted daughter's complex emotions. What Kay articulates through adoption is also the women's painful position in society and the construction of a space for themselves as marginal subjects within this triad, questioning the womanhood and motherhood dichotomy, along with the multicultural self-representation of the black daughter. Thereby, using an interdisciplinary approach, this essay aims to interrogate the intricate formation of hybridity and fluidity of the identity from racial, gender and autobiographical points of view that are reflected through three different voices of the white birth mother, the white adoptive mother and the black adopted daughter.

Key Words: adoption, identity, womanhood, motherhood, hybridity, autobiography

*Probably the most difficult time for me regarding adoption was when I got married and had my own children. When my first child was born I looked at her and realized there was no way in the world that I could ever be apart from her. I think this was the worst time for me. It brought up a lot of feelings about having been "given away". Intellectually, I knew there was little choice for my mother—the stigma and all about illegitimacy during those times. But emotionally, it was difficult to take ... When I got older and my children were grown, they sometimes asked about my adoption. They seemed to be more interested than I was about my background—of course, it was their biological background too.
(Brodzinsky, Schechter, and Henig 192)*

What makes people who they are becomes a very complex question taking on different connotations in patterns of global interconnectedness. Regarding the controversial debates to underpin 'identity', Paul du Gay maintains that in recent years, questions of 'identity' have attained a remarkable centrality within the human and social sciences and although the term 'identity' takes on different associations depending on

the context within which it is deployed, 'identity' has achieved its contemporary centrality both theoretically and substantively because that to which it refers is regarded in some sense as being more fragile and incomplete and thus "more amenable to reconstitution than was previously thought possible" (1-2). Among the very particular contentions, one consistent theme is the "powerful challenge it offers to the metaphysics associated with the concept of the person as an individual subject"; thus, the individual is conceptualized as the author of its own acts and centered in a "unitary and reflexive consciousness" (du Gay 2). By this means, the question of subjectivity and its relation to the unconscious have been developed within the discourses of "psychoanalytically inflected" cultural studies and feminism (du Gay 2).

In her poem "The Adoption Papers" (1991)¹, Jackie Kay focuses on a more complicated situation than the mainstream debates on the fluidity of identity; she projects the emotions of a mother in giving her baby for adoption and the destructive effect of its ramification, the adoptive mother's feelings and questioning motherhood in conjunction with the adopted daughter's complex emotions. Consequently, through the conception of adoption, Kay discloses interrogating identities and the reconstitution of selves through time. According to the psychologists, adoption is a "unique and complex way to build a family that can present lifelong developmental and psychological challenges to adopted persons, birth families, and adoptive families collectively known as the adoption triad" (Baden and Wiley 869). Furthermore, in Kay's poem the birth mother is a white Scottish woman, but the daughter is black and the adoptive parents are also white Scottish. What Kay articulates through adoption is also the women's painful position in society and the construction of a space for themselves as marginal subjects within this triad, questioning the womanhood and motherhood dichotomy, along with the multicultural self-representation of the black daughter. Thereby, using an interdisciplinary approach, this essay aims to interrogate the intricate formation of hybridity and fluidity of the identity from multifarious, racial, gender and autobiographical points of view that are reflected through three different voices of the white birth mother, the white adoptive mother and the black adopted daughter in Jackie Kay's poem "The Adoption Papers".²

As feminist critic Alison Light argues, British traditions have tended to exclude the female poet leaving her "no space or place" to speak from and that Scottish poets indiscriminately of gender have not fared well in British tradition (247 in Severin 45). Until recently, the British literary community has not acknowledged the distinctiveness of poets who write as Scotts and women; additionally, since the Scottish literary canon has also been "phallogocentric" the Scottish women writers suffered from "double

¹ Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers* is her first collection of poetry. It is divided into two sections: "The Adoption Papers" and "Severe Gale 8". This essay covers the first section "The Adoption Papers" which is divided into three parts and 10 chapters. "Severe Gale 8" also includes some poems related to the topic of "The Adoption Papers", but they are not included in this discussion for the purposes of focusing on this particular section as a uniform composition as Jackie Kay seems to have intended to structure it.

² This article is developed from my paper "Interrogating and Re-forming the Self: Jackie Kay's *The Adoption Papers*" presented at 2nd International IDEA Conference: Studies in English. Ankara: Hacettepe University, April 17-19, 2007.

exclusion” (Severin 45-6). Due to the marginality of their situation the Scottish women writers had to speak both as a Scot and a woman.

Regarding Jackie Kay, among the poets like Liz Lochhead, Valerie Gilles and Carol Ann Duffy, she is considered as one of the contemporary Scottish women poets who include the “feminine voice” in Scottish poetry (Severin 45). Poet, playwright and novelist Jackie Kay was born in 1961, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her mother was Scottish and her father Nigerian. Kay’s father was visiting Edinburgh when he met Kay’s mother and after he returned to Nigeria, the mother discovered that she was pregnant and decided to give up the child. Kay was then adopted by a white couple with a strong commitment to radical politics and brought up in Glasgow (Paddy online). As Kay grew up she identified herself as ‘lesbian’ (Paddy online), transgressing “liminal zones” (Hetherington 18). Kay’s adoption is not a unique case in the sense of a black child’s being adopted by a white couple and her private life is not the concern of this essay. However, Kay’s adoption is partially exposed in “The Adoption Papers”, in the way that it is concerned with the intricate nature of identity; a mixed race child’s adoption by white parents and the adopted child’s search for her self, projecting that complex structure from the women’s point of view. Giddens argues that autobiographical thinking is a “central element of therapy” because “developing a coherent sense of one’s life history is a prime means of escaping the thrall of the past and opening oneself out to future” (249). For the black people, though, Morrison points out that autobiography provides an instance in which a writer could be “representative” and tends to say “ ‘how I got over-- look at me—alone--let me show you how I did it’ ” (302). Additionally, from the feminist point of view autobiographical writing functions as “retrieving silenced voices of the past” (Swindells 9). All these different points of view may be regarded as authentic and true; furthermore, Kay uses her own experience as a starting ground to explore the complicated conception that identity is always coterminous with the notions of race and gender. At an interview, Kay revealed as such:

“Yes, I’m black, yes, I’m gay, but does that define everything I write? No, it doesn’t [...] I [am] interested in how fluid identity can be, how people can reinvent themselves, how gender and race are categories that we try to fix, in order perhaps to cherish our own prejudices, how so called extraordinary people can live ordinary lives” (Bold Type Interview Online).

Combining these highly intricate data Kay prefers the genre of poetry for her stance, styling it through three distinct dialogic voices: the white Scottish mother’s (Elizabeth)³, the white Scottish adoptive mother’s and the black Nigerian-Scottish daughter’s, to accommodate her unnamed marginal subjects. Moreover, Kay’s “The Adoption Papers” is divided by timeline into three parts covering the years 1961-1990: the first part denotes the traumas at birth, the second part covers the span when the unnamed protagonist is aged 6-18 and the last part wraps up the search for the birth mother when she is 19-29. These three parts are also divided into ten chapters by

³ The birth mother is mentioned as Elizabeth only once in the poem when the daughter is speaking to her grandmother on the phone (31). The daughter and the adoptive mother are not named, since the term ‘birth mother’ is conceptually more significant in the poem, I prefer to mention ‘Elizabeth’ as ‘the birth mother’ throughout the essay.

headings. Throughout the poetic narration, although the voices of the three speakers are intermingled, they are also distinguished typographically which may be illustrated as follows:

DAUGHTER: Palatino typeface,
ADOPTIVE MOTHER : **Gill typeface**,
BIRTH MOTHER **Bodoni typeface**

Apart from the voices, the styles also signify the three diverse identities in the poem. As for the genre, Kaplan states that poetry is “a privileged metalanguage in western patriarchal culture” (285), yet adds that it is increasingly written by members of oppressed groups and its appeal may have diminished in relation to other literary forms, but its status and function in high culture continues to be important (286). The intricacy of Kay’s poem discloses the appeal to high culture because Kay’s poetic narrative starts with the combination of the birth mother’s voice in contrast to the adoptive mother’s and proceeds with the mingling of the daughter’s voice without any distinction except the typefaces. Time is also fluid moving between the past and present. Considering Kay’s black identity, the style may also be regarded as dissident against the white hegemony on style.

The mother’s aspirations about life change when she realizes that she is pregnant at the early age of nineteen. She writes to the father informing him of her pregnancy, yet the reply which comes six weeks later is that he cannot leave Nigeria. The absence of the Nigerian father both in the poem and in Kay’s life forms a contrast to the situation of the hybridization of the colonized, so, it is possible to remark that Bhabha’s ‘mimicry’ in the sense of an “effective strategy of colonial power” (85) is reversed by the father’s leaving a black baby in the colonizer’s country. However, Kay chooses not to pursue the topic further in “The Adoption Papers”, so from the gender point of view she follows Cixous who argued “woman must write woman” (293).

As a result of her desertion by the Nigerian father, the mother gives birth to the baby alone, going through paradoxical feelings of both wishing to destroy the baby and praying for her survival since the baby has to stay in the hospital for four months of an obscure illness:

On the first night
I see her shuttered eyes in my dreams
I cannot pretend she’s never been
[...]

On the second night
I’ll suffocate her with a feather pillow

Bury her under a weeping willow
Or take her far out to sea

and watch her tiny eight-pound-body
sink to shells and reshape herself.

So much the better than her body
encased in glass like a museum piece [...]

I toss I did not go through these months

for you to die on me now
on the third night I lie

willing life into her
breathing air all the way down the corridor

to the glass cot [...] (*The Adoption Papers* 13)

After giving her baby for adoption, the dichotomy of remorse and alleviation are again concurrent, tearing her self apart:

May be the words lie
across my forehead
headline in thin ink
MOTHER GIVES BABY AWAY [...]

Nobody would ever guess.
I had no other choice
Anyway it's best for her, [...]

I must stop it. Put it out my mind.
There is no use going over and over.
I'm glad she's got a home to go to. [...] (17)

When I got home
I went out in the garden- [...]
and dug a hole the size of my baby
and buried the clothes I'd bought anyway.
A week later I stood at my window
and saw the ground move and swell

the promise of a crop,
 that's when she started crying.
 I gave her service then, sang
 Ye banks and braes, planted
 a bush of roses, read the Book of Job,
 cursed myself digging a pit for my baby
 sprinkling ash from the grate.
 Late that same night
 she came in by the window,
 my baby Lazarus
 and suckled at my breast. (18)

The birth mother tries to solve her dilemma by a last attempt to visit her daughter at her adopted home after five months, right after she is adopted. The adoptive mother comments that the birth mother looks like "a dead spit" of her daughter, ironically, except her being "lightening white" (19). She picks up the baby strokes her cheeks and leaves as fast as she has come, not communicating with the adoptive mother, either, never to see her child again for twenty-six years. However, the conflict in the formation of the biological mother's identity continues because when the daughter becomes nineteen years old and "legally able" (28) for the quest of her biological parents especially her birth mother, the mother dreads facing her daughter: "**At night I lie practicing my lines/ but 'sorry' never seems large enough/nor 'I can't see you, yes, I'll send a photograph.'**" (28). However, the daughter manages to find her mother in spite of very insufficient documentation. Fearing that she might be rejected the daughter calls her grandmother pretending to have worked with her daughter. Since she sounds very young for such a lie the grandmother knows that it is her. Half an hour later her aunt calls to say she will give the daughter's number and address to 'Elizabeth', adding "*I'm sure you understand*" (31). Consequently, the meeting does take place after twenty-six years. The mother confesses her denial to her daughter: "**I never imagined it [meeting her daughter] [...] It would have driven me mad imagining, /26 years is a long time.**" (33). In "The Trajectory of the Self" Giddens holds that "letting go of the past, through the various techniques of becoming free from oppressive emotional habits, generates a multiplicity of opportunities for self-development" (254). Kay does not disclose the traumatic aftermath of the meeting for the birth mother, directly voicing her in the poem; nevertheless, it is implied that the mother reconciles with her past and reconstructs her identity for a life without her daughter, since she symbolically throws away the baby cloth she has kept in her drawer for twenty six years, remarking: "**I have no more terror**" (34). Hence, she overcomes the guilt feeling for the choice she has made of womanhood instead of motherhood.

