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# Editorial



In the evolving landscape of literary studies, one phenomenon has been constant – the rise of new theoretical ideas with the challenge to traditional boundaries and exploration of new frontiers of thought. As a mirror that captures the complexities of human existence, literature has pushed boundaries of conventional thinking to reflect the changing scenarios of political, cultural, and social life.

One of the most striking aspects of this sustained literary renaissance is the diversity of literary perspectives that have gained prominence. From post-human Gothic to Afro-futurism to Surveillance studies, scholars are embracing a multiplicity of lenses to interpret literature and life.

Our contributors have embraced this diversity and our articles for this issue reflect the fundamental shift in the way literature is approached. Dr. Padma V. Mckertich investigates how the contours of the Bhakti canon have been rewritten. The appraisal of revisionist mythmaking in *The Color Purple*; Aversive racism which persists amongst the most ‘civilized’ and ‘inclusive;’ and the questions of displacement which haunts the fates of a major part of the globe now are the themes taken up by other researchers. We trust that by fostering this interdisciplinary dialogue, literature becomes richer for the insights it brings to text, tradition and intellectual activity.

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# Solitude and Solitude in the Recent Poetry of Derek Mahon

Dr. Rajeev S. Patke\*

## Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate that the poetic oeuvre of Derek Mahon oscillates between two contrary impulses: a temperamental affinity towards a morose form of solitariness and a more warily sanguine desire to break out of such isolation by seeking out connections. Attempts to make connections, however, prove difficult, especially when directed at society and people in general than when in the presence of nature or objects of contemplation. Even moods of contemplation prove to be less a matter of escaping from solitariness than of finding relief in a solicitude that negotiates with the condition of being alone (and of always feeling alone) through the writing of poetry. Poetry thus represents a form of solicitude that enables the poet to translate solitariness into the more amenable form of solitude, at least until the urge to step out of being alone starts the cycle again. The paper attempts to show how metaphor and metonymy play a significant role in the see-saw between the desire to make connections and the temporary relief afforded when solitariness is translated into a form of solitude.

**Keywords:** *Derek Mahon, Irish Poetry, Aloneness, Solitude, and Solicitude.*

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**"Wrong life can't be lived rightly."**

**--Adorno 39**

**I**n this essay Derek Mahon's poetry is explored from the perspective of a tension that leads to a negotiation between two impulses. On the one hand, the poet turns to solitude as to a desirable state, and accepts solitariness as an inevitable condition; on the other, he turns to a particular kind of solicitude, which involves the desire to make connections. This desire seeks engagement, not merely with one's times and places, but also with other ways of conceiving experience, whether through personal or collective memory, or through art and writing. For example, the third poem in the sequence 'Art Notes' voices an anxiety attributed to the painter Nicolas de Stael; "je sais que ma solitude est inhumaine" (I know my loneliness is inhumane) (CP 301). The painter declares that he will henceforth renounce abstraction and turn again "to the world of objects" (301). The poem exemplifies a recurrent movement between emptiness and haecceity. An affinity for solitariness is mitigated by the desire to reach out through poetry; the fragment reaching out for the whole, the individual seeking a share in the humanity he sometimes recoils from, in a frame of mind which the poem "Craigvara House" describes as "a watchful anomie" (125). Likewise, in an article on Samuel Beckett, "Watt is the Word," Mahon refers to Beckett's notion of a "rupture," a disjunction between subject and object, between the perceiving sensibility and "the unreality of reality," in a context of unbelief in which "poetry was the only prayer" (12-13). One might say the same about a particular aspect of Mahon's work that it seeks to heal a rupture between the alienating object and the perceiving subject.

A reading of the poetry suggests that the attempt to resolve the tension leads to situations in which subjunctives of desire invoke an ameliorative function for poetry. This is directed less usefully at the world construed through metonymy than at the poet struggling to keep his two impulses in conversation, even if only through a figure of speech. It implies that we should not lose sight of what the poem "Mark Rothko" speaks of as "a rich interior glow / as of an absent presence / still desperate to get through" (AW 74). The tension between the two impulses is felt most interestingly in the work done by the type of language-use traditionally contained in the idea of metonymy or the pair of metonymy-synecdoche. My argument and illustrative analyses focus, therefore, on the role played by metonymy as a kind of shuttle or go-between, which tries to stitch a fabric that won't let the will to solitariness go its way without some compromise with the will to solicitude, even if this compromise comes at the cost—not of denying solitude, but—of courting poeticisms that lean heavily on a nostalgia for past modes of existence. The poem "Harbour Lights" gives nostalgia a more brave look by declaring that "I claim the now disgraceful privilege / of living part-time in a subversive past" (CP 283).

Poetry that articulates a desire for recuperation points to maladies and invokes remedies. The first task requires breadth and scope, combined with brevity of reference. That is where metonymy is particularly useful. The history of this figure of speech, its proximity to and difference from metaphor, its alliance with synecdoche, and their role within the larger expressive functions of reference, imagery, and symbolic language, is vast, complicated, and full of instructive disagreements over the definition of terms, their interrelations, and the relation of, or the

alleged differences between, poetic or literary figurations, and the role of figurative language in ordinary speech. The researcher proposes to enter this thicket, only very briefly, and from the outskirts, to allude to that approach to analysis which draws upon the distinction made by Roman Jakobson in 1956 between metonymy as a figure of contiguity, contexture, and combination antithetical to metaphor as a figure of displacement, selection, and substitution (Jakobson and Halle 55-82). Contemporary discussions build upon that distinction in a variety of ways.<sup>5</sup> From these, the researcher would like to draw attention to the role of metonymy in a jig-saw like building up of, or allusive reference to, a composite gestalt; contrasting this activity, which is confined to a single conceptual domain, with that in metaphor, where one encounters what is de-

scribed nowadays as a conceptual mapping from one domain to another.

One would like to think of metonymy (and synecdoche) as a system of shorthand: quick, concise, and vivid in its illustrative - referential function. It draws strength from the tacit understanding that whatever is proffered will evoke, allude, and exemplify a field of reference of which it is part. It depends for its success on whether it can trigger in readers a sufficient degree of recognition to what its code points at (Martin 863-70, 876-78). Consider, for example, the poem "At the Chelsea Arts Club," in which the poet unfolds a list of things, properties and phenomena which a bright shade of yellow evokes to his mind as forms of existence to be praised in a mixture of what one might describe as a joyous, playful, and facetious spirit:

of crocus and freesia, primrose and daffodil,  
yahoos, yuppies, yuppies, yoga, yoghurt, Yale,  
bananas, Danaë's golden shower, baby clothes and toys,  
prohibition, quarantine, caution, cowardice, buoys,  
lamplight, gaslight, candlelight, illness, fog,  
pencils, *I Ching*, golf, 'radio-active,' bubonic plague (CP 215)

The poem goes in this vein for quite a while more. I do not propose to comment or analyze, but merely note that the list ad libs by association—as in Rupert Brooke's rather more predictable poem of 1914, "The Great Lover" (Brooke 61-66). Its quirkiness provides an affirmation of individual sensibility, and its randomness feels secure in the implied conviction that each entity alluded to in the text is like the tip of an iceberg, and given more time and space, the poet could readily display the rest. The surprise is created by the collocations; but there is no surprise to be expected about what the poet could do if he were minded to explain each metonymic reference.

The point here is that metonymy draws its strength from an assumed coherence and correlation between what is proffered and what is not, between what is given and that of which it is a prototype. That is why it is possible to categorize the metonymic family as spread across a handful of related or similar functional relationships: container for thing contained; agent for act, product, or object possessed; cause for effect; time or place for their characteristics or products; associated object for its possessor or user. To these one adds the types classified as synecdoche: parts of the body for associated states of consciousness; material for object made from it; attributes or abstract features for concrete entities.



The point of enumerating the wealth of possibilities within a referential-evocative function based on contiguity is that Mahon's poetry is drawn to this range of repertoire for specific reasons. He aims for conspectus; he aspires to cosmopolitanism: each is a cure for or preventive against the insularity of localism. He also moves at a relatively quick pace of allusiveness. All these desiderata find metonymic allusions useful: they are concise; and they can be precise, vivid, and suggestive without becoming opaque or enigmatic.

Solitariness may be an effect of temperament combined with chance and circumstance. But it does not work toward self-isolation with-

out an impetus from the world at large. Mahon's poetry is replete with details of what repels him. Much of it has to do with the turn globalized societies have taken in contemporary times towards a culture whose characteristic associations metonymy serves to evoke. Mahon discovers such sentiments in the poems he translates. The poem "Whatever," from the French of Michel Houellebecq, begins: "Clearly this stupid world doesn't inspire / anything now but an intense antipathy" (RM 63). Examples from Mahon's own work are plentiful. In the eleventh poem, "Rain," from the sequence 'New York Time' (formerly *The Hudson Letter*, 1995), contemporary civilization is criticized for denying individual privacy:

a civilization based on superfluous light  
concedes no decent dark, so we create  
with blinds and blankets our own private night  
to keep the glare out (CP 192)

Several poems from "Decadence" present the twentieth century in the gloomiest of perspectives. The fifth poem in the sequence,

"Schopenhauer's Day," imagines the philosopher having a nightmarish vision:

as if I'd seen the future in a dream—  
Weimar, a foul Reich and the days of wrath,  
a *Vogue* model in the dead dictator's bath;  
and the angel of history, a receding plane  
that leaves the cities a rubble of ash and bone (203-04)

The eleventh poem, "At the Chelsea Arts Club," is just as negative, if less gloomy:

Everything aspires to the condition of pop music,  
the white noise of late-century consumerism—(214)

Other poems of the late 1990s, such as "High Water," show the poet in flight from the overloads and surpluses of our times:

Starved for pedestrian silence and in flight  
from the 'totality and simultaneity' of data (233)



The depressive mood this induces in the poet is again captured by metonymy in “Biographia Literaria”:

A great cold has gripped the heart already  
with signs of witchery in an ivy tree:  
now nothing will ever be the same again. (288, LE 13)

The volume *An Autumn Wind* (2010) returns again and again to a single but complex see-sawing movement of thought, from a manifest disenchantment to a wished-for re-enchantment, which he evokes through a series of metonymic references that combine elements of imagery with symbolic and representative values. Each poem in the volume expresses concern over the direction our collective twenty-first century has taken towards a future where the pile of detritus and preoccupations accumulated by contemporary societies viewed on a global scale threaten to ruin all and the natural environment. The times and their values make the poet recoil from sociability. But this recoil is countered and prevented from becoming a form of withdrawal. It teaches itself to stop short of voicing a full-fledged desire for solitude through the workings of an optative mood, which is the poet’s grammar of rhetoric, which brings poem after poem to a close with subjunctives of desire, stretched along the spectrum from wish to exhortation, asking that one’s todays and tomorrows learn to look backwards across human history, from ‘the upward slide’ (AW 16) of technologized and consumerist self-impoverishment to a world of simpler, older values.

Thus, the poem “Blueprint” alludes to “a different music of the spheres / from what the corporate buzzards know” (15). Its vision of how to go back to a time before the modern failure had started was “scribbled on by guilty pens” and by now it is “virtually effaced” (15), except that

out “in a great plain or wood” “the wind sighs / secrets the ancients understood,” and, may be, people like the Algonquin could again “re-enchant the world” (16). The next poem, “A Quiet Spot,” begins with the declaration that “We tire of the cities in the end” and talks of moving—not to the countryside but—to a mid-way compromise, “a dozy seaside town” (17). The poet has had enough of his own often-repeated ‘fugitive year / of travel’ (17). The agenda he sets himself, or Gaia demands, is clear: it is now “time to create a future from the past, / tune out the babbling radio waves / and listen to the leaves” (17). When it rains heavily, in “The Thunder Shower,” the poet imagines the sound as “a suite for water, wind and bin, / plinky Poulenc or strongly groaning Brahms” (18). “All human life is there / in the unconfined, continuous crash;” but very soon, the “crescendo of a cascading world economy” is left behind as the storm moves on, having “lost interest in us” (19). The poet first encompasses all the human noise in a series of metonymic allusions, then sweeps them aside as if a return to nature were not a way of turning one’s back on contemporary human concerns and preoccupations but a way of turning those concerns towards what they make all lose sight of: the ways in which all that one is obsessed by might be in the nature of a divagation.