Conversely, the white adoptive mother goes through different disturbing emotions, initially by her inability to get pregnant: "**I always wanted to give birth/do**

that incredible natural thing/that women do- I nearly broke down/ when I heard we couldn't" (10). While the birth mother decides on womanhood, the adoptive mother yearns for motherhood, biological or not. On the other hand, Kay also reminds the readers that since it is the early sixties, adoption was considered as "scandalous": "telling the world your secret failure/ bringing up an alien child, / who knew what it would turn out to be" (10). After five years, the couple applies for adoption; nevertheless, it comes out to be problematic. The first agency refuses them saying they did not live "close enough" to a church, nor they were "church goers" (14); the second agency rejects the couple on the ground that they have a low income, and most other agents they apply to declare that they have a long waiting list; thereby, they are rejected for six months until the adoptive mother says, "we don't mind the colour", so: "Just like that, the waiting list was over" (14).

After they go through an assessment by the authorities, the couple has to wait for the baby to come out of the hospital for four months. The adoptive mother manages to succeed in obtaining an approval from the woman inspector, by hiding all the visible evidence of their communist inclinations at home, before she arrives. Consequently, they receive their adopted black baby daughter. By the time the child is six years old, confronting the dominant ideology and identity of motherhood, the adoptive mother reveals to her that she is not the 'real' mother:

I could hear the upset in her voice
 I says [sic] *I'm not your real mother,*
 Though Christ knows why I said that,
 If I'm not who is, but all my planned speech
 Went out the window (21)
 [...]

I always believed in the telling anyhow.
 You can't keep something like that secret
 I wanted her to think of her other mother
 out there, thinking that child I had will be
 seven today eight today all the way up to
 god knows when. I told my daughter-
 I bet your mother's never missed your birthday,
 how could she? (22)
 [...]

Now when people say 'ah but
 it's not like having your own child though is it',
 I say of course it is, what else is it?
 She's my child, I have told her stories

wept at her losses, laughed at her pleasures,
she is mine.

I was always the first to hear her in the night
all this umbilical knot business is nonsense [...]
I listened to hear her talk,
And when she did I heard my voice under hers (23)

Parallel to her argument, Winnicott notes that “the good-enough-mother, (not necessarily the infant’s own mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant’s needs” (156). Thus, twenty years later, when her daughter wants to meet her birth mother, the adoptive mother is not distressed, depending on the conviction about her own conception of motherhood:

I always told her, if you ever want to,
I won’t mind. [...]
Curiosity. It’s natural. Origins.
That kind of thing. See me and her.
There is no mother and daughter similar.
We’re on the same wavelength so we are.
[...] Closer than blood.
Thicker than water. Me and my daughter. (34)

Hence, the adoptive mother, convinced from the very beginning that she is the real mother, challenging the ideology of biological motherhood, overcomes her frustration of not bearing a child and re-forms her identity as a real mother, not fearing to lose her daughter to the biological mother. As a result, both mothers reject their social identities concerning motherhood and womanhood.

On the other hand, the black daughter emerges as the one who suffers most, torn between two mothers and being the black, hybrid daughter of white parents. In her article “Mirror-role of mother and family in child development”, Winnicott asks, “What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother’s face? I am suggesting that ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and *what she looks like is related to what she sees there*” (original emphasis) (145). Winnicott’s implication of face denotes to the mother’s face literally and her mood metaphorically. Thereby, in Kay’s poem, the baby’s loneliness in a glass cot for four months and then being adopted by a white mother might reveal an underlying sense of trauma for her identity development, although Kay does not project any controversy of color between the baby and the white parents during infancy.

The daughter’s narration starts with the quest for her origins. Being an adoptee is a very traumatic phenomenon according to psychologists and as Dunbar and Grotevant state “[t]o gain a sense of their origins,” adopted persons often have questions such as, “Where did I come from? Who were my parents? Why was I placed for adoption? Do

my birth parents think about me now? Do I have siblings? What does adoption mean in my life?" (Dunbar and Grotevant 135-136 in Baden and Wiley 870). These questions reflect the "sought-after sense of heritage and origin that are part of an adopted person's identity" (Baden and Wiley 871). Although early conceptualizations in psychology considered identity development as an adolescent task, it is now recognized as a "lifelong process" (Baden and Wiley 871). Furthermore, "developing a separate, autonomous, and mature sense of self is widely recognized as a particularly complex task for adoptees" (Baden and Wiley 871). Additionally, "the layers of unknown personal, genetic, and social history often complicate[s] the adopted person's identity development" (Baden and Wiley 871). Likewise, Kay focuses on three major crises in the child's life: of being adopted, of being black and hybrid, and of feeling incomplete because of the absence of biological parents and consequently of genetic and social history. Of her earliest childhood memories, the daughter remembers the time when the mother tells her that she is not her real mother. Drawing on Scotch vernacular Kay maintains that ironically, it is not the color of the mother that afflicts the child, but her reality in the literary sense:

After mammy telt me she wisnae my real mammy
 I was scared to death she was gonnie melt
 or something or mibbe disappear in the dead
 of night and somebody would say she wis a fairy
 godmother. So the next morning I felt her skin
 to check it was flesh, but mibbe it was just
 a good imitation. How could I tell if my mammy
 was a dummy with a voice spoken by someone else?
 So I searches the whole house for clues
 but never found nothing. Anyhow a day after
 I got my guinea pig and forgot all about it. (22)

Montefiore states that the Scotch vernacular of the daughter is essential to the interplay of voices in "The Adoption Papers" because the variety of Scottish voices enables women poets and readers of different regions, classes and ethnic identities to foreground the " 'fault lines' of existences in a divided country" (28). On the other hand, Michael Rustin argues that very young children, shaped by their genetic inheritance, relate to adults in terms of their familiarity or friendliness, not in terms of their superficial bodily characteristics. It is mainly at the age of latency when cultural definitions gain greater influence in children's minds that the racial patterns emerge in thinking and social behavior. Hence, Rustin concludes that racial feeling among children seems to be a product of group life and culture; it is not of "instinctual nature" (184-5).

Parallel to Rustin's point of view, Kay's protagonist is racially discriminated when she grows up; the society enforces oppression through school friends and

teachers. Accordingly, realizing her hybridity, the adopted daughter starts idealizing Angela Davis⁴ who is in prison in America at the age of twenty six:

Angela Davis is the only female person
I've seen (except for a nurse on TV)
who looks like me. She had big hair like mine
that goes out instead of down. My mum says it's called an *Afro*.
If I could be as brave as her when I get older
I'll be OK. [...]
Her skin is the same too you know. [...]
He [her father] brought me a badge home which I wore
to school. It says FREE ANGELA DAVIS.
And all my pals says [sic.] 'Who's she?' (27)

Kuortti and Nyman state that hybridity “does not mean any given mixing of cultural materials, backgrounds, or identities, but implies a markedly unbalanced relationship” (2). Because of the absence of her parents, the unnamed protagonist of Kay’s “The Adoption Papers” has to go through her hybrid state alone. Kay does not pursue the dichotomy between growing up in Scottish culture and appearing ‘black’ and “forever foreign” to others (Baden and Wiley 878); she concentrates basically on the reconstruction of identity in general. Nonetheless, one can suggest that even Kay’s typefaces ironically enable a visible hybridity. As Stuart Hall argues, “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference” (17). Kay focuses basically on the adopted daughter’s search for her mother, which is her basic dilemma rather than being black. Grotevant et al. describe the three most salient aspects of identity for adopted children as follows: “(a) self-definition (the characteristics by which one is recognized as he or she self-defines within his or her historical context), (b) coherence of personality (the subjective experience of the ways various facets of one’s personality fit together), and (c) sense of continuity over time (the connections between past, present, and future that traverse place and connect relationships and contexts)” (4 in Baden and Wiley 871). These identity aspects are labeled as the “self-in-context” and consist of three levels: “intrapsychic, family relationships, and social world beyond the family” and the primary task of identity for an adoptee is “‘coming to terms’ with oneself in the context

⁴ Angela Yvonne Davis “(born January 26, 1944 in Birmingham, Alabama) is an African American communist organizer and philosopher who was associated with the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Communist Party of the United States of America. She was linked to the murder of judge Harold Haley during an attempted Black Panther prison break” (Wikipedia online). “Though not involved, Davis was charged with kidnapping, conspiracy and murder and ended up going into hiding and being on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list. She was captured, imprisoned and became the subject of an international ‘Free Angela Davis’ campaign led by students and academics. She was eventually freed in 1972, charges were dropped and she established the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression” (Prescod online).

of the family and culture into which one has been adopted” (Baden and Wiley 871). In Kay’s adopted daughter’s case, her self-definition is missing because of the lack of historical context from her Nigerian father’s side, primarily. It is basically fulfilled by her adopted family’s warm welcome into their life. Coherence of personality seems somehow structured after succeeding in finding the birth mother. The sense of continuity over time for Kay’s adoptee is consequently achieved after meeting the biological mother. Thus, the ambivalence created for the adopted daughter’s “self-in-context” is smoothed out by coming to terms with herself, essentially by the adoptive parent’s warm and supportive approach. Kay principally portrays the three women; the adoptive father is hardly mentioned, yet at those minimal instances he is projected as a supportive husband and having a positive attitude towards his daughter.

For adopted children the search for the birth family is evoked through many complex feelings, of which only curiosity is revealed by Kay. The entire information the daughter could gather about her birth mother was that: “She liked hockey. She worked in Aberdeen/as a waitress. She was five foot eight inches” (14). Accordingly, when they finally meet, there is no sentiment between the birth mother and the daughter. They have tea together and walk by the sea and the protagonist points out “Neither of us mentions meeting again” (33). However, as Giddens states the autobiography is a “corrective invention into the past, not merely a chronicle of elapsed events. One of its aspects, for example, is ‘nourishing the child-that-you-were’”. Thinking back to a difficult or” (249) “traumatic phase of childhood, the individual talks to the child-that-was, comforting and supporting it and offering advice” (250). Consequently, “the reconstruction of the past goes along with anticipation of the life trajectory of the future (250). Having accomplished this, the daughter in “The Adoption Papers” and perhaps Jackie Kay herself along with her protagonist, move on to the future. The protagonist now knows about her birth mother, despite the absence of the biological father. Reconciling with the past, whether or not they meet again, nonetheless, hoping for a letter from her, the daughter yearns for some more acknowledgement:

Her sister said she’d write me a letter.
In the morning I’m awake with the birds
waiting for the crash of the letter box
then the soft thud of words on the matt.
I lie there, duvet round my shoulders
fantasizing the colour of her paper
whether she’ll underline First Class
or have a large circle over her ‘i’s. (34)

Thus, the journey for a self-discovery, of womanhood and mothering as dichotomy and with the addition of a daughter forming a triad, is a fluid and ongoing process of cultural negotiation and relocation. It has no final destination point, yet the subject may express and relocate the self through narration.

As for the highly controversial debates on identity mentioned before, sociologists basically focus on the socially constructed identities. This shift engages in “social relations, techniques and forms of training and practice through which individuals acquire definite capacities and attributes for social existence as particular sorts of ‘person’” (du Gay 279). This conception involves a movement away from general social theoretical accounts concerning the formation of ‘subjectivity’ or ‘identity’ and brings about an understanding of the “limited and specific forms of ‘personhood’ ” that individuals acquire in their passage through social institutions (du Gay 279-80). This set of theoretical arguments are concerned with the sociology of the person by describing and analyzing the institutional settings in which personal capacities are formed and the practices and techniques through which those capacities are transmitted. Elias argues that since people are more or less dependent on each other first by nature and then through social learning, education, socialization, and socially generated reciprocal needs, they exist as pluralities, only in “figurations” (297). Thus, he maintains that it is not productive to conceive of man “in the image of the individual man”; it is the “image of numerous interdependent people forming figurations (i.e., groups or societies of different kinds)” (Elias 297) with each other. In line with Elias, Bourdieu claims that “a life is inseparably the sum of the events of an individual existence seen as a history and the narrative of that history” (299). In this context, ‘the proper name’ is the support of social identity, that is the support of the set of properties (nationality, sex, age, etc.) attached to persons (302) thereby, devoid of names, Kay’s characters are distanced as socially constructed identities, despite the fact that it is only an attempt. Bourdieu also holds that ‘life history’ is a “socially irreproachable artifact because trying to understand a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of successive events” and “without ties other than the association to a ‘subject’ whose constancy is probably just that of a proper name, is nearly as absurd as trying to make sense out of a subway route without taking into account the network structure, that is the matrix of objective relations between the different stations” (304). Accordingly, although Kay’s characters’ inner life is projected by distancing the outside world, they cannot exist outside society, predominantly because of racism, the daughter’s being black.

Consequently, within the complex matrix of identity, Kay interrogates and reforms the hybrid nature of self and in line with her, Paul du Gay holds that “the very scope and diversity of contemporary debates about identity suggest that anyone hoping to produce the definitive identity is likely to be involved in a somewhat immodest, and probably impossible, task” (2). As from the point of view of black writers’ dissidence, Nasta states that the motivation was not “just one of constructing a ‘counter-discourse’”, but one “which could shift from within the epistemological and conceptual bases of the oppositions themselves, thereby perhaps changing fundamentally what George Lemming called [...] the parochial ‘habits of English reading’” (143-44). That is why it is possible to assert that in her poem, Kay defies the conceptions of both identity and narrative discourse.

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Özet

Evlat Edinme ve Yaşamların Yeniden Düzenlenmesi : Jackie Kay'ın *The Adoption Papers* Adlı Eseri

Kimlik üzerine yapılan farklı tartışmaları da içeren bu makale Jackie Kay'ın "The Adoption Papers" (1991) adlı şiirini ele almaktadır. Kay'ın kısmen kendi yaşamını yansıttığı bu şiir, beyaz İskoç bir ailenin zenci bir bebeği evlat edinmesiyle ilgilidir. Bu şiirde Kay, siyah bebeğini evlatlık veren beyaz bir annenin duyguları, bebeği evlat edinen annenin duyguları ve evlatlık verilen kızın karmaşık duygularını yansıtmaktadır. Kay, evlatlık verme/alma/verilme kavramlarının yanısıra kadınların toplumdaki yerleri ve kendilerine marjinal insanlar olarak bir alan yaratma çabalarını ele almaktadır. Bu bağlamda, annelik ve kadınlık ikilemi ile siyah gençkızın beyaz bir toplumda kimliğini araması da sorgulanmaktadır. Bu nedenle disiplinlerarası bir yaklaşımla, bu makale bu üç farklı kadını, ırk, cinsiyet ve özyaşamöyküsü açılarından ele alarak kimliğin akışkanlığı ve melezliğin karmaşık yapısını sorgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: evlat edinme, kimlik, kadınlık, annelik, melezlik, özyaşamöyküsü

**Sue Made Flesh:
Sue Bridehead's Corporeality in Michael Winterbottom's *Jude***

Bronwen Welch

Abstract: The character of Sue Bridehead, in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, is never really physically described to the reader; moreover, Hardy represents Sue as childlike, and completely lacking any sexual desire, despite the fact that she has several children. Her character thus conforms to the Victorian ideal of chaste and silent womanhood. It is this ideal that Michael Winterbottom criticizes in his movie *Jude*. By emphasizing, rather than deemphasizing, Sue's body in the movie, Winterbottom refuses to mimic Hardy's depiction of a character whose power comes not from her presence but from her absence. Winterbottom's Sue is literalized to the audience over and over again; his Sue gains a corporeal presence that Sue never achieves in the novel. Consequently, Winterbottom's Sue appears as a real woman rather than an idealized concept of womanhood he obviously feels is best left behind.

Keywords: Purity, invisibility, lack, corporeality, body, excess

Introduction

Peter Widdowson, writing on Michael Winterbottom's adaptation of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, remarks that "the casting of Kate Winslet as Sue seems to me to be the film's biggest mistake – or, alternatively, its most devious strategy in reprocessing the novel" (193). Widdowson's restrained outrage raises an interesting question, and one that deserves an answer: how can Kate Winslet, a beautiful fresh-faced and charismatic actress, possibly portray Hardy's neurotic sexually squeamish Sue Bridehead?

Interestingly, within *Jude the Obscure*, Sue's body remains largely abstracted. Wanting his readers to focus on her intellect, Hardy deliberately de-emphasized Sue's physical body, but how is a visual form of art (such as cinema) supposed to represent a woman whose physical presence remains largely absent from the novel? To physically literalize Sue (as Winterbottom must obviously do) marks a huge departure from Hardy's novel, and yet literalized she must be, as it is a physical impossibility to cast a drifting mist or a beam of sunshine as one's heroine. Recognizing the impossibility of depicting Sue as Hardy saw her, Winterbottom deliberately, and dramatically, deviated from Hardy's portrayal and intentionally emphasized Sue's physicality. By highlighting Sue's physicality Winterbottom not only criticizes Hardy's portrayal of Sue Bridehead, but also the Victorian culture that refused to acknowledge the physicality, the messiness, and the humanity of the female of the species.

Hardy's Sue Bridehead

The character of Sue Bridehead, unlike Hardy's Tess Durbeyfield or even Bathsheba Everdene, is physically de-eroticized. While in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*

there are descriptions of Tess that send the most prosaic reader into a swoon, Hardy's representation of Sue is of an intellectual, yet child-like, woman. Sue's de-eroticization is the result, as Judith Mitchell points out, of Hardy's inability to "imagine a loveable woman" who also sexually desires (202). Consequently, Hardy's attempt to de-eroticize his heroine renders her more or less invisible to his readers.

However, Hardy was not alone in his inability to imagine a moral but also sexually desiring woman. Hardy, like all writers, was a product of his culture, and thus studies of late nineteenth century ideology explore "the polarization of women into the chaste and the depraved, the virgin and the whore" (Boumelha 11). Hardy, for all his modern notions concerning love and marriage, could not wholly shrug off the cultural assumptions that surrounded him. While, he succeeds in de-emphasizing Sue's physical appearance, he does so at the cost of Sue having any kind of physicality or sexuality. Sue, writes Judith Mitchell, "almost entirely lacks erotic desire, conforming perfectly, in fact, to the most rigid Victorian notions of sexuality" (202).

Victorian physician, Dr. William Acton comments on how, "[a]s a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself" (213), and this is a view Hardy seems to have internalized and depicted in his representation of Sue. Sue, Hardy implies, is too ethereal, as well as too intellectual, to feel any sort of sexual desire; and, although she is a woman, her character seems one that is above such earthly activities as childbirth and sex. Indeed, in case the reader does not fully comprehend his portrayal of Sue, Hardy devotes a paragraph to reiterate this particular detail of her character:

Then the slim little wife of a husband whose person was disagreeable to her, the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfil the conditions of the matrimonial relation with Philloston, possibly with scarce any man, walked fitfully along, and panted and brought weariness into her eyes by gazing and worrying hopelessly. (229)

This description of Sue is one that emphasizes her lack of physical presence: she is obviously no ordinary woman, but arguably an angelic being trapped on earth.

Penny Boumelha remarks that "Clement Scott, writing in 1894, argue[d] that men are born 'animals' and women 'angels', so that it is only natural for men to indulge in their sexual appetites and, hence, perverse — 'unnatural' for women to act in the same way" (18). Thus we see the Victorian double standard that Hardy reacted against, but nevertheless found impossible to ignore in his depiction of women. Sue, according to both the novel's protagonist, Jude, and the narrator, is made of finer stuff than Jude: a sort of angelic essence, free from earthly desire. It is, after all, Sue's lack of eroticism that seems to attract Jude to her in the first place, whereas his desire for Arabella, a lusty country-girl, is an animal instinct — something that "moved him along, as a violent schoolmaster a schoolboy he had seized by the collar" (41). Thus, Jude's sexual desire is something that overmasters him completely as well as being "violent," a pejorative adjective that aligns sexual desire with a kind of powerful brutality. Jude's reaction to Arabella underlines Hardy's (perhaps unconscious) belief that a physically desirable (and desiring) woman was somehow "unfeminine," and therefore dangerous. A woman's role was not to galvanize a man into physical passion, but rather, she was meant to act as his conscience: his spiritual guide.

For example, despite the fact that Sue would be expected to acquiesce to Jude's sexual demands if she married him, because they remained unmarried, it was, in the eyes of Victorian society, her fault that they engaged in sexual relations. Jude remains blameless for his desire for Sue, as his need for sex is an ingrained part of his biological make-up; however, Sue, because she supposedly feels no physical desire, could have, and, in fact *should have*, maintained the platonic status-quo. When Sue tells Jude that they should have remained platonic lovers, he protests by saying that people are incapable of living in such a manner, and she responds by saying, "[w]omen could: men can't, because they—won't. An average woman is in this superior to an average man—that she never instigates, only responds" (372). Mitchell wryly remarks that it is at this point in the novel that "[Sue] not only voices the received wisdom of mid-nineteenth century patriarchy, but she also reveals the limits of Hardy's ability to imagine a desiring adult female subjectivity" (202).

Yet, it is not only Hardy's limitations that compelled him to compose Sue as he did. In his portrayal of Sue, Hardy was attempting to create a New Woman figure; thus, Sue's sexual reticence reflects Hardy's wish to illustrate the barbarous effect of the marriage laws on women. In a letter regarding his characterization of Sue's sexuality, Hardy writes,

One point illustrating this I could not dwell upon: that, though she has children, her intimacies have never been more than occasional, even when they were living together (I mention that they occupy separate rooms, except towards the end), and one of her reasons for fearing the marriage ceremony is that she feels it would be breaking faith with Jude to withhold herself at pleasure, or altogether, after it; though while uncontracted she feels at liberty to yield herself as seldom as she chooses. (qtd in Guerard 110)

Hardy obviously has sympathy for Sue's position as a woman in Victorian society, in that he seemed to understand that chastity was a way in which a woman might maintain power over her own body. Yet, Sue's sexual squeamishness is such a focal point of her character that one suspects that Hardy was threatened by the idea that a good woman could also possess a healthy sexuality. Thus, Hardy made Sue *Bridehead* safe by writing her sexuality (and thus her body) out of the book entirely.