The title of another poem, “New Space,” provides a metonymy for a parallel argument that solicits the particular in preference to the general, the concrete in preference to the abstract:

not “the sublime,” but neat rows of “beans and peas, / rosemary, parsley, sage and thyme;” not a discourse on aesthetics, but “the weight of a bone-handled knife” (21) in one’s hand. The reasons for why one might be said to have lost one’s way are many, and each can be alluded to through a metonymy developed into a tiny allegory of one’s ruin, as in “World Trade Talks,” which ends on the hope that “Next spring, when a new crop begins to grow, / let it not be genetically modified / but such as the ancients sowed / in the old days” (23). In “Ash and Aspen,” we use the wood of ash and aspen “for matches and matchboxes” (24), but the trees groan like “captive spirits” at the uses to which we put our mastery over nature. In “Growth,” two metonymic references, each invoking its own world of reference, make their point through the simple juxtaposition of lines in sequence: “The global oil-price crisis bites; / an April mist lifts from the shore” (25). That the two worlds should co-exist but scarcely impinge on one another implies a barely-concealed moral, that the world’s solicitude has abandoned itself to a binary solitude: them (phenom-

ena of nature) and us (our all-consuming lacks and needs).

There is another kind of poem, which works out a different kind of negotiation between solitude and solicitude. Typically, this is a night poem. The poet is alone, in a room, with a view. He watches, listens, and contemplates. He is by himself, but the presence of others at a distance keeps humanity in touch, even if from a distance that requires no direct engagement or personal interaction. The scene of writing ensures that the poet does not turn his back on the world and brood inwardly to the exclusion of general humanity. This scene recurs throughout Mahon’s career.

“Afterlives,” from *The Snow Party* (1975), lays the scene thus: “I wake in a dark flat / To the soft roar of the world” (CP 57). Another variation is played out in “The Mayo Tao,” which adopts the posture of the poet withdrawn from human society to commune in solitude with nature:

My days are spent in conversation  
with deer and blackbirds;  
at night fox and badger gather at my door. (67)

The mood and its corresponding mis-en-scène are not confined to the USA. We meet it again in “Dawn at St. Patrick’s”

I sit on my Protestant bed, a make-believe existentialist,  
and stare at the clouds of unknowing. [...]  
and try to figure out  
what brought me to my present state— (151)

Back in New York, the stage is set again for the same predicament, as in the second poem of “New York Time”:

Here I was, sitting quietly in my studio  
and grading papers with the radio low  
as Pascal says we should [...] (CP 163)

The communion between solitariness and the night deepens its colour in the first poem, “Night Thoughts” from the sequence “Decadence”:

Night thoughts are best, the ones that visit us  
where we lie smoking between three and four  
before the first bird and the first tour bus. (195)

Sententious solitude, ancient memory, night  
and silence, nobody here (196)

Sometimes self-reflexivity can afford a little sardonicism or two, as in the second poem of the sequence, “Axel’s Castle”:

“I sit here like Domitian in a hecatomb of dead flies,  
an armchair explorer in an era of cheap flight” (197).

A later poem like “The Widow of Kinsale” show how this ensemble has settled down into a habit of mind which reassures itself whenever frustrated or distracted by the whirl of the contemporary, of how:

[...] my true guiding spirit  
is something I inherit,  
a thing dim and opaque,  
a lighthouse in the fog,  
a lamp hung in a wood  
to light my solitude. (266)

And the right locale for such recovery is identified in “Where to Hide” as:

“Some derelict beach hut or abandoned wreck  
as in that strange novel by Yann Queffélec” (273).

An early poem by Wallace Stevens, “The House Was Quiet and The World Was Calm” (Stevens 311) is echoed by Mahon in the title poem of *Harbour Lights* (1995); “It’s one more sedative evening in Co. Cork. The house is quiet and the world is dark” (281).

And the same poem broods morosely at how “I toy with cloud thoughts as an alternative to the global shit storm that we know and love” (284).

This is a predicament to which the only antidote is “a sphere of influence where thought incubates with midnight oil and those harbour lights” (285).

Consider a more recent instance of the poet brooding alone at night in a little more detail. In the poem “The Seasons,” the speaker sits by “lighthouse in the early dusk” (AW 26), watching, in the light of a setting sun, a seascape that includes “yachties, blow-ins, quiet drunks / and the new girls with parasols in their drinks” (27). They all watch “a yawl, Bermuda-rigged,” and he watches them all, by himself but not alone. This type of poem recurs often through Mahon’s career. In “Insomnia,” for example, the speaker contemplates from out the window of his sleep-deprived wakefulness the *mise-en-scène* of his solitariness, which includes in its list of “chimneys, power plants, gasometers, / oil refineries, Gothic spires / And things like that,” “a woman from some foreign shore,” whom he has met by some roadside, but does not know. The glum and drab enumeration leads the poem to its prepared surprise of an ending, in which “a soul screams/for sunken

origins, for the obscure sea bed/and glowing depths, the alternate mud haven/we left behind” (CP 294-95). Having given room in the consciousness of his speaker for that scream, the poet ends with a wry reflection that is a form of making-do with things as they are, for “Once more we live in / ‘Interesting times.’” The reader is free to decide whether to find that plausible even as a placebo, or to treat it as a sort of wry shrug.

The Indian poems from the third part of *An Autumn Wind*, ascribed as ‘raw material’ to “The fictitious Hindi poet Gopal Singh” (AW 66), add two nuances to the Mahon repertoire. India itself—its urban bustle, its crazy mix of contraries—can be captured economically through metonymy, and the very first such poem has two stanzas of quoted captions from bill-boards and city advertisements, their metonymic detail sufficient to capture the ethos without needing any commentary from the poet:

*Tata. Maruti. IndiCom. IndiGo.*

*Bavinder Ready Cash. Dubai*

*Is Closer than You Know.*

*Unwind beneath the Goa Sky. (AW 67)*

The evocation of the sights, sounds, and unique cultural markers that give a place and a time its quiddity can thus be shared with readers as part of the cosmopolitan poet’s capacity to encompass difference and open his own sensibility to interaction with relatively unfamiliar cultures and contexts. The poet may not be there long enough to grow roots, but by pausing to immerse himself for a while in that element, he keeps himself open to change, and holds solitariness at bay. If the heart of standing still is that you cannot fly, as William Empson had remarked (Empson 69),

to keep flying from place to place might help keep the heart from going still.

The second nuance to the poems with an Indian setting is the opportunity to bring in references to the Indic belief-system of cyclic rebirth, which when linked to the belief in the immortality of the soul shared between the Indian and the ancient Greek worlds, allows the poet a double-opportunity: irony at the new sense in which what goes round can come back again; and some serious fun at the expense of the idea that everything around us, including ourselves, is part of a

gigantic recycling process, a cosmic and continual metamorphosis which keeps both the alarming and the reassuring aspects of contemporary reality in suspended potentiality: "Avatar and aviator, / I who was once a virus, / once a mosquito, / begin to re-imagine / my previous lives" (AW 69), remarks the poem "Raw Material," punning on the recognition that if one buys into this belief-system, there may be no certainty or fixity to selves and lives, but a peculiar reassurance that the ceaseless mutation will not let the bright glare of a ruinous modernity persist into our futures. Benjamin's Angel is indeed being blown backwards into the future, but with this option of a wry joke as a thought-bubble. Curiously enough, there is no mention of Nirvana or Moksha in the world of Gopal Singh. The poem "Recycling Song" has some reasonable fun with this: "Be careful with that refuse, / respect that wrapper; once / in another life that bottle was your friend" (75). A little more seriously, as in "The Great Wave," nature too plays its role in this script, and if a tsunami smashes up a coastal town, it also throws up "some soapstone Madurai / devotional figures" (77) that might be speak a temple fragment buried for long beneath the sea and now allowed to resurface and mix with the debris of contemporaneity. And if the allotments of karma keep the deprived "gazing at lighted windows with rapt faces" (78) in "Up at the Palace," who knows but one day their time will come and they too "will sip champagne one of these years" (79). The volume ends on the reflective question: "what do we worship now the gods have gone?" (79); and we may answer it any way we choose, but reminded of a context in which the idea of things moving in cycles is kept in continual motion.

A quick reading of the recent work suggests that the poet applies himself these days to forms of fictive retrieval, occasions made up for the self

and it others to meet, in "the shadow of a presence, / a long sought community." In such fictions of avowal, solitariness is never shed; but how it may be configured keeps changing, as the experience of solitariness learns to distinguish itself from solitude. The former is the result of some combination between predilection and chance: the price of how one lives. The latter bespeaks the need to reflect on self-belonging and self-possession. It is a concession to anxiety or care for the self, and admits to a wariness and weariness at the toil and effort of caring for others. In Mahon's recent poetry, the two cross each other's path in poetic fictions of conversation and engagement, enabling the poet to share in the possibility of relations in which "our own miniature self-regard" is circumscribed wherever it occludes selflessness. That, I have argued, is the difficult gift proffered by the poet not only to his readers, but also to himself: an amelioration of how one is, minute to minute, year by year, poem to poem, singular among crowds, private yet aligned, even if only in the gesture that is poetry.

#### Abbreviations Used

- AW Derek Mahon, *An Autumn Wind*, Loughcrew, Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2010.
- CP Derek Mahon, *New Collected Poems*, Loughcrew, Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2011.
- LE Derek Mahon, *Life on Earth*, Loughcrew, Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2008.
- RM Derek Mahon, *Raw Material*, Loughcrew, Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2011.

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# Reading Damon Galgut's *The Promise* as a Neomodern Novel

Dr. Ihsan-ur-Rahim Malik\*

## Abstract

Neomodernist novelists seek to recreate and rearrange the basic propositions and methods of modernism not to just to keep the modernist enterprise alive but also to expand its range of presentation and interpretation. The art of Neomodernist novelists falls in line with that of their predecessors in that it endeavours to analyse innermost emotions and state of things as they actually are using typically modernist procedures. In other words neomodernist novelists subject modernist principles of taste and style to a new process to analyse contemporary issues. The paper examines how Damon Galgut, in the novel under reference, employs typical modernist strategies to foreground the complications and complexities issuing from an Afrikaner family's inability to keep the promise of passing on a bequest to their Black servant, Salome. This by implication parallels the situation engendered by the policy of racial discrimination or segregation (apartheid) formerly practised in South Africa. It also analyses how the use of characteristic modernist techniques like narrative flexibility, which is easily perceptible through oscillating points of view, allows the author to present the characters from divergent perspectives. Finally the paper looks at how this panoptic narrative perspective lends meaning to the sequence of events.

**Keywords:** *Neomodernism, Narration, History, Family, and Politics.*

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**D**amon Galgut is a South African Novelist and playwright who started writing fiction when he was in his teens.

His books *The Good Doctor* and *In a Strange Room* were shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2003 and 2010 respectively, but he had to wait until 2021 to win this prestigious prize for his ninth novel entitled *The Promise*. His early novels, written in the 1980s, were based on divergent and somewhat apolitical themes. However, since the 1990s Galgut started engaging more explicitly with politics and his book *The Promise* is typically reflective of this thematic shift in his fiction.

Drawing from modernist fictional style, Damon Galgut makes use of a unique narrative technique in his book *The Promise* (2021), to express his reaction to certain communal and political events which had far-reaching socio-ethnic implications in South Africa. His ingenuity is pretty clear from this technique which he carries forward from some of his earlier works. What proceeds from this experimentation is a queer coalescence of divergent thoughts and attitudes. This is partly owing to the fact that the novel strenuously attempts to foreground a comprehensive and even-handed outlook which makes it difficult to strike a balance between artistic and moral-ethical concerns. The novel however is not blunt or offensive nor does it ignore complications or complexities of the theme with which it deals. The analysis of certain instances of lack of justice or the violation of rights tends to become less virile owing to the extraneous influence of certain scruples which bear upon the interpretation of events in the form of the narrator. The novel opens in the mid-1980's amid the declaration of emergency in South Africa which was aimed at stifling intensive dissent. This declaration allowed law enforcing agencies to apprehend or restrain anyone to ensure what they perceived

as public safety without the detainee having any right to appeal. Such racial discrimination and segregation was characteristic of the official policy of apartheid practiced in the Republic of South Africa. The story revolves around a white family (Swarts) who have to their name a badly maintained farm situated in rural South Africa. The family is provided for by Herman Swart a fanatical racist and a neo-convert to religious belief who is unwilling to reconcile with any social or economic change. The book begins with the passing of Rachel, Hernam's wife, who has borne him three children, Anton, Astrid, and Amor. The title of the book, *The Promise*, is highly suggestive and refers to Rachel's deathbed-declaration of bequeathing a house situated on the farm to Salome, the black servant of the family. The Swarts however renege on their promise refusing to hand down the bequest to her. This accounts for the moral bankruptcy and trust deficit which had come to define communal relationships in South Africa.