In addition to being represented as angelic, and therefore bodiless, Sue is also consistently referred to as a little girl. "Indeed," writes Mitchell, "the word 'little' is used to characterize her more than any other" (200). Descriptions abound illustrating Sue's diminutiveness, and are applied to Sue by both the narrator and by Jude with saccharin and rather alarming regularity. She is described as "so pathetic in her defenselessness that his heart felt big with it"; as "being easily repressed," as having a "nervous little face," as possessing the "manner of a scared child," as "being as light and flexible as a bird," and as walking "as if she hardly touched the ground" (150, 109, 103, 178, 306). While comparing Sue to Arabella, Jude muses on Sue's "small, tight, apple-like convexities of her bodice, so different from Arabella's amplitudes" (195). Since *Jude the Obscure* teems with such descriptions of Sue, Hardy's intent is made clear: Sue is part angel and part child, and these characteristics, blatant as they are, precludes any notion the reader might entertain about Sue's adult physicality.

In addition, readers feel that they never really know or understand Sue. Kristin Brady points out that the reader never hears Sue's thought processes, but instead hears her thoughts filtered through either Jude or the narrator (97). Indeed, writes Brady, "the chief gap in the narrative lies not in the series of elided lovemaking scenes but rather in the thoughts and feelings of Sue herself, which are rarely depicted or described but instead, are suggested by her words or actions and guessed at by the narrator or by Jude" (96).

Thus, since Sue's thought processes remain unknown, and her physicality is practically non-existent (at the end of the novel the reader has a hard time envisioning what Sue looks like), it is difficult, despite the horrific deaths of her children, to fully appreciate her grief as a mother. She never really seems like a mother to the reader, for how could she when she is so physically absent for us? (Mitchell 201). Despite the vast amounts of literary criticism and debate generated by her character, Sue remains a complete mystery to readers, and thus it is perhaps safe to say that it is Sue who remains obscure to the reader, and not Jude.

Winterbottom's Sue

"The only reason why I'm pleased I read it [Jude the Obscure] is because it made me realize I didn't want to be anything like the Sue in the book. I completely hated her."

Kate Winslet (qtd in Daily Telegraph Magazine)

Since Hardy's Sue Bridehead remains largely invisible, no director could realistically be faithful to Hardy's textual portrayal. Peter Widdowson wonders whether Winterbottom's casting decision is merely "the result of miscasting a contemporary cult actress in an unsuitable role"(193); and since, in 1986, Winslet was nominated for an Oscar for her portrayal of Marianne in the movie adaptation of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, as well as garnering much critical attention from her role in *Heavenly Creatures*, Winterbottom's conjecture seems worth exploring, albeit briefly.

Austen's Marianne is a character full of passion and "sensibility," and Winslet certainly stays true to this aspect of the character. Winslet's Marianne is full to the brim with energy and naïve sexiness, and her Oscar nomination catapulted her suddenly into the public eye. In addition, one must not forget her starring role in *Heavenly Creatures*, the shocking true story of two young girls who commit a horrific murder. This was a rough role for a young woman like Winslet to take on, and she played it with a convincing sexiness and passion, despite the stark subject matter.

Winslet is, consequently, known as an actress who portrays female characters who are passionately physical. Susan Hayward's point that "[the star] also stands for roles she or he has played before" (357), cannot be discounted within a discussion of Winslet's portrayal of Sue. Known for two roles that capitalized not only on her beauty, but also on her ability to play impassioned and desiring women, Winslet could not but carry her sexy energetic persona forward into her next role. Since Winterbottom is an experienced director, one must assume he made his casting choice quite deliberately.

Moreover, her star status aside, Winslet physically refutes the vision readers of *Jude the Obscure* would have of Hardy's "ethereal fine-nerved, sensitive girl" (229).

Peter Widdowson writes that “[p]hysiognomically, Kate Winslet has an inescapably modern face, and all her pert, flirty, self-confident, healthy-young-woman-of-the-1990s mannerisms seem entirely inappropriate for the intellectually precocious and sexually repressed ‘slight, pale ... bundle of nerves’ the novel represents Sue Bridehead as being” (193). In *Jude*, Winslet’s healthy young face and body, becomingly smooth and rounded, completely refutes Hardy’s description of a Sue who is as “light and flexible as a bird,” who “went along as if she hardly touched the ground, and as if a moderately strong puff of wind would float her over the hedge and into the next field” (306). Therefore, it is useful to examine the points in the film *Jude* where Winslet’s physical body is used as the focal point of the movie. It is also interesting to note that the points in the film in which Sue’s body is highlighted are points that never occur in the novel.

Flashback

The first scenes I wish to examine in Winterbottom’s *Jude* occur directly after Sue has left Phillolston to embark on her life with Jude. The first scene in which Sue appears, she is romping (there is not other word for it) along the beach with Jude. Sue’s golden hair and her long pink dress stand out against the blue-gray color of the sea and sky. Consequently, the pink of her dress and the gold of her hair act as beacons to which our eyes are immediately drawn. The next scene shows Sue and Jude laughing hysterically as they bike along a country road. At another moment we watch as Sue playfully pretends to leap into a lake. At several points, Sue’s face fills up the entire frame in extreme close-up shots; her hair is wet, and plastered to her round, creamy, dimpled face. These moments highlight not only her face and body, but also her physical activity. We watch Sue as she runs, jumps, bikes, and laughs loudly: in short, all actions that compel the viewer to notice her supple and physically active young body.

There can be no reason for these particular moments other than to emphasize Sue’s importance in the film, and this importance is manifested in her physicality. In addition, many of the shots of Sue are close-up shots, thus emphasizing her physical presence. Susan Hayward writes that close-up shots “have a symbolic value, usually due to their recurrence in the film. How and where they recur is revealing not only of their importance but also of the direction and meaning of the film” (328). Although Winterbottom’s movie is called *Jude*, the director devotes equal, if not more time to Sue, whereas Hardy’s novel focuses primarily on Jude.

Additionally, Winterbottom’s pivotal shots of Sue do not occur in the book, and, furthermore, they seem to serve no real purpose in the film’s narrative. Astonishingly, towards the end of *Jude*, the sequence of shots devoted to a romping, laughing Sue is repeated once again within the context of a flashback. Moreover, in both scenes Sue is now the only person shown within the frame. Her body fills the whole screen in several shots, and is highlighted once again against a blurry background of sky, water, or trees. The flashback scenario also includes a new sequence of shots of Sue: Sue sitting in a blue and white dress, nicely highlighted against a gray wall, and Sue firing off charmingly intellectual questions to an off-screen Jude (as well as the viewer).

The flashback scene is important in that it includes a repetition of seemingly excessive scenes that the audience has seen previously. Sue’s face, as she asks her questions, fills the whole screen. The series of shots within the flashback amount to

exactly seventeen separate shots of Sue in which she is almost exclusively the only person on the screen. The camera minutely examines Sue's face, and adoringly focuses in on her impudently wrinkled little nose, her golden hair, and the dimples on each side of her smiling mouth—in short, the camera leaves no detail unnoticed.

One might argue that the initial romping/bike-riding scenes are to highlight the new-found happiness (a happiness interestingly de-emphasized by Hardy) of Jude and Sue in each other's company, and that the flashback sequence serves to emphasize the tragedy of Sue's casting off her intellect and reverting to the strictures of religious doctrine. However, what is really stressed in these two sequences of the film is Kate Winslet *playing Sue*: Kate Winslet running down the beach; Kate Winslet biking in the rain, her pretty face flushed and laughing, and Kate Winslet looking charming in a blue dress.

Of course, one possible explanation for Winterbottom's inclusion of these scenes is the fetishization of the female form. Laura Mulvey writes, "fetishistic scopophilia, builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something fascinating in itself" (42). Yet the flashback scene does more than simply eroticize the female form in order to draw in audiences. Instead, these scenes direct the spectator's attention to the face and body of Sue over and over again in order to emphasize her corporeality: the reality of her physicality. The seventeen separate shots of Sue do not serve to sustain the narrative, but to interrupt it—and, therefore, according to Kristin Thompson, to constitute *excess*, as "excess implies a gap or lack in motivation" in the film (134). And these scenes *are* clearly excessive, in that if the director had chosen to exclude them, especially the flashback scene, it would have made no difference to the overall narrative. Yet, what constitutes a gap in the narrative is, in fact, a conscious directorial choice to render Sue Bridehead visible, making her a flesh and blood woman, and consequently breaking away from the shivering, childish, and physically invisible Sue of *Jude the Obscure*.

The Sex Scene

Every reader of *Jude the Obscure* is familiar with the scene in which Jude coerces Sue into having sex with him. Spurred on by Jude's threat to visit Arabella, Sue agrees to sexually consummate her relationship with Jude, exclaiming, "[v]ery well then—if I must I must. Since you will have it so, I agree! I will be. Only I didn't mean to! And I didn't want to marry again, either! ... But, yes—I agree, I agree! I do love you. I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run, living like this!" (280). The scene between them ends shortly afterwards, and the reader is left to imagine the rest of Sue and Jude's night together. However, we do *not* imagine it for the simple fact that we cannot imagine Sue as having a *body*, let alone imagine her engaged in something as physical as sexual intercourse.

Winterbottom directs this scene in a way that completely redefines it for viewers who have previously read Hardy's novel. For clarity's sake, let us break this particular scene down into segments. Firstly, Arabella comes to the door of the house where Sue and Jude live. She tells Jude that she is in trouble, and so Jude agrees to come and see her at the hotel where she is staying. Jude then comes upstairs, and the camera immediately shows Sue sitting up in bed. As opposed to the novel, Winterbottom

chooses to shoot this scene in the bedroom, where Sue and Jude presumably occupy the same narrow white bed.

While Jude is sitting on the edge of the bed, we see only a small part of his body in the frame, whereas Sue's body is wholly within the shot, framed by the white bed. "Can't you see what she's doing?" questions Sue, "She wants you back!" "But do you want me?" asks Jude petulantly. "Yes," Sue answers and then tells Jude, "Close your eyes," as she pulls her nightgown over her head. She then lies back against the bed, the only person in the frame (we only see Jude's elbow in the extreme left side of the shot), as the camera angle focuses down on her naked body. Jude then begins to remove his clothes off-screen. The camera then focuses entirely on Sue alone and naked on the bed for a total of twenty-three seconds. This duration of time cannot be explained in terms of adding to the understanding of the film's narrative, and for those readers who are familiar with Hardy's Sue, the fact of her nudity on screen leaves us dumbstruck. However, since the camera focuses for *such* a long time on her naked body, we are left with no other alternative than to gaze at it.

Now, one could read this scene as an erotic enticement to draw audiences into the movie theatre. However, on closer examination, this assumption proves to be a false one: for despite the presence of beautiful Kate Winslet playing Sue Bridehead, the scene is anything but erotic. First of all, consider the camera angle. As spectators, we are looking *down* on Sue. We are not looking at Sue from Jude's point of view, nor are we in the dubiously erotic position of being Sue being gazed upon by Jude. Instead, we are placed in the uncomfortable position of a voyeur, gazing down at the naked and solitary form of Sue filling the frame. Thus, the feeling we experience is not one of sexual excitement, but embarrassment. Sue is not raised on her elbows with her back arched, nor is she lying with her legs crossed in mid-air wearing leather boots; in a word, she is not in a particularly attractive or erotic position. Lying flat on her back, arms at her side, Sue gazes stiffly up at the ceiling. Contrary to most cinematic images of naked women, Sue's breasts look flat and her pubic hair looks dark and somewhat coarse. As most Western audiences are used to seeing the female body as eroticized, Sue's body, to viewers, appears almost unfamiliar. Thus, we gaze upon her as something almost *overly* embodied – there is no attempt on Winterbottom's part to soften or disguise the female form.