As far as its distinctive style is concerned, *The Promise* is a neo-modernist novel in that it makes dexterous use of the modernist narrative and stylistic approaches. Describing the dynamics of neo-modernist fiction, Monica Latham in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism and Neomodernism* remarks:

Neomodernist texts are not concerned with any ludic relationship with the fictional predecessor in the way post-modernist texts are; they do not rely on close textual transformations but renegotiate, enhance and further the modernist literary heritage in general. It is not so much a matter of commenting on or laying bare the mechanisms of the original work, but of continuing the aura, that is to say the recognisable narrative

tools and stylistic devices, of modernist literature. In short, in their neo-modernist narratives, authors reanimate and reinvigorate the very methods and strategies their postmodernist counterparts sought to mimic and parody. (130)

Besides this, *The Promise* is a neomodernist novel also because it appears to advocate the presence of a universal truth and clearly rejecting the postmodern position that the substance of that which exists depends on the perspective of the beholder. As one would expect, the author's intention as represented in his work is not irrelevant in neo-modernist scheme of things.

The narrative brings together ideas and styles from diverse sources. The adjustments which the author makes to expand the ideas in a discourse tend to inform the narrative in a typical neo-modernist style (Babb 3). In the process he seeks to represent the characterial cerebration in a manner which is true to life. The narrator speaks from a position which is not clearly delineated in that the narration oscillates between different narrative points of view. At times the narration converges on specific characters, while at other times; it tends to become more objective. For the most part, however, it reads like a revelation of the flow of ideas and feelings of the characters which make it correspond to the stream of consciousness technique. Galgut is careful about maintaining the balance in the narrative particularly when he endeavours to describe the distinctive traits of the characters through their words and actions.

A striking feature of Galgut's fiction is that most of his characters live through disconcerting feelings proceeding from the experience of human responsibility and freedom. They have to contend with inner conflicts to try to harmonise discordant feelings and ideas. Familial intricacies,

which manifest themselves in a bitter strife with their kindred, pose insurmountable problems to them. Last but not the least; the prevalent political instability leads them to grapple with nagging theological questions. They constantly try to come to terms with this chaos so that they can endure the vicissitudes of life. Galgut's fiction is melancholic but, at the same time, realistic to the core.

As mentioned earlier, the story proceeds from the promise made by Rachel to Salome of giving the latter proprietary rights of the house in which she resides. The members of the family however struggle to reach an agreement on whether the promise should be upheld or not. The sequence of events in the novel however point to the country's cold, cruel, and stormy past punctuated by events suggestive of the rampant discrimination, violence, and dissent as well as the reconstructive attempts which were made to control the situation (Barris 97). The novel analyses the dynamics of the coalescence history and collective identity of South Africa. Pertinently, as seen in the narrative, this identity manifests itself through beliefs, attitudes, and sensitivities.

The Swart family, which is made up of differing character types, disintegrates as the members start breathing their last in a continuing series. The egotistical Astrid lacks fidelity to her spouse which leads her to betray him. Anton, on the other hand, has done some wrong while discharging his professional duty as soldier. This weighs heavily on his consciousness. Amor who is favourably inclined towards fulfilling the promise made to Salome is probably, the most compassionate member of the family. The Swart family's indisposition towards upholding the promise was not the only problem. The passage of land to Salome had complicated legal implications as well.

What separates *The Promise* from Galgut's other fictional works is the clearly perceptible neo-modernist technique which he employs in the novel. The novel is seriously thoughtful and expresses profound personal emotions and observations. The uniqueness of the technique, as pointed out earlier, manifests itself in terms of the alternating narrative perspectives. Many expositions are meant clearly for the reader where he becomes the conspicuous recipient. At times, such a neo-modernist approach can make one feel alienated, disoriented or out of place. However, in the novel under reference, it has a different impact and accounts for the flexibility of the pervading narrative force impelling the reader to move with the story. This is what makes the novel so delightful and charming. The style and technique adopted by Galgut triggers, in the reader, a feeling of overwhelming admiration for his art. In line with the modernist approach he weaves together a story which interrogates the dynamics of political unrest while investigating moral imperfections which land his characters in unpleasant situations. He does all this with the kind of dexterity which allows the reader to comprehend the motivations, perspectives, and experiences of his characters so that he can identify with their emotional states. Monica Latham asserts:

By reproducing and reconfiguring the fundamental principles and techniques of modernism, the neomodernist practitioners of fiction have 'sustained the modernist project beyond its heyday of the 1920s and 1930s' (Bradford 5). They nod allegiance to modernism in the sense that they tend to represent inner moods and external reality with modernist tools, that is to say they make use of modernist aesthetic approaches and formal strategies which are reworked and carried forward to depict their present-day concerns (129).

Galgut's degree of skill in handling opinions and attitudes is palpable throughout the narrative. He consistently establishes perspectival positions which differ diversely from other existing positions. The narrator understands everything about the characters and portrays their behavioural attributes with utmost precision. The narrative is put together with exemplary skill and presents an intense description of a family beset by seemingly insurmountable difficulties. At the same time the narrative foregrounds certain constraining national problems which impede restoration of order. Galgut dissects his characters engagingly in the style of influential modernists like Woolf and Joyce but at same time he has the ability to detach himself from their experiences and analyse them objectively. Modernist writers sought to find refuge in literature to circumvent the disillusionment issuing from the inconsistencies of politics and morality. However Galgut's *The Promise* compels one to believe that aesthetic has the power to redress the inconsistencies of history and politics. Nonetheless, what Galgut seems to suggest is that the effect of the socio-political turmoil analysed and reflected in his book is penetrant to the extent that it has debilitating psychological implications. Consequently such a perplexing political situation obviates the fulfilment of all personal commitments and promises. Galgut's fiction is reflective of his sensitive perception of the aesthetic qualities and values associable with the modernist novel. The technical as well as thematic similarity between some of the modern novels and *The Promise* is easily recognizable. Like some of the modern novels, this novel too is centred around a situation pertaining to the proprietorial and moral rights vis-à-vis the possession of a house. However, as pointed out above, what makes the novel quintessentially neo-modern is the use of typical modernist techniques like narrative versatility which manifests itself in terms of the shifting

points of view. This allows the author to present the characters from differing perspectives and be critical of them. Such authorial judgement and interpretation helps the readers to understand and appreciate the characters better.

Galgut's narrative experimentation in *The Promise* is somewhat unrestrained. A generally solemn and melancholic narrative is enlivened by the distinctiveness of style through which characters and situations are examined from within and without. At other times one comes across narrative drifts which separate themselves from the principal course of the narrative to present the particulars of certain events and occurrences in a way which is contrary to what is expected, as demonstrated by the following lines:

Then Rachel is gone, truly gone. She came here as a pregnant bride twenty years ago and hasn't left since, but she will never walk back in through the front door again. In the hearse, I mean the house, a certain unspoken fear has ebbed, even if people aren't sure why and it's barely been said in words. Most of the time, in fact, its words that deflect fear... (Galgut 18)

Galgut's narrator is versatile who's expression juxtaposes nuanced and straightforward tones which in turn facilitates the relative importance of situations. The narrator is all-knowing yet the narration is not plain or open and this is what makes the characters complex. Such narration makes the novel more appealing and interesting as it attracts attention to the narrator's recognition and expression of the peculiarities and incongruities inherent in different characters and situations. Having the characters perceive themselves critically with their own eyes as well as through the eyes of others situates them properly in the narrative. The author probably alludes

to the fact that their very existence is subject to alteration as they are embroiled in an intricate and perplexing political situation which has the potential to obliterate their experiences. This narrative flexibility offers some relief in the face of seemingly inexorable and relentless gloom.

*The Promise* then is a book about the vicissitudes of history and the complexities of inheritance. The narrative beautifully represents ideas and principles through figures, situations, and characters. For the author the impulsion for such writing seems to be both historical and personal and in this sense it aptly exemplifies literature born out of dissent and socio-political instability (Penfold 998). The property of the Swart family serves as symbol for disputed territory. This notion is put forward by the narrative through a dexterous and pronounced description of a series of related events. A White South African family has dwelt in a farmhouse for years on end but is kept by unavoidable circumstances from continuing to possess the property. The implication is that the family is simply not meant to be the rightful owner of the property. The only viable course of action for the Swart family seems to be expiation which they can achieve by washing their hands off the property. Overall the narrative takes a gloomy view and eventually the South African struggle seems to lose its way between divergent attitudes and positions. The dispensation is not upright enough to ensure that civic amenities are made available to people which leads to further despondency and distrust among them.

Although Amor eventually decides to fulfil the promise made by her mother to Salome, her son Lukas, who happened to be Amor's childhood friend, is not just unappreciative but irate as well. Lukas is not able to reconcile with the Swart family's needless procrastination with respect to handing Salome the promised bequest:

My mother was supposed to get this house a long time back. Thirty years ago! Instead she got lies and promises. And you did nothing. Salome tries to shush him, but he keeps on. You lived off your family, you took their money, you didn't want to make a fuss. Now because all of them are dead, you come and give us a present. I saw you looking at it. Nice, nè? Three fucked-up rooms with a broken roof. And we must be grateful? (Galgut 200)

To him the delay means that that the promise has fallen through notwithstanding Amor's proposal of making all possible amends. It is difficult to judge whether Amor's altruism and considerateness seems to have the potential to alleviate the misery of Salome's family or whether such generosity and accommodativeness, by implication offers an antidote to the national feelings of betrayal. However it is quite clear that in spite of the novel's narrative flexibility the state of Salome's cerebration seems to run into a siding. Salome's desires, opinions, and sense of security regarding her expectations are principally and purposely ignored as Galgut endeavours to bring to light the fact that she is rendered speechless by the excesses of those who denied her a free and honourable life. In so doing, Galgut seems to assert that Salome's possible unwillingness to speak is more visible and persuasive than any argument could be but at the same time it is deeply demoralizing as well.

As a novelist Galgut pays strict attention to artistic procedure while his style is precise and impervious to anything inappropriate or extraneous. However what lends a subtle balance to his narratives is his ability to look at the brighter side of things. This distinctive ability often proves to be a pervasive influence which tends to change things compensatory. As pointed out above,

Galgut's narratives embody the force, substance, and liveliness of the modernist novelists like Faulkner, Joyce, and Woolf. Perhaps Galgut comes closest to the stylistic flamboyance of Faulkner. However in his animated presentation of the thoughts and feelings of his characters he bears a striking resemblance to Woolf's style. From Joyce he seems to borrow his preoccupation with the idea of death (Perry). The narrative covers the deaths of four members of the Swart family as well as the chaos and vexation that anteceded these deaths. The modernist elements are too visible in the narrative. What appeals the reader alongside its gravity and carefulness of thought is its gracefulness and sincerity of purpose. The novel juxtaposes humour and exactitude with insights which are indisputably true. However the novel has more to it; it makes you take a journey which not only offers significant insights into the otherwise obscure realities but is highly edifying as well. *The Promise* has often been compared to Forster's *Howards End* which like the former is also a book about a mishandled bequest and people in power who are obdurately uncompromising.

What distinguishes the novel as an extraordinary work of neo-modernist fiction is the play between the interrelated sequence of events and an intensive and all-embracing perspective from which the story is told. All of this is held together by profound and overarching symbolism. The perspective traverses several consciousnesses to accommodate the natural as well as the supernatural as is evident from the following lines:

You get the idea. She touches down where her spirit was once thick, but she's no longer solid, a watercolour woman. In the crowd she is just another face, not much evident. She crosses large distances as if going from room to room; looking for something she's

lost. In these appearances she wears different items of clothing from her wardrobe, an evening gown, a flimsy summer dress, even a shawl she bought on appro once from Truworths and took back the next day. She looks real, which is to say, ordinary. How would you know she is a ghost? Many of the living are vague and adrift too, it's not a failing unique to the departed. (Galgut 38)

The flexible narrative voice offers insights into the cerebration of a host of characters which include the ones who suffer as well as the ones who are responsible for their suffering. It dexterously copes with variable circumstances and situations. In its various conspicuous movements the voice is incisive, disproportionately earnest, and intensely personal. At other times you find it to be expatiative, flip-flopping or self-correcting. The voice reaches out to the reader candidly perceiving him to be white South African who is made to feel that he is an unwilling participant in the impulsive discrimination and prejudice of the Swarts. On the other hand, as mentioned before, absence of Salome's voice is reflective of the parochialism associable with racial discrimination. Galgut's perception of the intricacies and inconsistencies of life is unique. He also seems to be considerably conversant with alterability of human consciousness. These perceptual skills

account for the multiteity and versatility in the narration and also for a providing a faithful picture of moral wrongs committed by the Afrikaners and their deleterious implications.

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# Seeking the Speaking Voice- Research Realms in the 'Third World'

Dr. Samson Thomas\*

## Abstract

Research in Humanities in the Third World/Global South is increasingly becoming a derivative exercise, leading to the loss of social relevance. Not just the methods of inquiry, even the topics of research are being dictated from the metropolitan centres, and even those who are conversant with the epistemic violence perpetrated on the non-west are victims/products of this theory-imposition. Restoring authenticity in research enroute to ensuring its social relevance, and finding 'voice' have become the major concerns of researchers in the field in recent years. This article advocates a critically-informed theoretical stance, and a few methodological manoeuvres derived from this stance, which together have the potential to address this issue plaguing research in humanities. Careful scrutiny of dominant theoretical postulates and approaches with a view to distinguishing between genuine theories, and those that are mere symptoms of the very socio-cultural phenomena they claim to analyse, and deriving the methods of inquiry from the objects of analysis themselves, by assuming a fluid connection between the subject and object of inquiry, are two of the research-authenticity reclaiming macro-strategies this paper advocates.

**Keywords:** *Authenticity, Social Relevance of Research in Humanities, Third World Research Scenario, Theory-Imposition, and Strategies of Resistance.*

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**I**n a letter to his student, Richard Feynmann, the Nobel Laureate physicist wrote to his student Koichi:

With you I made a mistake, I gave you the problem instead of letting you find your own; and left you with a wrong idea of what is interesting or pleasant or important to work on (namely those problems you see you may do something about). I am sorry, excuse me. I hope by this letter to correct it a little.<sup>1</sup>

Even those who don't readily subscribe to the recent trend in literary studies that sees meaningful research as that which is driven by the personal connection with a research problem, what, in other words, is idiosyncratically relevant for the individual researcher, which, in the case of humanist studies, takes the form of auto ethnography of some kind, must acknowledge the influence of the self, the personal, at least at the beginning of the research endeavour. Without this spark, research problems will lack the 'pre-given' quality of problems in life, like finding the right job or a compatible partner (Graff 45) and lose their relevance to the research community. Opinions that grow out of abstractions, arguments built on logic that is virulently counter-intuitive (Gornick 108), elusive to an interested and well-informed academic outsider, and newness for the sake of newness are fast becoming obsolete.

### Seeking the Speaking Voice

How many among us, involved in humanist studies today, are convinced by the flippant views on research/thinking like the one Paul McHenry Roberts was famous for? One wonders! To recall Roberts' in/famous words:

Say the assignment is college football. Say that you've decided to be against it. Begin by putting down the arguments that come to your mind: it is too commercial, it takes the students' minds off their studies, it is hard on the players, it makes the university a kind of circus instead of an intellectual center for most schools it is financially ruinous. Can you think of any more arguments, just off hand? All right. Now when you write your paper, make sure that you don't use any of the material on this list. If these are the points that leap to your mind, they will leap to everyone else too, and whether you get a 'C' or a 'D' may depend on whether the instructor reads your paper early when he is fresh and tolerant or late, when the sentence 'In my opinion, college football has become too commercial,' inexorably repeated, has bought him to the brink of lunacy. Be against college football for some reason or reasons of your own. If they are keen and perceptive ones, that's splendid. But even if they are trivial or foolish or indefensible, you are still ahead so long as they are not everybody else's reasons too. Be against it because the colleges don't spend enough money on it to make it worthwhile, because it is bad for the characters of the spectators, because the players are forced to attend classes, because the football stars hog all the beautiful women, because it competes with baseball and is therefore un-American and possibly Communist inspired. There are lots of more or less unused reasons for being against college football. (408)

This kind of academic posturing that Vivian Gornick claims that her mother sneered at (1987) is fast being confined to the realm of fiction, like the campus novels of David Lodge. Lodge's Morris Zapp articulates his author's (also literary critic like himself), self-ironizing stance vis-à-vis his own profession:

The classical tradition of striptease, however, which goes back to Salome's dance of seven veils and beyond, and which survives in a database form in the dives of your Soho, offers a valid metaphor for the activity of reading. The dancer teases the audience, as the text teases its readers, with the promise of an ultimate revelation that is infinitely postponed. Veil after veil, garment after garment, is removed, but it is the delay in the stripping that makes its exciting, not the stripping itself; because the sooner has one secret been revealed than we lose interest in it and crave another; .... the dance ends — but is our curiosity and desire satisfied? Of course not. ... Just so in reading. The attempt to peer into the very core of a text to possess once and for all its meaning is vain — it is only ourselves that we find there, not the work itself. (26)

GRIM (The Great Rumbling Ideological Machine) is Ihab Hassan's term (364) for the Zapp kind of research, the theory applique that trivializes literary and cultural studies.

The academy as an Ivory Tower with no access to the outside world, where

the search for truth is its own value, and fidelity to it mandates the accompanying values of responsibility in pedagogy and scholarship. (Fish 2004)

Fidelity is defined as rigid conventions with regard to setting up research problems (Booth and Williams 59-63), the so-called German model of research (Boyer 22), is a position that generates often its own opposite, the 'research-as-social-responsibility' argument, persuasively articulated by historians like Handlin:

Our troubled planet can no longer afford the luxury of pursuits confined to an ivory tower. Scholarship has to prove its worth, not on its own terms, but by service to the nation and the world. (129)

From a different angle, Michael Awkward, an Afro-American studies specialist, speaks of the necessity of personal investment in research and other academic activities.

One of my participation in such scenes of instruction is that I have become a scholar of twentieth-century Afro-American literary and cultural traditions. As such, I am well acquainted with depictions of commencements in black narratives that investigate the ironies of education in racist environments. The radical drama surrounding commencement in, for example, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* demonstrate that such celebrations are often sites of struggle between operatives of white society and forces of black resistance, both of whom seek control over form and content of African expression. (Awkward 1)

One should let Jacques Derrida have the final word on personal investment in the realm of arts and ideas here, not just because he generally

gets to say the final word, but his words are often stimulatingly different:

As an adolescent, I no doubt had the feeling that I was living in conditions where it was both difficult and therefore necessary, urgent, to say things that were not allowed, in any case to be interested in those situations in which writers say things which are not allowed. For me, Algeria in the forties (Vichy, official anti-Semitism, the Allied landing at the end of 1942, the terrible colonial repressions of Algerian resistance in 1945 at the time of the first serious outbursts heralding the Algerian war) not only or primarily my family situation, but it is true that my interest in literature, diaries, journals in general, also signified a typical, stereotypical revolt against the family. My passion for Nietzsche, Rousseau, and also Gide, whom I read a lot at that time, meant, among other things: "Families, I hate you." (Derrida 38-39)

Whether it is driven by the desire to make a difference, or over determined by personal investments of diverse kinds, the cognitive processes popularly known as research are often triggered by some major affect or other. The belief in the possibility of passionate detachment as the initiator of disinterested quest for knowledge has become quite difficult to sustain. The supposedly natural human trait for problem-solving, hitherto deemed an innate quality of the human as a specific, with its corollary idea of knowledge for knowledge's sake, has been put under erasure post Levi Strauss's structuralist thesis that knowledge of culture is at bottom an imposition of mental (binary) structures on socio-cultural processes, triggered by the desire for pattern, regularity, and order (1963). The slippage across the

Knowledge/Power binary that Foucault has posited (1972) is a more radical formulation Strauss's position. The varieties of anti-essentialism, ranging from post-structuralism to post-theory positions, view this as the central hypothesis, and the rejection of unmotivated objectivity is the first act in the demarcation of the field of research in Humanities.<sup>2</sup>

Following this line of inquiry, research problem in the Humanities very often is in the realm of narratives of the self and society. Chief among these narratives is what is bracketed as art, a rough-and-ready definition of art that is inscribed in us, thanks to our experience of art and culture from childhood onwards. In this definition art deals with "what the narrow and desperately practical perspectives of real life exclude" (C.S. Lewis 1947), what lies beneath the quotidian world.

As an eminent branch of the Humanities, Literary Studies, as one understands it today, requires the researcher to bring their literary experience (And there is no one who lacks it!) to the fore so as to 'like' a work and start reading it. This preliminary exercise in literary judgment is the beginning of research, in the spirit of Feynman's observation on research in science.

C.S. Lewis suspects that all acts of reading of literature, from the superficial 'reading for pleasure' to the well-informed critical/analytical, exercise the intellect:

When you see an immature or uneducated person devouring what seem to you merely sensational stories, can you be sure what kind of pleasure he is enjoying? It is, of course, no good asking *him*. If he were capable of analysing his own experience as the question requires him to do, he would be neither

uneducated nor immature. But because he is inarticulate we must not give judgement against him. He may be seeking only the recurring tension of imagined anxiety. *But he may also, I believe, be receiving certain profound experiences which are, for him, not acceptable in any other form.* (1947; emphasis added)

Turning to societal problems and issues that are mediated through narratives that humanist research is concerned with, seasoned researchers claim that a researcher's investment in these could be from a moral imperative like the desire to improve and enhance life in a community struggling to exist among other communities (Said 312). For Said,

[t]o read Austen without also reading Fanon and Cabral ... is to disaffiliate modern culture from its engagements and attachments. (50)

One acknowledges that solving-problems and making sense of the world by imposing patterns / structures / systems on it is marked by violence, material or symbolic; by this logic, meaning-making, and through that process becoming a whole person by telling one's story (R. Nash 41) is a benign form of realising the human potential, in the sense of an updated version of the definition of man (Burke 1964).

The researcher who is convinced of the personal-social connect of the research project as the driving force of genuine research still needs to define for themselves the questions that he/she/they needs to ask and answer in their situation, the kind of voice they need to make their research sound personally and politically authentic. How does a student of arts choose topics and approaches so as to avoid living in intellectual bad faith?

This intellectual journey, the process of initiation, starts with an earnest effort to define one's stance vis-à-vis dominant debates in the academies of the world — the topics/issues and the approaches to these. The scholar in the Global South can only articulate his/her views in terms that are circulating around them in the debates on culture and society raging within the academy. The position they occupy is thus secondary to the strategy of negotiation — it is immaterial if they look at their modernity as the ravages of the epistemic violence/cultural determination of their imperial past, or as the product of their intertwined history, shared with the cultures of the West.

In the case of the Indian academic scene, stalwarts like D. D. Kosambi furnish illustrious examples of this negotiation with Western thought as the first key stage in the process of research in non-western contexts. Kosambi's theoretical practice offers two different, equally important ways of responding to theories from the West as part of the efforts to obtain critical distance from one's own reality.

The first of these strategies is to grapple with Western theories dealing with Indian history and reality, to examine and evaluate their accuracy and explanatory adequacy vis-a-vis the socio-cultural phenomenon under scrutiny. Kosambi's critique of Marx's notion of self-sufficient Indian villages is the case in point.

Most villages produce neither metals nor salt, the two essentials that had mostly to be obtained by exchange, hence implied commodity production . . . . The villages did not exist 'from times immemorial.' The advance of plough-using agrarian village economy over tribal India was a great historical achievement by itself. Secondly, even when the size of the village unit remains unchanged, the density of these units plays

a most important role; the same region with two villages, or two hundred, or twenty thousand cannot bear the same form of superstructure, nor be exploited by the same type of state mechanism. . . . Change of quantity ultimately means change of quality. Similarly, we cannot let pass without challenge Marx's statement that 'Indian society has no history at all. . . what we call its history, is but the history of successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging (village) society.' In fact, the greatest periods of Indian history, the Mauryas, Satavahanas, Gupta, owed nothing to intruders; they mark precisely the formation and spread of the basic village society, or the development of new trade centres (Kosambi 11-12).

The rejection of Marx's idea of a self-sufficient village, more importantly the critical stance couched in "...we cannot let pass without challenge Marx's statement..." spells out the questioning attitude of the scholar in his encounter with a theory that he passionately embraces suggests the position scholars outside western academy ought to occupy.

One finds the "we cannot pass without challenge x's statement" stance in Alice Walker's response to Western feminism. Walker deconstructs the relation between Western feminism, the ideology of a group that clamours for a room of one's own, and the lived experience of a woman of colour, who often don't own even their own bodies (Walker 235) when Walker, the writer-critic, makes feminism the species, and womanism its genus: "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (Walker xii). A womanist is one who generously acknowledges the layered identity of the female of the species, their intersectionality, in contradistinction to what she sees as the narrow ideology called Western feminism.