The length of time of Sue on the bed alone is doubled, almost exactly, once a naked Jude joins her on the bed. However, we only see Jude from the back, whereas Sue is always lying looking up at the ceiling. In addition, once Jude's body enters the frame, and begins kissing her, much of Sue's body is blocked (excepting her crotch area – on which the camera focuses for several seconds). Unused to full-frontal female nudity, the viewer is at once shocked and fascinated (but not sexually titillated), and the camera takes advantage of this, focussing undue attention on Sue's crotch in a manner that eerily foreshadows the horrific birth scene to come.

In her essay, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," Kristin Thompson discusses how any time spent focussed on an object or person may constitute excess. For instance, Thompson writes, "[w]e may notice a device immediately and understand its function, but it may then continue to be visible or audible for some time past this recognition. In this case, we may be inclined to study or contemplate it apart from its narrative or compositional function; such contemplation necessarily distracts from narrative

progression" (135). Thus, since Sue is naked for such a length of time, and since we have nothing else to look upon but her, we begin to notice details that we would never ordinarily notice. We notice how her pelvic bones jut up slightly on either side of her stomach; we notice the shape of her breasts, the texture and color of her pubic hair, and the pinkness of her skin against the white bed sheet. In short, the minute details of her body, ones that we would never normally notice, become the focal point of our interest.

Although Sue's body becomes very real, very tangible to the viewer, it certainly is not eroticized for the very reason that eroticization is, in and of itself, a form of invisibility, for once a woman is turned into an object of erotic interest, her appearance must conform to certain erotic ideas; consequently, what makes her unique is lost, and she becomes a generic type that than a real woman. It is Winterbottom's purpose in this movie to render Sue as real, as *visible*, as possible; thus, if Winterbottom had eroticized Sue in this scene, she would have ceased to become an actual woman for the audience because she would have lost her individuality, and become, instead, merely an object designed to titillate and arouse.

The Birth Scene

I will conclude by examining what is arguably one of the most shocking parts of *Jude*: the birth scene. Now, certainly, readers of *Jude the Obscure* are aware that Sue becomes a mother. Yet, as I mentioned previously, her maternity is scarcely believable because she seems so incorporeal. However, Sue is a mother, and it is, of course, vital to the narrative that Winterbottom show her in that role. However, Sue's labour is never shown in the book, the children simply appear in the narrative.

The birth scene in *Jude* follows directly on a visit by Jude, Sue, and little Jude to a carnival horror show. At the tail end of this scene, the dramatic screams of one of the actors blend in with the screams of Sue giving birth in the next scene. Although what we hear first are her screams, we soon see Sue's face, sweaty and in pain. The camera then pulls back a little and we see her legs spread apart, as she pants and screams in agony. Then, in a shot-reverse-shot, we see what Sue sees: Jude and little Jude both watching her as she gives birth. Next, the low angle camera shot focuses once more on Sue or, rather, her crotch area, open and bright red, dripping with blood. As a result of this particularly low angled shot we are, essentially, looking right into Sue Bridehead's vagina.

Viewers see birth scenes quite frequently these days. One has only to turn on the television on any given night and see a woman giving birth. Yet, the scenes are never quite as gratuitous as Winterbottom chooses to make this one. In addition, we hardly ever see the baby actually emerge: we only see blood spurting and a *possible* head crowning.

No one could argue that Sue needs to be represented as a mother, but where is the motivation that compels Winterbottom to represent Sue's maternity in this fashion? Thompson writes, "[m]otivation is the primary tool by which the work makes its own devices seem reasonable. At the point where motivation fails, excess begins" (135). The excessive bright red blood against the white sheet, the screams, and the angle of the shot itself all constitute filmic excess, as these features do not serve to further the spectator's understanding of the narrative.

If the birth scene (which lasts approximately seventeen seconds) were completely deleted, the narrative would still make sense. Winterbottom could have shown Sue pregnant, or holding her babies after they are born, and scenes such as these would more than adequately portray her motherhood. Thus, we have to assume that Winterbottom's choice to show Sue's wide open vagina spurting bright ruby-red blood exists for no other reason than to emphasize Sue's physicality. As in the nude scene, there is absolutely no eroticism in this scene but, instead, the spectator suppresses the desire to look away in disgust.

Winterbottom's *Jude* forces the spectator to witness Sue's embodiment again and again; and in this way, the movie is a complete contradiction of the novel. The Sue in *Jude* is not a mystery. She is never obscured from the reader's gaze. Instead, the reader gazes at Sue's body continuously throughout the film, and at the end of the film there is no part of Sue's body that we feel we do not know. On other hand, Thomas Hardy's Sue Bridehead seems both untouchable and un-understandable, not only to Jude, but also to the reader. Winterbottom's dramatic deviation from Hardy's Sue stemmed not only from the difficulty of finding an actress who walked "as if she hardly touched the ground" (Hardy 306), but also from the fact that such a casting decision would perpetuate the ideal of the silent, pure, and childlike Victorian woman. By deviating as far as possible from Hardy's depiction of Sue Bridehead, Winterbottom tacitly admits that the Victorian ideal of femininity was based on diminishing a woman's physical presence. In Hardy's novel, Sue's attractiveness is based on what she *lacks*: form and sexuality; her power (if we can call it that) stems not from her presence, but rather from her absence. Winterbottom's excessive, yet un-eroticized, attention to Sue's body underlines his desire to recast Sue as visible and authentic and, consequently, Sue Bridehead can never again be overlooked nor forgotten.

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Özet

Sue Vücut Buldu:

Michael Winterbottom'ın *Jude* Adlı Eserinde Sue Bridehead'in Bedensel Varlığı

Hardy'nin *Jude the Obscure* adlı eserinde Sue Bridehead adlı karakter asla fiziksel olarak tasvir edilmez; dahası, Hardy, Sue karakterini çocukları olan bir kadın olmasına rağmen hiçbir cinsel arzu barındırmayan çocuksu biri olarak sunar okura. Sue karakteri böylelikle Viktorya Döneminin ideal namuslu ve sözsüz kadın tipine uymaktadır. Michael Winterbottom'ın *Jude* adlı filminde eleştirdiği nokta da budur. Filmde Winterbottom, Hardy'nin kasıtlı olarak vurgulamadığı Sue karakterinin bedensel varlığına dikkat çeker ve gücü varlığından değil yokluğundan gelen bir karakter portresi çizen Hardy'nin bu yaklaşımını taklit etmeyi reddeder. Winterbottom'ın Sue karakteri, izleyiciye tekrar tekrar sunularak romanda asla elde edemediği bedensel varlığa kavuşur. Sonuç olarak, Winterbottom'ın Sue karakteri yönetmenin tamamen geride bırakılması gerektiğini düşündüğü idealize edilmiş kadın kavramından sıyrılarak gerçek bir kadın olur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Viktorya dönemi idealleri, saflık, görünmezlik, bedensel varlık, insaniyet, beden

**Ethnic American Literature and Its Discontents:
Reflections on the Body, the Nation**

Maria C. Zamora

Abstract: This article considers the ways in which bodies challenge the categories asserted in nation building. It examines the body's significance in the dominant imaginings of the concepts of "America", and designates the body as a contested terrain in and of itself. The symbolic process through which the U.S. constitutes its subjects as citizens is tied to the global dynamics of empire building and a suppressed history of American imperialism. This article proposes that the body in Ethnic American Literature is a site of both enormous symbolic work and symbolic production that has continued to dramatize the mapping of shifting representations of "America".

Keywords: Ethnic American Literature, body, American imperialism, citizenship, national identity.

Historians long ago began to write of the body. They have studied the body in a field of historical demography or pathology; they have considered it as the seat of needs and appetites, as the locus of physiological processes and metabolisms, a target for the attacks of germs or viruses; they have shown to what extent historical processes were involved in what might seem to be the purely biological base of existence; and what place should be given in the history of society to biological "events" such as the circulation of bacilli, or the extension of the lifespan. But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.

Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punishment

"If the skin were parchment and the blows you gave me were ink. . ."

Dromio the slave to Antipholus his master

William Shakespeare, The Comedy of Errors

Bodies are manipulated to produce meaning and purpose. They accumulate meaning by way of attribution, designation, authorization, and naming. But bodies are just as often made to be social and symbolic markers in life. The import of a live body is encountered in the world by way of the dynamic combination of both inscription and self-determined expression. As impressions of life are continually inscribed on flesh, living bodies make present the passing of time. Such a fact contributes to the daunting and complex realization that our bodies are actually living texts, texts that are constantly bearing and transforming meaning. But how might we understand what it is about our bodies that is “natural”, and what it is that is culturated? The nature versus culture debate is at the center of any contemplation of how we might read bodies. Is the body, in any final sense, “natural” or “raw” (i.e. non- or pre-social)? On the other hand, can the body itself be regarded as purely a social and signifying effect lacking in its own weighty materiality? The interaction and engagement of “the natural” with “the cultural” needs careful consideration. It is not adequate to simply dismiss the category of nature outright, but in turn the cultural too must be seen in its limitations, as a kind of insufficiency that requires natural supplementation. When we look at bodies we don’t just see biological nature at work. We see values and ideals, differences and similarities that national culture has “written”. How can we understand the contributions of the body to the production of knowledge systems, regimes of representation, cultural production, and socioeconomic exchange? Bodies are necessarily interlocked with cultural, racial, and class particularities, and such “interlocking” is by way of mutual constitution. Subjectivity cannot be made to conform to the universalist ideals of humanism if there is no concept of “the human” that includes all subjects without violence, loss, or residue. Humanism, the intellectual/philosophical/metaphysical line of inquiry that has dominated (western) thought since the eighteenth century, posits humankind as the measure of all things. Consciousness of the self has become the measure whereby humankind posits its existence (as opposed to God’s authority) and has allowed us to invest in a celebration of humanness. But the trouble is, not everyone has been accorded the same “human” status (i.e. slavery). Furthermore, different social practices have led to bogus theories of “stages” along an evolutionary “human” trajectory (i.e. colonial inscriptions). It follows then that the whole of cultural life, including the formation and evaluation of knowledges themselves, must be questioned regarding the sexual, racial, (and cultural) specificity of subject positions. Ultimately, the body is not only symbol, but materiality situated within the contingencies of history.

Considering bodies as living texts lends itself to Roland Barthes’ well known commentary on the limits of authorization. The debate over a text’s determination in the hands of author or reader sheds light on the reception of bodies in the world. Any text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not the author (Barthes 148). Live bodies never function as a single ‘theological’ meaning (the message of the Author-God). Rather, they are multidimensional spaces in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. Yet the idea of the human body as “open” text yielding a multiplicity of readings is at once at odds with the predominant impulse to authorize bodies, to limit and furnish their meaning with a final signification. In what ways has the body’s representative power been interpreted, especially in terms of nation and citizenship? It is

in this interminable process of lending bodies metaphorical and figural meaning that literal bodies have often been violated. In the context of nationalism, literal bodies have become powerful metaphor or symbol for/to the nation, yet such figural appointments customarily result in the very real violation of the person inhabiting such a designated body. The material body often suffers under the sway of the figurative regime.