Alice Walker's 'voice' is the gift of her critical stance, achieved through a rigorous scrutiny of theory in the light of lived experience, with experience being constantly kept at arm's length, so as not to become immersive.

Anyone who does not wish to be smothered by theory that has arrived on their land, travelling from distant shores, needs to walk with Walker and chew the cud with Kosambi. The major task here is to separate genuine theory from the pseudo-varieties paraded in the garb of theory. Insofar as theory is a crucial part of the intersubjective perception of the world, the other name of perception being construction, a theory that is completely immersed in its immediate context of production, is limited in its validity and relevance to wider contexts. In the realm of the study of narratives, the one-sided relations between the trinity of writer, text, and reader, one-sided relations that are attractively packaged as death of the author, the all-pervasive discourse, or the power of the reader to shape the form and meaning of texts, furnish an interesting case in point.

To attempt a contextual analysis of the middle term first ('text'): The failure of the Parisian Left to rise to the occasion during a revolutionary situation (Merquior, 1986; For a dissenting view, see Aijaz Ahmad, 2011) triggered the intr-group introspection, over why the oppressed sections of the society are unable to challenge their oppressors, and question the social and economic injustice that is their day-to-day experience. The answer provided was quite simple: these groups are made up of subjects, not individuals. Their subjection to the State, which is controlled by a particular class, is through the symbolic system that mediates between human beings and the world they live in. Freedom from this bondage is through epistemic scepticism, with the total

rejection of essences in favour of processes. The belief that the world one experiences is a text, a construct that is created systematically through material-symbolic practices (discourse), and this self-validating construct has no foundation, nor any metaphysical link, is the redeemer. This socio-cultural context of production and the ensuing emotional investment together lead to the leading theorists papering over the fissures in their theoretical positions. If the conversion of the self into subject is total, leading to the absence of the questioning attitude in the teeming, suffering multitude, how has the theorist/philosopher escaped this condition? If there is an excess that eludes the total conversion of the self into the subject, allows the self to return to itself, then how can the theorist claim that the conversion/subjugation is effective? Given the right conditions, when the situation becomes so desperate that the only direction from abject poverty is up, will the subject regain its selfhood? But the absolute relativism of the theory under scrutiny sees the 'world' and the 'self' as effects, and not as essences/substances, so what is the pre-subject self or the excess or trace?

The curious case of the 'author' is the next contentious issue. If the author has no privileged position as the creator of the text, being the effect of the text, just as the reader is, how does one explain the writing/reading process? How does one explain the incoherence or the absence of internal consistency that the popularity of reader-response theory is a manifestation of? After all, as the effect of the text and not as a pre-given entity (Scholes 655), how can the reader create the text (Herrnstein-Smith 1988) that they wrongly assume they merely read? Or is it an endless loop, a more open-ended version of rock-paper-scissors, wherein the text (symbolic network) constructs the writer, only to be re/constructed by the reader who, in fact, is a construct of the text (The death of the Cartesian ego the

postmodern intellectuals swear by implies this!) much like the writer?<sup>3</sup> While it is true that in the academy, no one can control the flow of ideas, the silence of the intellectuals over this and similar glaringly obvious contradictions, and aporias,<sup>4</sup> anomalies that threaten to alter the anti-essentialist paradigm, is puzzling.

It is in occupying the stance marked by the slogan "we cannot pass without challenge x's statement" that the student of society, of arts can find their voice, and the stance is partly enabled by this student's context. Indian scholar Aijaz Ahmad explains this with reference to 'Indian postmodernism':

The first irony that strikes me is its (postmodernism's) great popularity in countries like India and China. All the fundamental presuppositions of post-modern social and economic analyses refer to the structures of advanced capitalism. Looking at things from India, it seems implausible that post-modernist analyses could apply to societies that are not modern even by the standards of nineteenth century Britain or France or Germany. Nor is it possible to be post-industrial in predominantly agrarian societies (14).

The structure and the much-denounced superstructure (relations of production, social organization...) of advanced capitalism, which smoothen out the contradictions within and between theoretical positions, are less effective in our Third World/ Global South societies, making these fissures and fault lines in theory glaringly obvious to the Third World Scholar (TWS).

Take for instance contemporary postcolonial theory. Its progressive agenda is cultural self-determination, but nine-tenth of the insights are provided by theory that has travelled from the

erstwhile (and present-day) imperial/neo-imperial centres, even to the point of hijacking the postcolonial efforts to educate the West on the ways of its Other.<sup>5</sup> Even if one chooses to play down this ideological compromise, one can't help noticing that post colonialism is also plagued by the contradictions travelling theory has bequeathed post colonialism at the macro and micro levels of analysis. Post colonialism tacitly endorses the postmodern view that the text is the product of the 'author function' and not composed by the empirical author who has the copyright, even as spiritedly attacks the colonial, racist, patriarchal mind-set of such diverse authors as Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Emile Bronte, and closer home, R. K. Narayan and other Indian writers in English writing at the twilight of the Raj / on the eve of Independence. If the author is a mere victim/product of their society, it follows that the postcolonial critic is obliged to admit that their energies are wasted on tilting at the proverbial windmill. If, however, the apportioning of praise and blame is performed in good faith, postcolonial theorists will be forced to acknowledge the writer's agency in creating a work, thereby annulling the poststructuralist / postmodernist thesis of the totalizing power of the ruling ideology that annihilates difference and makes homogenised, standardised subjects out of individuals. Further, from a purely post-modern standpoint, the assumption that despite its multiple colonisations (double colonisation, Holst and Rutherford 1986; the 'subaltern' as the more marginalised within the colonised groups, Prakash, 1994), the colonial subject miraculously retains the capacity to nurture the desire, and hope for cultural self-determination through collective agency looks suspiciously like a postcolonial wetdream! Strategic essentialism (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 64) is a cop-out from the philosophical impasse.

A student of arts and ideas, who is located in the non-metropolitan academic contexts, occupies a unique vantage point from which the politics of post colonialism, race, and gender theories is potentially visible. What this student can see is a variety of theoretical anarchism (Ahmad 2011) where the collage-bricolage called postmodern theory is broken up into a thousand pieces, and the odds and ends of the postmodern theses are loosely put together as a construct in lieu of theory, in order to give the impression of a theoretically-informed resistance to the dominant ideology. If the Western eye sees this as 'becoming' (Gale 2010), as a radical, progressive move, and the West-trained eye echoes this view<sup>6</sup> TWS qua TWS ought to view it more as a sign of confusion, of indeterminacy. To quote Terry Eagleton,

A faith in plurality, plasticity, dismantling, destabilizing, the power of endless self-invention – all this, while undoubtedly radical in some contexts, also smacks of a distinctively Western culture and an advanced capitalist world. (xi)

It is worth emphasizing that the critical edge with TWS is partly a contribution of the location of this reader/scholar. This position has the potential to offer refreshingly different approaches to social and cultural phenomena, which can be arrived at through meaningful debates with the 'received views' on these phenomena.

The second strategy consists in drawing inspiration from the socio-cultural phenomenon itself, the so-called object of study, to arrive at the method of analysis, so much so that the analysis resembles the self-consciousness of the process itself, if that were possible. D. D. Kosambi's variety of historiography, his hypothesis that history is created by men in the act of fulfilling their

everyday needs, and his approach to history that hints at looking at the life of a people, here and now, as a clue to the history of that people, especially in the case of societies that do not have written records of their life, is the model response. This method is born out of the desire to understand socio-cultural trends of the present and the past in their dynamic interrelation. More significantly for this study, Kosambi's approach suggests that methods of analysis in humanities research ought to be aligned with the phenomenon under scrutiny:

Since by definition [the prehistorian] works with evidence other than written records, he sometimes turns for illuminating parallels to living peoples who themselves have not written history. Perhaps nowhere in the world can such parallels be found more readily than in India. (105)

The absence of written records of the life of a people in a distant era is not an obstacle to the historian for whom the past illuminates the present, this being the wisdom drawn from his reflections on his own experience in the present. His approach does not depend on written records alone, but on the interpretive routine/procedure that establishes the links between the present and past, and in a sense, creates a more authentic record of the past. This manoeuvre, which converts what is traditionally seen as raw 'data' that is often deemed to require reading against the grain, into a methodological resource, and thus a new way of creating historical narratives, one marked by the tracing of the vital connection between the past and the present, is ushered in. What Kosambi proposes is going against the fact-oriented scientific historiography of the major Western school to establish a hermeneutical historiographical tradition in which the horizon of the present society suggests the outlines of the past

society (Gurukul 2008). More importantly, Kosambi reminds those advocating a positivist/scientific approach to human affair that history is a human science, and the horizon of the historian has the potential to overlap with that of the group/s he/she chooses to deal with.

The ready analogy that suggests itself is from the realm of Greek mythology: Ariadne's thread. The maze of history, marked by conflicting wills, intentions and purposes, acts and their consequences, can be studied profitably when these human thoughts-acts are imaginatively recreated using the thoughts and patterns of behaviour of people in the present as a vital clue, much like Theseus braving the danger of getting lost in the maze by trusting the thread. In the case of the historian, the thread is the traces of the past in the routines of the present, and the historian's shared species-experience with the agents of the past.

The interpretive manoeuvre Kosambi suggests is born out of the firm belief that research in humanities is quite different from the methods of analyses employed by scientists, both in terms of the investigator-object of analysis connection, and the methods of inquiry that issue forth from the nature/feature of this relation. It is worth mentioning here that one of the profound ironies of contemporary literary-cultural theory is the hidden positivism and scientism of the supposedly anti-positivist/anti-foundationalist/anti-technological rationalist stance of this theory. After picking holes in the rhetoric of the advocates of a narrow view science, in which it is the epitome of objectivity, logic, and rigour,<sup>7</sup> 'Theory' (Patai's nomenclature: 2005) has let in positivism/scientism through the backdoor, the tout court dismissal of which is supposed to have freed the space for Theory. The single-minded effort to find an explanatory principle that will illuminate the 'discursive formations' across do-



mains including that of literary production, and reception (race, gender, 'other'), the massive amount of critical energy spent on identifying/conceiving an overarching concept/metaphor/category (self-fashioning, cultural nationalism, colonial archive, epistemic violence) reminds one of the arduous search for 'covering laws' to explain socio-historical developments, much like Newton Laws of Motion, popular during the heydays of positivism (Mandelbaum 1977).

American philosopher Stanley Cavell famously observed:

Science can be said to have no audience, for no one can fully understand it who cannot engage in it; art can be said to have in each instance to create or recreate its audience. (Cavell 5)

In so far as art, as the life breath of a culture, creates/recreates its own audience, research in humanities has to be seen as a nuanced interaction with the field of enquiry, at once constituting and being constituted by it field and the 'object' of scrutiny. In this model of inquiry, the 'object' is anything but inert matter. Even those researchers who are sceptical of Emerson's abolition of the difference between the subjective and the objective, and their corollary in the realm of methods, methodological individualism, and methodological holism, articulated in his famous speech:

the deeper he (the American Scholar) dives into his privatest, secretest presentiment, to his wonder he finds, this is the most acceptable, most public, and universally true. (1837)

It cannot totally deny the connection between themselves and the realm of human thought-action they study. Research in humanities begins with the acknowledgement of this

connection with the 'other' and the researcher approaches his/her 'other,' armed with the confidence that it will 'speak' to this researcher, if the resonance of the supposedly ordinary events with the 'major' ones is acknowledged and the living connection between the past and the present is endorsed.

Instead of imitating theoretical manoeuvres of contemporary Western humanities, characterised as it is by intellectual cherry-picking in the name of hybridization of the discipline, the borrowing of concepts-methods that is marked by "simple imitation and not enough a matter of imaginative adaptation" (Dogan 2000), TWS should aim at understanding the organic connection between the knower and the object of knowledge, and make use of this connection to arrive at methods of inquiry.<sup>8</sup> Kosambi's analyses of diverse cultural phenomena do just this.

In acknowledging the difference between scientific inquiry and research in humanities, and identifying the objectivist-compulsion in contemporary theory in the West, in other words, the discovery of the specific conditions in which western theory of arts and ideas is situated, this discovery being enabled by the researcher's location in the Third World, the humanities researcher can gain a certain degree of authority. This authority is born out of the realization that the TWS's studies have more claims to authenticity than the analyses of their Western counterparts. This authenticity, which is available to them through self-reflection, is the result of the vital role life experience plays in humanities research. The inner and outer aspects of human thought and action, the particular and the universal dimensions of events and their consequences are made available by, and mediated through, the researcher's life and experience as a human being (read social being). The objects and tools of their analyses of the humanities researcher are

those that have been derived from reflections on, and exploration of, their life-experience, and TWSs in humanities research are in a better position to appreciate this crucial difference between physical and human sciences.

Instead of falling into the trap of attempting to overturn the science-humanities hierarchized binary opposition, which seems to be the area wherein the metatheoretical energies of contemporary theories in humanities are being spent, evident from the popularity of Thomas Kuhn, Gaston Bachelard, and Paul Feyerabend, Bruno Latour, Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer among others, this researcher should see the subject and the object of inquiry as being in a dialectical relation, each continuously informing, and being informed by the other. More importantly, he/she should be less concerned (read less obsessed) with the onto-epistemological status of the inquirer's self, and the things they choose to study in the physical sciences, the favourite hobby-horse of postmodern theory, with Lyotard's *Report* being the notable instance.

It must be acknowledged that postmodern theory comes very close to grasping this old news (the reconciliation of the 'subject' and 'object' of analysis in the humanities), evident from the space that theories focussing on literary reception enjoyed even during the heydays of post-structuralist elevation of the text (Barthes 1974) and the near-total concern with the process of literary production (Macherey 1978). Unfortunately, the relation between the subject and object of knowledge (text and its reader, production of literature and its reception) was viewed as a one-sided relation, with the reader-text continuum being conceptually split into an either/or binary opposition (Weimann 19), leading to two different schools of thought, and a variety of text-centric and reader-centric theories.

The proposal for research rooted in its socio-historical context will become more concrete and specific, through a specific response, taken as an illustrative example. The researcher in the erstwhile colonies, while keen on analysing the processes that helped sustain colonial rule, with its limited military resources and native-administrator population, their interest in these processes born out of this researcher's desire to ensure "freedom from domination in the future" (Said 1994), ought to be sceptical of the extreme focus on culture to the exclusion other spheres of human activity (trade and commerce, polity, warfare...)<sup>99</sup> For a detailed analysis of the looting of India by the British Raj, see Shashi Tharoor (2018), "Saying Sorry to India: Reparations or Atonement?" *Harvard International Law Journal* in contemporary analyses of colonialism and imperialism (Ahmad 1995); they should also be nervous about treating the patterns of behaviour like mimicry of the colonial master by the native, which is at best gestural, a sign of "spectacular resistance" in postcolonial critics like Homi K. Bhabha's take on colonial resistance (Ahmad 370).

### Conclusion

The aim of the humanistic inquiry, particularly in contexts that offer the ideal conditions for this inquiry, is to be the voice of the self-critical society that can intuit the processes that have gone into its making. This amounts to seeking out,

what was already critical in a form of life, not least the sense of agency and transformative possibility implicit in its work a day activities and elaborate it to the point where it might constitute an alternative form of 'common sense.'

To quote Terry Eagleton's paraphrase of Gramsci (Eagleton, "Materailism" 144). One is reminded of C.S. Lewis' "narrow and desperately

practical perspective" of everyday living. The act of egging a society on to realize its potential for self-criticism, thereby contributing to the efforts of the society re-make itself in a vastly improved form and fashion, is fundamentally different from participating in the carnival of ideas, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term (Bakhtin 1965), where the radical alternative to the present order of things flashes in front of the academic community for a few fleeting moments, before the exciting vista of the alternative society is closed, with the spectator being reminded of the self-contradictions, and the resulting impasse surrounding the alternative society. When human agency is sinking in the quagmire of radical scepticism, marked by the levelling off of all discourses, which are deemed as equally legitimate language games, the optimism of the will (Gramsci 1920) is transformed into a phantasmal rope, and cold comfort for the one sinking into intellectual pessimism.

The new agenda for humanities research, discussed above, implies two major assumptions. The first of these is that the material and the ideational/spiritual co-exist at any given moment, in any situation. The real is neither ultimately symbolic, nor is the material, the thing, separable from the thought that makes it so, in some sense; the two are tied-up to our human condition, to our species being (Marx 1844). The second foundational assumption, closely related to the first one, is the provisional epistemological validity of all forms/systems of reflection – from common sense, intuition, belief, wisdom, lore, knowledge, to gnosis. This is a pre-condition to broaden... theoretical sights and extend the ... circuit of pre-occupation (Eagleton, "Sweet Violence" xviii).

The acute awareness of the nature/function of humanist inquiry, and the realization that this awareness is the gift of one's location 'elsewhere,'

away from Euro-American metropolitan centres, would help choose the issues TWS wishes to take up for analysis or join debates with, apart from marking out the lines of inquiry for them.

### Footnotes

- 1 (Letter dated February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1966, included in the anthology *Perfectly Reasonable Deviations From the Beaten Track: The Letters of Richard Feynman*, (1918-88). New York, Basic Books, 2005.
- 2 "It could be argued that as capitalism increasingly equates wealth with happiness (while also contradictorily asserting, of course, that the best things in life are free), interest as intellectual curiosity or concern is gradually ceasing to seem distinct from interest as material or economic concern, so that disinterested (detached, having nothing to gain) is becoming synonymous with uninterested (bored)." Catherine Belsey (1980), *Critical Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London, Routledge, 2002, 37.
- 3 C.S. Lewis offers a more persuasive explanation: The more imagination the reader has, being an untrained reader, the more he will do for himself. He will, at a mere hint from the author, flood wretched material with suggestion and never guess that he is himself chiefly making what he enjoys. The nearest we can come to a test is by asking whether he often re-reads the same story.
- 4 The most clichéd aporia is thrown up by the following questions: Is the thesis about the absence of a transcendental signifier the new universal, posited by a theory whose main contention is the absence of such universals? If, 'no,' if one were to train the sceptical gun on the trainer themselves, is this an invitation to free-fall down the rabbit-hole? If all

knowledge is situated, what is the epistemological status of the knowledge about the situatedness of all knowledge?

- 5 Robert Young, the deconstructionist-turned postcolonial theorist is the interesting case in point. See Aijaz Ahmad 1995, 29.
- 6 According to Homi Bhabha "...the formulation of knowledges that require our disciplinary scholarship and technique but demand that we abandon disciplinary mastery and surveillance." "Translator Translated: W. J. T. Mitchell Talks with Homi Bhabha," 113.
- 7 See Derrida's comment on Einstein's 'constant' in response to Jean Hippolyte (Stolzenberg 2004), the Alan Sokal affair (1996), and Paul Gross and Norman Levitt's attack on the academic Left in *Higher Superstition* (1998).
- 8 The quantum indeterminacy that has, in a sense, helped crystalize the impressions of the moment, the crisis of confidence in the Parisian Left, resulting in this notion becoming the central tenet of the culture critique of postmodern theory, bears ample testimony to this cherry-picking. Varieties of anti-essentialism and social-constructivism work with the hypothesis that the 'real' is an effect of a network of signifiers(text), which is a historical-rhetorical construct, without any substantial basis, and the signifiers are indeterminate (Différance), and texts are self-reflexive, in that they refer only to this indeterminacy. Heisenberg's contention that "the observer and the system, ... the subject and object, are thus seen as an inseparable whole that cannot be subdivided without introducing the indeterminacy specified by the Uncertainty Relation" (Hayles, 1984, 51) instead being seen as a critique of the narrow view of science, is taken

as a manifesto for indeterminacy, and a reductive view of the complex relation between a consciousness, one that is fully aware of its provisionality, and a world that this consciousness seeks to represent to itself through highly sophisticated processes of mediation and intervention, has resulted in the severance of the vital connection between thought, art and society. Anyone really interested in the study the realm of human will, desires, motives and actions need to see self-reflection as a powerful tool in the hands of culture in the process of constructing itself, and art, among other intellectual activities, as part of the culture's efforts at self-critique (Argyros 1990). When self-reflection is paired with a frivolous idea of indeterminacy, supposedly borne out by the multiple meanings of words taken out of context, art and theory loses their potential to perform a vital social function, which is holding the mirror to culture and the wasted opportunity is symptomatic of the alienation of philosophy and theory from society. Theory thus ends up articulating its own condition of production, instead of aiding any discovery of the connection between ideas and the material conditions of their production.

- 9 For a detailed analysis of the looting of India by the British Raj, see Shashi Tharoor (2018), "Saying Sorry to India: Reparations or Atonement?" *Harvard International Law Journal*, [harvardilj.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/Tharoor-Reparations.pdf](http://harvardilj.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/Tharoor-Reparations.pdf)

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# The New Bhakti Anthology: Redrawing the Contours of the Bhakti Canon

Dr. Padma V. Mckertich\*

## Abstract

This article posits a new kind of anthology of bhakti poetry that has been published in India in the twenty first century. Christening them New Bhakti Anthologies, the article identifies features specific to them: the putting together of compositions from different religious/spiritual traditions and the inclusion of a critical introduction that effectively reconfigures patterns of relationships between such traditions. The article suggests that the publication of such anthologies fills in certain gaps identified in academic discourses on the bhakti studies. It specifically examines three such New Bhakti Anthologies: *Extraordinary Child: Poems from a South Indian Devotional Genre* (Penguin 2008), *One Palace, A Thousand Doorways: Song lines Through Bhakti, Sufi and Baul Oral Traditions* (Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2019), and *The Mystic and the Lyric: Four Women Poets from Kashmir* (Zubaan 2019) as three such examples of the New Bhakti Anthology and considers the ways in which they trace new configurations of relationships between the saint-composers whose works they carry and the larger bhakti tradition.

**Keywords:** *Bhakti, Anthology, New Bhakti Anthology, and Critical Introductions.*

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The twenty first century has witnessed a boom in India in the publication of translated compilations of devotional/mystical/spiritual poetry composed by saint-singers in various Indian languages during the medieval period in the history of the subcontinent. This article will examine one kind of such a compilation – that of compositions of saint-singers from different spiritual traditions – and consider these publications as a new kind of bhakti anthology that allows us to reconfigure the bhakti traditions in India as a network of influences rather than a singular movement.

It is possible to classify these anthologies into broadly three categories:

- (a) Anthologies containing compositions of a number of saint-singers: some examples of this kind include *Extraordinary Child: Poems from a South Indian Devotional Genre* edited by Paula Richman (Penguin 2008), *The Mystic and the Lyric: Four Women Poets from Kashmir* translated and edited by Neerja Mattoo (Zubaan 2019), *Eating God: A Book of Bhakti Poetry* edited and collected by Arundhati Subramaniam (Penguin Ananda 2014), and *One Palace, A Thousand Doorways: Song lines Through Bhakti, Sufi and Baul Oral Traditions*, translated and edited by Shabnam Virmani and Vipul Rikhi (Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2019).
- (b) Compilations of works of saint-singers acceptedly belonging to a single tradition: among anthologies of this kind are A. K. Ramanujan's translation and compilation of the vachanas of the Virasaiva saints in *Speaking of Shiva* (Penguin 1973), Vijay Nambisan's translation and collection of late medieval Malayalam poems in *Two Measures of Bhakti* (2009), H. S. Shivaprakash's *I Keep Vigil of Rudra* (2010) which is yet another translation and compilation of Virasaiva vachanas and *Hymns of the Sikh Gurus* edited and translated by Nukki Gunindar Kaur (2019).
- (c) Compilations of compositions of a single saint-singer: among examples of this are *In the Bazaar of Love*, a collection of poems by Amir Khusro, the medieval Sufi poet edited and translated by Paul Losensky and Sunil Sharma, (2013), *I, Lalla*, a translation of the vakhs of the fourteenth century Kashmiri Shaivite mystic Lal Dhed translated and edited by Ranjit Hoskote (2013), *Verses of a Lowly Fakir*, a collection of songs of Shah Hussain, translated by Naveed Alam (2013), *Transgressing Boundaries: The Songs of Shenkottai Avudai Akkal* (Zubaan 2015), *Andal: The Autobiography of a Goddess* (2016) and Archana Venkatesan's translation of the songs of Nammalwar in *Endless Song: Tiruvaymozhi* (Penguin 2020).