Citizenship (as an ideal) stands for the autonomy, self-legislation, and sense of civic solidarity that members of a group extend to one another. At the heart of the concept of citizenship is the question of the individual - both dependent and independent, always and yet never alone in the modern world. Considered as an ideal and practical identity, citizenship supplies both moral value and pragmatic institution. But by revealing "the citizen" as abstracted and yet embodied and gendered, we can detect the underpinnings of a national symbolic that has worked to make "America" recognizable and intelligible. Passing into citizenship through inscription in a national symbolic of the body politic, the citizen reaches another plane of existence, a whole unassailable body, whose translation into totality mimics the nation's permeable yet impervious spaces.¹ A notion of an abstract citizen-subject underlies democratic universalism or what Lauren Berlant calls the "fantasy of national democracy [...] based on principles of abstract personhood" (18). How have citizens been positioned and explicated within a collective/national domain, through regulation of the body and the coincident conscription of subjectivity? Can we ascertain a narrative of national corporeal imaginings when reckoning with the American body politic? The democratic ideal presupposes a connection between citizenship and impartiality. Such impartiality, as Iris Marion Young writes, "requires constricting the idea of a self abstracted from the context of any real persons". The advancement of collective interests presumes a citizen who "is not committed to any particular ends, has no particular history, is a member of no communities, has no body" (60). Citizenship thus depends on the projection of uniformity and equivalence. And perhaps more significantly, citizenship rests on a fundamental disavowal of difference. As Leslie Bow has written, "the necessity of projecting homogenous national citizens erases embodied difference as a predicate of uninterested civic participation and the promotion of the common good"(40).

Nevertheless, the symbolic process through which the U.S. constitutes its subjects (*how Americans are made*) is explicitly related to the internal categories of race, gender, and ethnicity. Furthermore, these "internal" categories are inexorably linked to the global dynamics of empire building. The multiple histories of continental and overseas expansion, conflict, and resistance have shaped U.S. national identity. Those cultures that the United States has dominated beyond its geopolitical boundaries have been (and continue to be) as formative to American identity as those cultures that have been recognized as "from within". That which has been rhetorically understood as "exterior" has continued to produce interior meaning. Although there has been a marked denial effectively sweeping under the proverbial rug the reality of the American empire, American imperialism must be recognized - not only within the context of international relations, but in terms of consolidating *domestic* culture. As long as American

¹ I have borrowed here this notion of the "national symbolic" from Lauren Berlant's *Anatomy of National Fantasy*. As Berlant reflects on the fantasy work of creating an American national identity, she considers the "national symbolic" of America as a political space which is not merely juridicial, territorial, genetic, linguistic, or experiential, but a tangled cluster of these.

imperialism is perceived as a matter of foreign policy (conducted by diplomatic elites) or a matter of economic necessity (driven by market forces), America will continue to be self-conceived as “independent” of the global stage. At length, “America” has been disciplinarily and historically understood as a domestic question, one that can afford to be isolated, unique, or divorced from international conflict. The result is a binary opposition of the concepts “foreign” and “domestic”, further encouraging a discourse that identifies *outsider* difference, hence, a historicized anxiety about those people and cultures that have been represented as the “exterior”. Asian American Studies scholar Lisa Lowe points out that in the last century and a half, the American citizen has been defined “over and against” the Asian immigrant, in legal, economical, and cultural terms. “These definitions have cast Asian immigrants both as persons and populations to be integrated into the national political sphere and as the contradictory, confusing, unintelligible elements to be marginalized and returned to their *alien* origins”(Lowe 4). Furthermore, as the concept of the “immigrant” in American sociology and public policy has historically signified “European immigrants”, it is telling to track the changing contours of such a category. In the last several decades this concept has been redrawn in an effort to universalize the temporality of assimilation - an assimilation earlier attributed to Irish Americans and Italian Americans, and extended more recently to ethnic minority groups from the “third world”. Nevertheless, this conceptual inclusion effaces the heterogeneities and hierarchies that are the reality of a vast (and vexed) history of American immigration. It also obscures the technologies of racial distinction that the immigration process substantiates.² American nationality is still posed as a monolithic and self-contained whole, no matter how diverse, dynamic, and conflicted.

There is no doubt that the legacy of the racial history of the United States is at once complex and vast. By highlighting the layered referents, ironies and ever-shifting boundaries of “America” and its colonial others, Ethnic-American literature does play a role in disclosing the occlusions of America’s self-image:

It is through the terrain of national culture that the individual subject is politically formed as the American citizen: a terrain introduced by the Statue of Liberty, discovered by the immigrant, dreamed in a common language, and defended in battle by the independent, self-made man. The heroic quest, the triumph over weakness, the promises of salvation, prosperity and progress: this is the American feeling, the style of life, the ethos or spirit of being. (Lowe 2)

But in being represented as citizen within this political sphere, the subject is “split off” from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract form of citizenship. The general iconicity of the national body veils how historically contingent body typologies really are. Whenever citizenship comes to look like a question of the body, a number of processes are being hidden (those ideal and pragmatic aspects entailed in the figural determination of national identity).

As a professor of Ethnic American literature, I interrogate the cultural compass of imperialism in the consolidation and expansion of United States national identity.

² See Robert Blauner, “Colonized and Immigrant Minorities” in *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper, 1972).

How do these literary texts investigate the technology of collective fantasy and the effects of the nation's semiotic practices on the unstable material it uses? The texts chosen in my syllabi (egs. Hagedorn, Alexie, Yamanaka, Morrison, Cisneros, Lahiri, Hughes, Santiago Baca) lie at the geographic and political margins of American national identity, and they consider the complex mechanisms of national identity.

How has America's role on the global stage affected the teaching of American literature? How do we teach American literature with regard to the changing face of American classrooms? How should literature teachers address pluralism and culture effectively through literature? In the recent past, many English teachers have incorporated pedagogies influenced by theories of cultural nationalism and identity politics in order to create a "multicultural" curriculum in their classrooms. (Eg. – teaching a text like *The Joy Luck Club* in order to understand the Chinese). But I believe it has become painfully apparent that these strategies often reify difference for students and in the process, essentialize ethnic minorities. In response to this concern, my own efforts in teaching Ethnic American literature are grounded in an understanding that our bodies are always somehow drafted in history. The body is always narrativized in discourse, and is always situated within cultural memory and within the seamless folds of the social. No matter how distant, removed, and powerless human beings feel in relation to the complexity of modern life, they bear the structures of cultural knowledge marked on their very flesh. A consideration of the power of narrative, the complexity of representation, the construction of history, and the formation of communities at work in such literary texts will hopefully contribute to an understanding of our dynamic pluralistic society.

The question that frames any directed close reading in my Ethnic American Literature class is always: How is "America" posited, reconsidered, challenged in this literary text? I guide my students to explore (and excavate) specific tensions and instabilities within the chosen literary texts, especially in regard to this notion of what it means to be American. America matters not only as a national territory, but also as a cultural style and a powerful idea, exported to other sites with far reaching influence. I prompt students to always question the priority of things which are set up as original, natural, and/or self-evident in this context. Students in this course learn to consider the authorizing signature or voice in the chosen texts. My students learn to question what can and cannot be talked about, and who (and what) influences the ground rules for conversation. As they focus on the cultural representations of the body in the context of this ever shifting notion of "America," students reflect on the many contradictions (and negotiations) that lie behind that "powerful idea."

This complex consideration of "America" is of course deeply rooted in stories of both willed and forced migrations, of both national and global economic exchange, wars and colonization, decolonization and global strife. Examples of texts chosen for closer reading are ultimately literary representations that clearly exceed the traditional boundaries of the United States yet still reflect a context in which "America" matters. One exemplary text I often teach in my Ethnic American Literature course is Lois-Ann Yamanaka's novel *Blu's Hanging*. This novel is an inquiry into the American nation-state imagination. I guide my students to read the body in *Blu's Hanging* as a site of symbolic production that has continued to dramatize the mapping of shifting

representations of “America”. I argue that *Blu’s Hanging* is a novel that underscores the crisis that cultural nationalism cannot resolve.

Yamanaka, a Hawaiian writer of Japanese-American descent, chooses the island of Molok’ai as the novel’s setting in which three poverty stricken children struggle to survive after the mysterious death of their mother. The novel is narrated by thirteen year old Ivah Ogata who becomes the caretaker for her younger brother and sister, Blu and Maisie. The three children are left to cope with a secret history of familial disease – leprosy. Leprosy stands as a rich metaphor for the colonized history of Hawaii itself. I suggest that the young bodies-in-crisis that are at the center of the novel expose the violations that arise when living bodies are cast as symbolic markers. Yamanaka’s portrayal of these three young children’s world instantly shatters the popular myth of Hawai’i as an island paradise and a vacation resort free of racial tension and ethnic strife. Written in part in Hawaiian pidgin prose that reflects the local hybrid linguistic tradition, the novel presents the reader with the subtle everyday realities that have resulted from competing local and mainland nationalisms and an ugly colonial history of U.S. political domination, economic exploitation and cultural hegemony. The political dissension that this controversial novel has sparked foregrounds the “stakes” involved in articulating a local self-representation, as well as an overall conceptualization of the “face” of the nation.³ By contextualizing the politics of leprosy, Yamanaka’s novel renders the Ogata family’s genealogy one of particular, *historicized* humiliation. This dissident American narrative is indeed written on the body.

Another example of a text I often have students read in my Ethnic American Literature class is the novel *Dogeaters* by Filipina-American novelist Jessica Hagedorn. This novel is also productive in the continuing explication of “America.” The novel opens up with an image of the cityscape of Manila, Philippines, as infiltrated by the dreamscape of American Hollywood cinema. The dream world of American movies is exalted as the standard upon which all must be compared. Every experience is filtered as possible celluloid fantasy – “this is just like a scene in the movies”. *Dogeaters* is a dense pastiche that can be read as an inquiry into the politics of representation. The reach and grasp of America on the Philippines, as well as the ensuing Filipino understanding and response to such a history, is at the center of this novel’s examination. Rather than approach Ethnic-American writing in the familiar parlance of assimilation, the more appropriate and compelling question is not whether Filipino-Americans (in this instance) have been assimilated, but “to what exactly they are to be assimilated?” We come to understand the refracted Filipino landscape as infiltrated and imprinted (both explicitly and implicitly) by American power. Ultimately, what the novel captures is not so much “the Philippines” per se, but the syncretism of global cultural exchange and a particular Asian American (or Americanized Asian) manifestation of it. Reclaiming the consideration of America at its roots in an international rather than a merely national framework, I attempt to undercut the logic of detachment that poses America’s domestic realm as separate from the history of empire.

³ *Blu’s Hanging* has generated a controversy that has ended up dividing the nation’s foremost group of Asian American scholars. The novel has been considered racist by some, and has become contentious enough to rupture the Association Asian American Studies.

Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* implicitly challenges this entrenched distinction between America's domestic-national and foreign-imperialist facades.