All the books mentioned in the list above are translations of works which, it is generally accepted, were composed as part of the bhakti movement in medieval India – a movement that is notoriously difficult to define and date, one that has engendered a number of academic discussions on its various aspects, and whose identity as a 'movement' itself is today problematized. John Hawley in *A Storm of Songs* suggests the term bhakti networks rather than bhakti movement. He argues that 'networks' is grammatically plural, implies intricate interconnectivity, and it is notoriously difficult to trace a point of origin to them. The compositions themselves display a fine network of influences and deviations between communities that groups of saint-composers consciously formed. Focusing on three of the compilations from the first category listed above – *Extraordinary Child: Poems from a South Indian*

*Devotional Genre, One Palace, A Thousand Doorways: Song lines Through Bhakti, Sufi and Baul Oral Traditions* and *The Mystic and the Lyric: Four Women Poets from Kashmir* – this article will examine how the form of the anthology has helped in tracing hitherto unconsidered contours of connections between compositions of saint-singers and has also helped in encouraging unique forms of reading the compositions that have been included in these compilations. In focusing on this, this article will eschew any reference to these compilations as translations.

### The New Bhakti Anthology

The New Bhakti Anthology can be defined as a compilation of compositions of different saint-singers from across bhakti traditions, often brought together for the first time. These can be placed against what one may call the Traditional Bhakti Anthology that contain selections from the compositions of a single saint-singer or saint-singers belonging to a single community of bhaktas or devotees. The *Thirumurai* for example, partially compiled by Nambiandar Nambi in possibly the twelfth century CE, contains the songs of the Nayanmars (devotees of Lord Shiva) whose community identity had already been established by Sundaramurthy Nayanar; the *Naalaayiradivya-prabandham* was compiled by Nadamuni in about the ninth and tenth centuries CE and contained the *paasurams* or sacred utterances of the Alvars (devotees of Lord Vishnu) who had also already formed a community of their own (A. K. Ramanujan tells us in *Hymns for the Drowning* that “Inscriptions as early as the eleventh century mention endowments of land for the maintenance of reciters for the alvars hymns [13]), and that *Shunya Sampaadane* of the fifteenth century is “a collection of dialogues between the [Virasaiva] saints arising out of dramatized encounters, setting the *vacana* poems in live contexts” (Ramanujan 284).

The anthology therefore has been the most common form in which the compositions of saint poets were collected in early South India. Tamil has, of course, a long history of poetic compilations: *Pattupattu*, *Ettuthokai* etc., were earlier compilations of poems composed during the Sangam period in the history of Tamil. It is in this tradition that compilations such as *Thirumurai*, *Nalaayiradivya-prabandham*, and *Shunya Sampaadane* fall.

In contrast to this trend in South India, the songs of many saint-singers of North India do not appear to have been consciously collected. Eleanor Zelliott in *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon* cites Gail Omvedt and Bharat Patankar’s then-unpublished draft of the translation of Sant Eknath’s Abhang 4299 that lists the names and castes of Vishnu devotees (27) which may function as a list of some of the saints of the region, much like that of Sundaramoorthy Nayanar’s *Thiruthondar Thogai* which first listed the sixty three Nayanmars. However, the compositions of the Nirguni saints of the northern and western regions of India seem to have been passed on entirely in the oral and performative modes and continue to be a fluid corpus, constantly in flux.

Studies on the form of the anthology, such as Barbara Benedict’s “The Paradox of the Anthology: Collecting and Difference in eighteenth Century Britain” and Alberto Manguel’s “Sweet are the Uses of the Anthology” are heavily Eurocentric. Barbara Benedict, for instance, clearly connects the form of the anthology to the evolution of the print industry in Europe: “Print indeed,” she states categorically, “is essential to the anthology, for it only exists through copyright legislation and practices” (233). Alberto Manguel asserts that the guiding principle of the anthology is the desire to gather and preserve what are

considered the “the best of a kind” (Manguel). Both these studies are based on the premise that the introduction of the print medium supplanted the oral mode of transmission. This claim needs to be reformulated in the context of the Indian subcontinent, especially South India.

Graham Shaw in his chapter ‘South Asia’ in *A Companion to the History of the Book* cites Sheldon Pollock’s assertion that there was a well-established “pre-print publishing industry” in South India from the third Century BCE onwards. This, he asserts, precluded print publishing from supplanting the oral mode of dissemination. Shaw goes on to state that “Indian notions of cultural, religious, and literary authority and authenticity” heavily depended upon the cultivation of memory and oral transmission (126). Thus, the oral, the manuscript, the performative, and the print mediums flourished simultaneously and the printed word held no special power in this context. He goes on to argue that the well-established manuscript industry meant that, unlike in Europe,

print did not enter a world of non-communication and fill the vacuum ‘but’ simply expanded the range of modes of production and dissemination of texts. (131)

Romila Thapar too argues that,

curiously in the Indian religious tradition, even after the recording of religious narrative and discourse in a literate form, the centrality of ‘the book’ to belief and worship is limited. (203).

In the same vein as Graham Shaw, she too points out that given that training in the teacher-disciple mode of dissemination, or “the guru-sishya parampara was in origin an oral training,”

the text only functioned in an interventionist role (198).

The simultaneity of modes of dissemination means that although a number of canonical anthologies of bhakti compositions exist in South Asia, their centrality in the religious, cultural, and academic context in India cannot be taken for granted. This paves the way for new configurations of patterns of relationships between composers and spiritual/mystical traditions.

Despite Barabara Benedict’s study being tilted heavily towards the West of the globe, her descriptions of what constitutes an anthology are useful as is Christopher Kuipers’ study titled “The Anthology as a Literary Creation.” Barbara Benedict loosely defines anthologies as books that contain material that are collected self-consciously for consistency and quality and asserts that very rarely are pieces commissioned for the anthology itself (she contrasts this to the miscellany that is usually advertised for its novelty). One may put her ideas together with those of Chrstopher Kuipers who, in his study, identifies three steps in the formation of the anthology to list some aspects of the anthology form:

- (a) **Selection:** This involves the decision that the anthologiser makes in selecting the texts that will go into the anthology; the selection is, naturally, based on a criterion or rationale. In the New Bhakti Anthology, the selection of entries is what helps in creating the new configurations of relationships. The detailed analysis of the three compilations chosen for study will examine the rationale for selection in some greater detail.
- (b) **Arrangement:** This of course, refers to the way in which the entries are arranged within the anthology. While alphabetical or chronological are the most common kinds of

arrangements, Christopher Kuipers points out that there may be other forms and that editors can mark off parallels and variations (126). In the New Bhakti Anthologies selected for study here, the ways in which the entries have been organised also encourages specific patterns of relationships between them.

- (c) **Presentation:** Kuipers uses the word to describe 'The presentation of texts within anthologies' which 'often leads back to the creativity of selection itself' (126). For the purposes of our discussion, one may include here also the various components of the New Bhakti Anthology – notably the critical introduction and/or translators' note with which each anthology invariably begins.

The bhakti anthologies published in the twenty first century in India can be seen as continuing a tradition of compiling, translating, and disseminating the compositions of the saint-singers who are generally considered as part of the bhakti tradition. However, the one major difference between the anthologies one is considering and those that were compiled in the tenth or twelfth centuries CE is in the selection of the entries that make up the anthology itself. The Traditional Bhakti Anthology compiled compositions of saints who already saw themselves as part of a community. In other words, the rationale for selection was the already formed community to which the saint-singers represented in the anthology belonged, as was earlier noted.

The New Bhakti Anthology on the other hand, places the compositions of saint-singers from different traditions together, sometimes for the first time. The rationale for selection therefore, is not the community to which the saint-singers belonged, but very often the themes and/

or forms that they used in their compositions. *Extraordinary Child* brings together compositions translated from Tamil that were written in the literary form of the 'Pillaitamil;' *The Mystic and the Lyric* contains the compositions of four saints who were all women and who all lived in the Kashmir valley; *One Palace, a Thousand Doorways* brings together compositions of a variety of saint-singers from across three traditions that continue to be influential in the North-western regions of India. In other words, while the Traditional Bhakti Anthology worked as a space that reinforced the community identity of the group of bhaktas it was representing, the New Bhakti Anthology redraws the contours of that identity and forces all to see new connections across bhakti traditions, connections that may often challenge many of the deeply held notions of the bhakti tradition itself. The question of course, is why these notions need to be challenged at all.

The period of Indian history usually associated with the bhakti traditions roughly coincides, it is generally believed, with what can be termed as the medieval period in the history of the sub-continent. Studies usually 'follow' Bhakti from often fourth or fifth century CE as it travelled with the songs of the Alvars and Nayanmars from the Tamil speaking region and the philosophies of Acharyas such as Adi Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva to the North of the Vindhya ranges where, it is believed, Bhakti took the forms of Nirguna (devotion to a divinity devoid of attributes such as name, form and narrative) and Saguna (devotion to a divinity with attributes, usually seen as devotion to either Rama or Krishna). Many consider that it neared its peak in the Marathi speaking region with the songs of Sant Jnaneshwar, Janabai, and Chokamela in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and reached its zenith in the emotionally charged songs of

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in fifteenth century Bengal. These different strands of the tradition were usually seen as sharing some common features: (a) focus on an emotional (rather than a ritualistic or formal) relationship with divinity, (b) belief in the centrality of the guru in 'reaching' the divine, (c) impatience with social norms, especially related to caste and gender, (d) the use of the spoken languages rather than formal Sanskrit, (e) the use of folk forms (often oral) rather than classical ones and (f) the importance of the community of bhaktas. These characteristics have been used to define and study the many saint-singers who have constellated the Indian subcontinent down the centuries such as (and the following list is as inadequate as the list of anthologies given at the beginning of this paper) the Veerasaivas from the Kannada speaking region in about the twelfth century A.D., the Haridasas from the same region in the thirteenth/ fourteenth century A.D., the Kashmiri mystic composer Lalded in the fourteenth century, Arunagirinathar the Tamil saint-singer of the fifteenth century, Shenkottai Aavudai Akkal the Tamil Advaitic composer in the eighteenth century, Saint Tyagaraja, the Telugu composer in the nineteenth century, and the Tamil composer Subrahmanya Bharati in the twentieth century. John Stratton Hawley, in *Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* includes a map of the Indian subcontinent with the names of the "Major figures in the bhakti movement narrative according to V. Raghavan" (22), referring to the series of Sardar Vallabhai Patel Lectures delivered by the Sanskrit scholar V. Raghavan in 1964, at the invitation of the then Minister of Information and Broadcasting Smt. Indira Gandhi. The talks were interestingly titled 'The Great Integrators' and fostered the idea that:

The bhakti archive of India – its corpus of vernacular religious songs ready to

be sung at any moment – [provided] the country with a sense of shared richness that has no peer. (13)

Patton Burchett cites Prema Nandakumar's conception of the bhakti traditions as 'a transforming avalanche' of 'emotional devotion' that began in South India "and gradually swept its way across the subcontinent as a single coherent movement" (24). John Hawley also lists out what he feels are "The guiding themes of the bhakti movement": the singing of devotional songs in the bhashas, a mutual companionship on the part of the saint-poets, "a tendency to consider both sexes and all strata of society as potential devotees" and the prioritisation "of personal experience as against external or ritual punctiliousness" (6-7).

Recent studies have argued convincingly that bhakti cannot be defined in a singular way based on any of these assumptions. Significant among them is that bhakti was not a single coherent movement; this argument foregrounded that the plurality of approaches, forms of utterance and means of dissemination of Bhakti utterances.

A number of studies have offered alternative ways of conceiving of bhakti. A. K. Ramanujan had, as early as in 1992 in his article "Talking to God in the Mother Tongue," insisted that "There are many kinds of bhakti, though we speak of it in the singular. The variety is immense and we ought to attend it" (53). Aditya Behl had proposed in his essay a model of conceiving of bhakti "as a historical dialogue" (321), "Multiple movements, a spectrum of views, an echo chamber, a hall of mirrors" so that we can recognize that it was "an intensely interactive and plural affair" (322).

Another important critique is that a number of narratives of the bhakti tradition have focused on an emotionally intense devotion towards a personal God to the exclusion of the saint-singers who sang to what Krishna Sharma in her much-cited *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement* calls an “impersonal God” (12); she points out that the emotional intensity and the seeming monotheism of Vaishnavism made it easier for the early British Protestant Indologists to identify with its devotional fervour, whereas the intellectual tradition to which the songs of saint-singers like Kabir owed allegiance was posited as the diametric opposite to these and hence ignored. It is interesting that A. K. Ramanujan defines bhakti as “personal devotion to a god” (7) rather than devotion to a personal god; the shift in the position of the adjective signalling, in what may seem to be a subversive way, the centrality of devotion rather than the divine.