Dog eaters has been understood by some as a sell-out to the West by employing a thoroughly postmodern aesthetic as it ignores more indigenous modes of expression that might possibly align with a politics of de-colonization. In other words, some critics have accused *Dog eaters* of being an American novel that reproduces an imperialist sensibility in its approach to the story of the Philippines. However, such postcolonial nationalist readings have failed to recognize the novel's focus on the politics of representation and in particular, the constraints imposed on women in the act of shaping national history. *Dog eaters* resists the leveling of true emancipatory politics to a postcolonial nationalism that would operate at the expense of women. Hagedorn's pastiche redraws the frame of a postcolonial transnational culture, and it does so from the perspective of the perpetual non-subjects of history. *Dog eaters* thus retells the stories of the Marcos years not from the perspective of the political or military leaders, the Western press, or subaltern historiographers, but largely from the viewpoints of Filipina mothers, mistresses, sisters, daughters, and wives. It is in this light that the question of female embodiment is the central thread in the *Dog eaters* weave. Hagedorn's consistent attention on the contours of female embodiment opens up new considerations for the roles women are often conscripted to play in the making of the nation. The novel admits a national desire that possesses and controls women, as it simultaneously challenges the putative naturalness of discourses of nation that require a rhetoric of territorialization. *Dog eaters* challenges how women become the mute but necessary allegorical ground for the transactions of nationalist history. Ultimately, *Dog eaters* addresses the limits imposed on women in the postcolonial act of shaping a national history by asserting a contradictory and dynamic female embodiment written beyond the restraints of trite national allegory.

America has taken on many faces in the American literary "tradition", from that of the utopian space of possibility, to the fantasy of wealth and privilege projected on the movie screen. It has been portrayed as a violent exclusionary society, the center for faddish consumption, and the site for a series of assimilationist narratives. The America on which some Ethnic American writers have chosen to ruminate is complex, contradictory, and ambivalent. These varying representations could never be reduced to a single unified response. But what is consistent is the way in which considerations of the human body (and its possible constraints) continue to complicate our understanding of "America". This consistency critically implicates the heart of a totality presumed to inhere beneath the signifier "American".

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Özet

Amerikan Edebiyatı ve Hoşnutsuzlukları: Beden ve Ulus Üzerindeki Yansımaları

Bu makalede, bedenlerin, ulusların kurulmasında öne çıkarılan kategorilere nasıl meydan okuduğu ele alınmaktadır. Makalede, "Amerika" kavramlarına ilişkin egemen imajda bedenin önemi incelenmekte ve beden hem içinde hem de kendisi ile rekabet eden bir zemin olarak ele alınmaktadır. Birleşik Devletlerin ülkede yaşayan halkı vatandaş konumuna getirdiği sembolik süreçler, imparatorluk oluşturma'nın küresel dinamiklerine ve Amerikan emperyalizminin bastırılmış tarihine bağlıdır. Bu makale, Etnik Amerikan Edebiyatında bedenin, hem sembolik işleyişler için hem de "Amerika"nın değişken temsillerinin şekillendirilmesini abartıp duran sembolik üretim için zemin teşkil ettiğini öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Etnik Amerikan Edebiyatı, beden, Amerikan emperyalizmi, vatandaşlık, ulusal kimlik.

Sacred Theatre

Part of the Theatre & Consciousness Series

Ralph Yarrow . ed.

Bristol, U.K./Chicago, U.S.A.: Intellect, 2007. +224 pp.

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By Aylin Atilla

Sacred Theatre primarily argues that the sacred as experience or as a mode of perception is a crucial part of performance theory and practice. The book is conceived as a collaboration of different writers to allow the reader to approach issues from different angles and to accumulate multi-perspectival and multi-layered understanding within a non-linear argument. It also aims to rescue the term 'sacred' from mono-theological and prescriptive use. As Yarrow states in 'Overture', "the writing of this book, whilst by no means entirely dialogic ... builds in a process of exchanges, of interactions and interventions in each other's thinking and expressing" (14). The writers in collaboration include theatre-makers, literary theorists and philosophers, teachers of theatre and performance studies, and the practitioners: Ralph Yarrow¹, Carl Lavery, Franc Chamberlain, Peter Malekin, William S. Haney II and finally John Fox, as guest contributor. The book maps sacred praxis across dramatic texts and their effects, actor training and directing method, and audience reception. From the very beginning, the writers state that "the notion of the sacred discussed in this book has nothing in common with theological or religious notions of the sacred;" their view of the sacred is "primarily scandalous – it interrupts self, ego, language and community" (10). Moreover, the writers in collaboration state the goal of sacred theatre and experience as something that cannot be "reduced to moments of fulfilled intensity" or "something [we] can possess;" whereas, they define the sacred as "what opens [them] to the Other" (10).

The book is comprised of three parts and nine chapters. The first chapter of part one deals with basic questions, terminologies and categorizations of the sacred. The second chapter includes sections about modern views of the sacred, Giorgio Agamben and the politics of the sacred, ritual and the ancient mystery religions, and lastly the theatre of the Absurd. In this chapter, the structural features and the functions of ritual in terms of the confrontation of temporal, spatial and ontological limits are discussed with different views and perspectives by Yarrow, Malekin and Lavery. Throughout the book, it is interesting to notice the different accounts of the sacred according to different psychologists, philosophers, sociologists, mythologists and theoreticians; for instance, Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, Rudolf Otto, Mark C. Taylor, Mircea Eliade, Georges Bataille, Giorgio Agamben, Eugène Ionesco, and Jean Genet. For Eliade and Bataille, for example, the sacred as "a territory of radical difference," has nothing to do with "redemption and understanding;" yet, it creates a space for the subject where it is "altered and 'othered'" (38). Unlike secular and religious discourses which generally

¹ Ralph Yarrow, the editor, is a Professor of Drama and Comparative Literature at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, U.K. He has various publications and numerous articles on theatre, and he is both a director and a performer.

define the sacred as socializing principle or spiritual truth, the book tries to define it as an opportunity for the subject to be altered. It is also emphasized that the sacred recreates identity and opens new possibilities for the individual and the society. Moreover, it is mentioned that there are crucial differences separating Freud's and Durkheim's account of the sacred. In connection with this, Carl Lavery reminds the reader that one of the essential points to bear in mind is the way in which "psychoanalysis and sociology perceive the sacred as a phenomenon that is bound up with questions of individual and collective identity" (35).

The next part, entitled "Text and Performance," aims to relocate certain works in critical receptions, and to open up questions which will be returned to later in the book. In chapter three in part two, William S. Haney II examines the phenomenology of non-identity in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; and in the next chapter he scrutinizes gender matter through Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. Haney defines the sacred of theatre as a "voiding of thought" and "a condition of liminality," and claims that "the optimal subjective experience of liminality is performance" (15). As Yarrow states, he discusses how the texts he examines produce the sacred as "a void in thought," especially in terms of 'gaps' which "deconstructive practice opens up between real and imaginary, self and other, and between self as the potential for experience and self as a concept" (61). These gaps operate not only by deconstructing fictional narratives of self and world, but also by making available "through shifts and perspective, comprehension, sensation and ontology" (61). Chapter five and six scrutinize Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* and *The Chairs*, and Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* and *Ashes to Ashes*. In these chapters, Haney writes shorter pieces on Ionesco and Pinter, who are pursued furthermore by Peter Malekin.

Lavery and Yarrow later, in the last chapter of part two, explore the politics and practice of Genet's theatre. This chapter includes discussions about Genet, Bataille, Beckett and the Absurd. It also attempts to describe how the sacred functions in Bataille's thinking and to show the similarities between Genet's and Bataille's concept of the sacred. The chapter also aims to display how the sacred informs Genet's "enterprise in terms of his desire to reinstate sacred experience as a necessary prerequisite to radical personal and political transformation" (127). Furthermore, it is the chapter's premise to define the sacred in Bataille's words: Bataille believes it to be "an ambivalent and ultimately unclassifiable phenomenon" (127-8). For Bataille, the sacred belongs to the realm of "a/theology, a philosophy that deliberately sets out to suspend theological notions of totality and wholeness" (128). For both Genet and Bataille, the sacred is an event that negates and recreates identity and discloses alternative possibilities for individual and collective existence.

The third and the last part of the book, called "Processes and Directions", investigates how sacred experience is generated in and by texts in performance, largely through consideration of European and American modernist and postmodernist work. In chapter nine, it is stated that "as part of its interrogation of the modes and forms of the sacred experience in and as performance", *Sacred Theatre* starts "the exploration of a number of tracks; sacred ecology, sacred and place/space, politics of the sacred, performance phenomenology and sacred experience, [and] sacred as bare existence" (165). The last chapter of the book also indicates how theatre practice resonates with

these features across historical periods and cultural contexts; for example, ancient Indian, Balinese and Japanese performance forms and twentieth-century European directing and actor-training practice. Finally, in 'Coda', Ralph Yarrow maintains that the sacred for them is "a moment ... an incitement to a shift of frame or paradigm, a loss and a potential renewal" (201). He states that the sacred "occurs in and as performance, but it is not just performance," and "it is available, though only in and as a kind of participation or active processing, to those who work in training or in production, and to those who receive the complexity and multiple layering of 'text' in performance" (201).

Sacred Theatre is the first book to scrutinize 'the sacred' in practice, process and performance of drama in "need to demystify the term" (201). The book displays that when the term is properly defined, represented and expressed in performance, it will be a unique experience for writers, performers and viewers. The writers collaborated in the realization of the book use a variety of sources and examples drawing upon elements of sociology, anthropology and critical theory as well as analytical readings of a range of texts and performances. The editor Ralph Yarrow initiated a significant contribution to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to the sacred in theatre and performance. The writers contributed in the book open up discussions for the ambiguities of the terms sacred and performance through a different variety of plays, and they also share their experimental experiences. *Sacred Theatre* examines not only theatrical but multi-disciplinary approaches to the sacred including work across many periods and cultures, in an attempt to be as non-exclusive as possible. It is the book's paradoxical conclusion that "the most politically committed theatre is the one which is the most radically disengaged, that is, the most sacred" (143). Yet, the book does not seek to come up with singular definitions rather it offers a spectrum of reflections and perspectives. Finally, for the academics or general readers, *Sacred Theatre* is an invaluable source on the sacred and its relation to the theatre. It raises questions of how the sacred can be represented through performance, answers them in different dimensions, and presents experimental and personal experiences. Moreover, it makes *Sacred Theatre* valuable and accessible to all readers, since it provides explanations for the structural understanding and function of the sacred in theatre with multi-disciplinary approaches, and it offers incitement for discussion within performance and theatre teaching.

Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?
Caryl Churchill
London: Nick Hern, 2006. + 42 pp.
ISBN 1-85459-959-3.

by Yeliz Biber

Caryl Churchill's latest play, *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* premiered at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs under the direction of James Macdonald. Funded by an anonymous donor, the play ran from 10 October to 22 November 2006, and was presented in association with the Public Theater in New York where it will also have its U.S. premiere in March 2008. Performance notes in this review are based on the opening night of the play at the Royal Court Theatre.

Writing for the stage for almost half a century, Churchill has been one of the least predictable playwrights in Britain, and one whose dramatic range frustrates attempts at critical categorisation. Before beginning her professional career in theatre—initially, she largely wrote for radio and television—Churchill had expressed a concern for a revitalised form of theatre in a student essay in 1960: “We need to find new questions, which may help us answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new form” (Churchill 1960, 446). In line with the Brechtian ideal of a developmental theatre,¹ Churchill's unequalled search for new forms and subjects has contributed widely to the progress of contemporary British theatre.

Churchill's playwriting oeuvre could, at best, be defined in terms of diversity; the spectator/reader is always left wondering what challenges her next play will hold. With *Drunk Enough*, however, it felt like the air of mystery surrounding the play was deliberately heightened. Pre-production notes barely revealed anything about the nature of the play. All one needs to know, Churchill must have thought, is that “Jack would do anything for Sam. Sam would do anything.”² During the course of this otherwise highly elliptical play, it becomes clear that Sam and Jack are allegories for the United States (Uncle Sam) and Britain (Union Jack): the former played by the American actor, Ty Burrell in loose sporty clothes, the latter by the English actor Stephen Dillane in relatively formal clothing.

Highly driven by dialogue, the play explores the disturbing political relationship between the United States and Britain in the form of a gay relationship between Jack and Sam. The representation of a gay relationship in disparaging terms in order to unfold the dynamics of this political solidarity may seem problematic; but, considered in the light of Churchill's earlier work such as *Cloud Nine* (1979), a satirical comedy on sexual politics, Churchill's intention cannot be to marginalise gay relationships. The suggestion that Jack leaves his heterosexual marriage (the British value system) to be

¹ Brecht's epic theory suggests abandonment of the old theatrical forms that can neither relate to the new social conditions nor challenge the spectator to view their social and political environment through a critical perspective. Although Brecht defined and developed the principles of a new theory for the theatre, the main idea behind his theory was a concept of theatre that evolves in order to be timely and critically engaging.

² These two lines are the pre-production notes that have appeared on the Royal Court website and the back cover of the play's published text.

with Sam (to support the States in foreign matters) may, however, create an unsettling feeling for an audience not familiar with Churchill's previous work.

Jack's revelation of his love for Sam and of his decision to desert his family to go with him starts the narrative of the play:

JACK. go where did you say you?

SAM. anywhere you wouldn't?

JACK. do when we get there?

SAM. anything you won't do? (4)

Sam's counter-questioning of Jack highlights his desire for control and unconditional dedication. The terms of their relationship are therefore established. The play, then, proceeds to explore the grounds for the British commitment to the manipulative American foreign policy by posing the sarcastic question: are the British 'drunk enough' to support the American campaign of global power? Predominantly speaking in half sentences or incomplete phrases (although the few words they use are enough to suggest the complete statement to the audience), Sam and Jack exchange remarks on self-interested and interventionist instances of the American foreign policy: Vietnam, the regime change in Chile, the several ways by which other countries have been politically and economically manipulated, carbon emissions, nuclear power and of course, Saddam Hussain and Iraq. Churchill's succinct language efficiently expresses in a few lines such complex and weighty issues as the abuse of poor countries by the American and British economies, and how the consumers are illuded into purchasing the products without considering the trade ethics involved:

JACK. and those beautiful African textiles made from our raw materials they agree to import rather than

SAM. or sometimes it's the other way, it's their raw materials like cocoa

JACK. and we make chocolates you get on valentine's day

SAM. because if they were allowed to make them [...] because our economy is the priority here

JACK. costing poor countries two billion dollars a day because

SAM. really snitty mood today. (18)

The power of *Drunk Enough to say I Love You?* stems partly from its treatment of a political matter within the dynamics of a personal relationship, and partly from its potent economy of language. "So often", Churchill said in an interview with Lizbeth Goodman in 1988, "dialogue works better if you just take lots of it away" (94). In *Drunk Enough*, she leaves only bits and pieces of dialogue which flow energetically, and which are reminiscent of her use of language in her 2002 play, *A Number*. The effect produced by Churchill's technique is an awareness of the operation of language in mind as the audience is apparently expected to fill in the blanks through a process of

mental association. On the down side, this linguistic style confounds the audience with too many hasty political references, but the brief references to trade-based exploitations and acts of violence—whether for anti-Communist or anti-Islamist purposes—also position the historical and current American foreign policies within a framework of terror.

Corresponding to the illustrations of torture and other terror-inflicted control systems, the sound design by Ian Dickinson is extremely disconcerting, with weapon clicks, threatening sound effects and terrifying music before each scene. The stage design is minimalistic, displaying a sofa on which Sam and Jack discuss international politics as if their relationship solely depends on and develops along these talks. The sofa gets higher and higher within the course of eight brief scenes, reaching a point that makes it hardly possible to view, especially from the first rows of the auditorium. Both Michael Billington and Nicholas de Jongh interpret the increasing elevation of the sofa as the characters' loss of contact with reality (Billington 44, Jongh 25). The light effect authenticates this explanation as it gradually gets darker on the stage. My feeling was that in the midst of Jack's confusion and the fervent discussions over the world politics, Sam and Jack were rising in power in a way that made it impossible for Jack to leave Sam. Their political solidarity conceals unacceptable crimes which, though empowering, also isolate them.

Jack becomes increasingly distressed by Sam's discourse of violence and desire for omnipotence and starts having doubts about their relationship, to which Sam responds with a brief reference to "the towers", and asserts the binding American politics which "makes everyone love me because it's only evildoers who hate me, you don't hate me" (32). Sam's rhetoric throughout the play discloses an us/them dichotomy, interwoven with naïve revelations of violence and a stigmatizing of different ethnic, racial and religious identities. The political relationship between Britain and The United States is depicted as the former's submission to the latter's manipulation, which reveals Jack at times rationalizing with or approving of Sam's brutal methods, and at other times as simply giving in to the cruel attraction of Sam. Sam wants full devotion when Jack is torn between his principles and submission to Sam's power. Whilst the slight favouring of the British value systems over the American is arguably problematic, it is crucial to Churchill's title question.

Jack gets very confused towards the end, but his attempts to leave Sam for his 'home life' prove inefficient. The frightening future that Angie in Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982) anticipates in a feminist context, gains a broader political meaning as Jack eventually gets "frightened" (41) by Sam's lack of humanitarian feelings. Sam, in his turn, gets alarmed at Jack's loss of affection for him as he realises they could "lose everything we've" (41), and says, "love me love me, you have to love me, you" (42). Sam's power obliges Jack to love and support him, because if he does not, Sam will have to position Jack in the same group as 'the evildoers who hate me'. The ending is quite bleak; on the one hand, Jack's realization of Sam's true nature implies a hope for the future in British foreign policy. On the other hand, as suggested by Jack's previous unsuccessful attempts at deserting Sam and the sofa which has peaked by the end of the play, it is now too late for Jack to break off his 'illicit' affair with Sam. Relatively more clear is the implication that the British support for the United States' foreign policy can

only be justified by lack of full consciousness and self-control, metaphorically suggested by drunkenness.

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Passion Play

Peter Nichols.

Performed on BBC Radio 4 on 12 January 2008.

Directed by Colin Guthrie. With Nicholas le Prevost, Joanna David and Emily Bruni.

by Laurence Raw

While reading Sebnem Toplu's review of *Queer Mythologies: The Original Stageplays of Pam Gems* (Toplu 139-40), I was prompted to reflect on how other British dramatists who enjoyed a high reputation in the 1970s and early 80s have subsequently been consigned to oblivion. One such writer is Peter Nichols, author of plays such as *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* (1968), *Privates on Parade* (1978), and *Passion Play* (1981). Born in Bristol, in the west of England, he cut his dramatic teeth on television and writing screenplays for such 60s hit films as *Georgy Girl* (1966). Nichols subsequently became famous for his penetrating analyses of family relationships. He represented marriage as a mental prison, in which husbands and wives seldom expressed what they really think. *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* reveals this through the reaction of two parents to their catatonic child; *Passion Play* uses the device of the doppelganger (also used in his earlier play *Forget-Me-Not Lane* (1971) to emphasise the distance between what people think and how they speak to one another.

Since the early 1980s Nichols has experienced much the same fate as Gems; both are now "in danger of being seriously underestimated through critical neglect" (Toplu 139). A recent revival of *Passion Play* broadcast on BBC Radio 4 (and available on the world-wide web at <http://www.bbc.co.uk>) on 12 January 2008 offered the chance for listeners to judge for themselves whether he deserves such neglect. The play's premise is relatively straightforward: art dealer James (Nicholas le Prevost), happily married for twenty-five years to Eleanor (Joanna David), embarks on a passionate affair with Kate (Emily Bruni) – a much younger woman. Despite the fact that Eleanor finds out about it, James continues to see Kate while at the same time insisting to his wife that he has given up his lover for good. What renders *Passion Play* especially intriguing is that Nichols gives two roles for his two main characters. One of these (James, Eleanor) represents the persona the character chooses to present in public; the other (Jim, Nell) functions as a doppelganger, or alter ego, letting the audience know what the character is thinking or feeling. Both parts were played in Guthrie's production by le Prevost and David.

When *Passion Play* premiered at the Aldwych Theatre, London in 1981, it was widely interpreted by reviewers as a critique of Thatcherism. Ever since she assumed the office of Prime Minister in 1979, Margaret Thatcher sought to create a liberal society, while at the same time insisting that every citizen should acquire the bourgeois values of thrift, prudence, diligence, temperance and self-reliance. If they accomplished this, then they could help to create a stable world on their own, without government interference (Subaşı 11-12). Individual responsibility lay at the heart of this philosophy. Nichols shows how this ideology forces James to rein in his passions; to suppress what he really believes in, so as to maintain social cohesion. Eventually the task proves too much for him as he embarks on his affair with Kate. Kate herself was perceived as a

sexually active personality, suppressed by what Nichols describes as the kind of “conventional [Thatcherite] values” (Nichols 73) which forced women to accept the roles of wife and mother. Meanwhile Eleanor dedicates herself to her husband and children, and ends up with nothing as a result. She sacrifices her “youthful and uninhibited” self in her efforts to fulfil her social responsibilities (Nichols 23). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that she should choose to end her life by taking an overdose of barbiturates.

Guthrie interpreted *Passion Play* quite differently, acknowledging the fact that Thatcher has now been consigned to history. The old bourgeois values of prudence and social responsibility no longer seemed significant: all the character sought self-gratification in a world where only the fittest would survive. James and Eleanor appeared incredibly narcissistic – something emphasised in this revival through the technique of overlapping voices. James delivered his lines before Eleanor had finished, and vice versa. Neither of them was prepared to listen to what the other had to say. The introduction of the doppelgangers served to exacerbate this situation: Jim and Nell had no qualms about interrupting James and Eleanor. Kate appeared thoroughly worldly – someone who took advantage of James and Eleanor’s self-centredness. She made James feel young again by fulfilling his sexual fantasies, allowing him to fondle her while wearing no underwear, or wearing lace panties whenever the two of them met at her apartment. At the same time Kate convinced Eleanor that they were firm friends embarking on shopping expeditions to buy even more frilly underwear.

In this revival marriage as an institution seemed nothing more than a series of empty rituals. Neither James nor Eleanor believed that their relationship had any future. Eleanor summed up her feelings in one pithy phrase; both of them were “out to lunch, no one home” (Nichols 76). However they lacked the courage – or the self-awareness – to do anything about it. Separation or divorce seemed out of the question – all they could do was to play continual meaningless verbal games. This was starkly underlined in the final scene. In the background, the sound of a choir singing Christmas carols could be heard, as James and Eleanor welcomed their friends with expressions of enforced jollity (“How nice to see you!” “Yes, we’re happy!” (Nichols 78)). Guthrie focused our attention on Jim and Nell, who bitterly disclosed their feelings in a series of asides delivered close to the microphone. Nell claimed that her bags were packed, prior to leaving home, while Jim declared (not for the first time) that his affair was based on pure sex, not love. Such phrases had little or no significance other than to demonstrate how morally bankrupt the two of them were.

From the evidence of this revival, it seems that Nichols’s recent critical neglect should be nothing more than temporary. If other directors create revivals of similar quality as Guthrie’s *Passion Play* (whether in the theatre, on television or on radio), then surely his reputation will be speedily re-established. As the theatre scholar Frederick Wilkins remarked in 1982, *Passion Play* appears so powerful that on many occasions it evokes the best of “[Eugene] O’Neill’s own drama” (Wilkins 1).

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