That the bhakti traditions were almost always socially subversive and challenged caste-based hierarchy is also a narrative that has been countered in recent studies on the bhakti traditions. One may take recourse to Krishna Sharma again – while saint-singers like Kabir and Nanak openly defied the caste system, others like Tulsi-das, she points out,

upheld the sanctity of the caste system and the supremacy of the Brahmans. If the former had championed new social values, the latter had advocated the preservation of the existing social order and socio religious norms. (2)

A striking feature in many of these descriptions and definitions of the bhakti traditions is that it is described in almost entirely Hindu terms, completely ignoring the dialogue that obviously would have taken place between differ-

ent religious traditions and which is evident in the songs of many saint-singers like Lalla and Kabir. This lacuna has been identified by Aditya Behl: “The greatest gap or silence is the role of Islam and Islamic religiosity in the formation of the *bhakti* movement” (319), he stresses that he wishes to ‘upturn’ (319) the singularity implicit in the term bhakti movement. What makes this absence even more striking is that, as Vasudha Dalmia and Munis Faruqui point out, “The Mughal period can be seen as the golden age of bhakti literature,” yet “rarely are bhakti and Muslim religious formations considered together, let alone as acting positively upon each other” (Burchett 59). Dalmia and Faruqui trace this lack to the Hindi critic Ramchandra Shukla and “his orientalist mistrust of Islam” (59) – clearly Shukla was an unwitting victim of the kind of Euro-centric bias in Indology that Krishna Sharma was ardently pointing out. In what can only seem like a strange irony, Sharma herself completely discounts the interactions between Hinduism and Islam, even in the works of a saint-singer like Kabir: while acknowledging that he must have been familiar with the nuances of both Hindu and Sufi thought, she feels that “there are no positive marks of any Sufi influence in his verses, as against the overwhelming presence of the Hindu” (23). In contrast to this, Aditya Behl states that,

the formulation of new religiosities in the new regional languages of the sub-continent was an intensely interactive and plural affair, with genealogies that have to include Islam in a historically complex way. (322)

Kshitimohan Sen had, in his lectures delivered at Shantiniketan in 1929, pointed out that “the Mahomedans as well as their opposing ideals resulted in the awakening of the same *bhakti*

in the Northern India" (8). Hazariprasad Dwi-vedi too had pointed out that the influence of Islam had led to a new understanding of religion and had, like Kshitimohan Sen, "built Islam into the Indian record" (Hawley 243). Such studies notwithstanding, recent scholarship on bhakti appears to work with the idea of mutual exclusivity of religious traditions.

The New Bhakti Anthologies function as a space where the problems identified in academic studies on the bhakti traditions are addressed and an alternative model offered. These anthologies place together compositions of saint-singers from across the bhakti network and so encourage us to trace not merely thematic connections, but also intertextual links between them, thereby constructing an image of bhakti not as a movement but rather as a network across space and time with what Hawley calls a "deep history of oral intertextuality" (32), some contours of which A. K. Ramanujan traces:

Thus, the Virasaiva saints named the 63 Tamil Saints among their forebears. Saivism knits faraway Kashmir with South India and within South India the saints of Tamil, Kannada and Telugu. Both Kabir of the Hindi region, and Chaitanya of Bengal, were inspired by southern precedents. (1992, 21-22)

The three New Bhakti Anthologies chosen for study offer a view of bhakti that allows us to see networks of influences across traditions and thereby portrays bhakti as a set of plural, vibrant interconnected traditions.

### Three New Bhakti Anthologies

Each of the three New Bhakti Anthologies selected for study spotlights this plurality and the implicit intertextuality in its selection and arrangement of the songs. Simultaneously, the

critical introductions – both the general critical introduction and the sectional introductions in each of them – not only help the readers navigate unfamiliar literary territory but also actively foregrounds this plurality.

*Extraordinary Child*, hereafter *EC*, is a collection of pillaittamils translated into English; pillaittamils are compositions in which the object of adoration is conceived of as a child. The general critical introduction introduces us to the highly stylized conventions of this form of Tamil poetry that was originally composed within the Tamil theistic context. Thus, the form and the language of the original composition function as the selection criteria of the anthology which explores the ways in which different religious and secular traditions have worked with this highly nuanced form. Language, region, and gender form the binding force in *The Mystic and the Lyric* (hereafter *ML*): all the four women mystics whose compositions are collected here lived in the Kashmir valley and had composed in Kashmiri. However, the mystics themselves can be traced to two different traditions – Lalded and Rupa Bhavani are part of the Kashmir Shaivite tradition while Habba Khatoun and Arnimal composed lyrical romantic poetry which could be given mystical interpretations. The general critical introduction places the four women in their respective historical and political contexts and traces some strands of influences between them. Such influences and intertextual connections are made even more evident both in the general critical introduction to and in the selection of songs in *One Palace, a Thousand Doorways* (hereafter *OPTD*). All the songs compiled here are from the nirguni tradition that conceived of the divine as devoid of attributes. Despite Krishna Sharma's argument that most bhakti narratives tended to ignore devotion to the supposedly impersonal divine, the nirguni

tradition has been historicized and narrativized in bhakti studies. However, the nirguni tradition is usually considered as a singular tradition; the songs compiled in *OPTD* all approach the 'attribute-less' divine in markedly different ways: the subtitle of the collection, *Song lines Across Bhakti, Sufi and Baul Oral Traditions*, reinforces one of the two aspects that form the rationale for this collection; all the compositions, the general critical introduction tells, are part of a fluid oral corpus of compositions that challenge academic ideas of authorship and authenticity. Thus rather than considering nirguni as a tradition in itself, the anthology appears to consider it as a path followed by different traditions, although the introduction does refer often to it as a tradition. Nevertheless, the focus of the anthology seems to be to point out how,

Across poets, across languages, across regions, across religions, the poets seem to address similar issues, utter similar cries, call out in similar ways. (*OPTD* 30)

The arrangement of the compositions in the three anthologies is also very telling. *EC* is divided into three broad sections – the first part giving the readers a detailed description of the pillaittamil form, the second containing the actual 'Pillaittamils for Reading' and a third that contains 'Reflections' on the form. The naming and arrangement of the pillaittamils in the second section is particularly interesting. Each of the six chapters in Part two contains pillaittamils addressed to different objects of adoration, mostly retaining the names of the original Tamil compositions, such as *Tiruccentur Pillaittamils* addressed to Lord Murugan of Tiruchendur and composed by Pakalikkuttar and *Maturai Minatciyammai Pillaittamils* addressed to Goddess Meenkashi of Madurai and composed by

Kumarakuruparar; *Napikal Nayakam Pillaittamils* composed by Seyyitu Anappiya Pulavar and addressed to the Prophet Mohammad and *Iyecu-piran Pillaittamils* addressed to Infant Jesus and composed by Arul Celladurai. The last chapter in the section contains pillaittamils composed to Tamil Tay, or the Tamil language personified as a mother and composed by a number of poets specifically for the Fifth International Tamil Congress held at Madurai between fourth and tenth January 1981; the collection also contains pillaittamils composed to E.V. Ramasamy Naicker, popularly known as Periyar, probably the single most influential figure in the Dravidian cultural nationalist movement. That the pillaittamils are divided thus and not according to the paruvams or stages (growth of the child-God) as pillaittamils were traditionally arranged is significant; the chosen arrangement foregrounds the ways in which different religious (and secular) traditions have adapted the formal and thematic features of the pillaittamil to their respective contexts, rather than focusing on the formal features of the pillaittamils alone.

These adaptations are explained and discussed in the sectional introductions. For example, the sectional introduction to 'A Pillaittamil to Muhammad' tells,

When Islamic poets used the genre, they did not compose pillaittamils to the divine. The Hindu pillaittamil involves envisioning the poem's subject in a particular form, an enterprise contrary to the spirit of the Qur'anic verse... which excludes representations of the divine in the form of a baby.... Islamic poets did use the genre, however, to praise a number of those venerated within the faith, most notably the Prophet Muhammad, but



also members of his family and various walis ('friends of God') whose tombs are revered in Tamilnadu. (131)

Yet again, one is told that

In the majority of Hindu texts, the poet calls upon a different god or goddess in each verse of the paruvam. In the Muslim context, there is only one God, Allah, so Anapiyya alters the focus and extends the scope of the paruvam. (136)

The sectional introduction thus places *Napikal Nayakam Pillaitamils* within two traditions – that of the pillaittamils and of Islamic literature in Tamil. Most interestingly though, it traces similarities and differences between the *Napikal Nayakam Pillaitamils* and Hindu pillaittamils, revealing what a subheading calls "Multi-religious Poetic Patterns" (137). Such patterns are also made evident in the sectional introduction to *Iyecupiran Pillaitamil*, in which various intersections between the Hindu milieu and the Catholic context of the pillaittamils are traced:

In writing *Iyecupiran [Lord Jesus] Pillaitamil ...* Celladurai self-consciously set out to compose a pillaitamil that would achieve several goals. Inspired by the beauty of ancient Tamil poetry, he wanted to write a poem in 'Only Tamil' words, that is, excluding words and poetic imagery that came from Sanskrit, English and other non-Tamil sources. (158)

thereby placing the composition squarely within a Tamil milieu.

The critical introduction also discusses in detail another way in which both Seyyitu Anappiya Pulavar and Celladurai have reworked the

formal features of the pillaitamil, namely the ways in which the erotic elements implicit in the form have been, in many ways, de-eroticized.

In other words, one sees how a literary form is used efficiently in different religious – Hindu theistic, Hindu monastic, Islamic, Catholic – and secular contexts.

The arrangement of songs in *The Mystic and the Lyric* as well as the general and sectional critical introductions in it highlight the intersections between various bhakti and poetic traditions. The compositions of the four women that are collected in the anthology are arranged chronologically and not according to the traditions they follow. Thus, Habba Khatoun follows Lalded and is followed by Rupa Bhavani while Arnimal's compositions appear at the end of the anthology. Thus we have almost a wave-like pattern – Kashmir Shaivism followed by lyrical romanticism followed in turn by Kashmir Shaivism followed in its turn by romantic poetry. Such an arrangement allows one to see how different kinds of influences work across spiritual, literary, and religious traditions. Most of these influences are clearly spelt out in the general and sectional introductions: one is told that Lalded and Rupa Bhavani shared a spiritual quest but expressed it using different linguistic and stylistic tools while Habba Khatoun and Arnimal wrote romantic poetry that referred often, to the Quran in the former's case and to Krishna in the latter's. It is also informed that the compositions of both Lalded and Habba Khatoun have for long formed part of the repertoire of folk singers, reinforcing the intersections between the singers.

The critical introduction to *ML* spends considerable space in tracing the influences on the four composers whose songs it carries. The sectional introduction to Lalded, for example, traces

the influences of Buddhism and Sufism on the much-loved female mystic of Kashmir. While one is told that “traditional Hindu/Brahminical beliefs were challenged by the Islam of the Sufis” (xvi), one is nevertheless also told that:

the two religious systems or schools of thought were beginning to learn to come to terms with each other in an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. (xvi-xvii)

Thus the tradition within which Neerja Mattoo places Lalded is a syncretic one, made up of cross currents of tantric beliefs, Sufism and Buddhism.

In contrast, one might note that Ranjit Hoskote’s introduction to *I, Lalla*, while recognising the influence Lalded had on the Rishi school of Kashmiri Sufis, pays little attention to how different religious thoughts came together in the vakhs of Lalla.

The general critical introduction to *One Palace, a Thousand Doorways* traces many such inter-sections between the saint-singers whose compositions are collected in the anthology. This is perhaps all the more significant in this collection as almost all the songs in it are drawn from an oral tradition in which the notion of authorship and authority are far more fluid than in overtly textual traditions. Thus the collection alerts one to the various intertextual connections between the compositions of Kabir, Shah Latif, Bulle Shah, and Rahim – as well as in latter day compositions that make use of the names of this earlier composer because of the power and beauty associated with the names.

The critical introductions in all the three anthologies – and this is true of most New Bhakti

Anthologies – therefore function as a space that not only guides the readers into the socio-political, cultural, and literary milieu of the compositions that each of them contains, but also draws song lines (to borrow the word from *OPTD*) across these traditions. To this end, it is significant that each of the anthologies has both a general introduction and a number of sectional introductions; the former is more prefatory in nature while the latter more specific. This aids in the dip, sip, and skip reading method, allowing the reader to read any of the introductions to the compositions without needing to read the entire collection.

One might note in conclusion that recognition of such syncretism is a feature common to the critical introductions of the New Bhakti Anthology. This recognition means that the anthologies portray bhakti as a dialogue between different cultures and traditions and encourage to identify the nuances of these dialogues.

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# The Ambiguity of Pathology: The Ethical and the Neurotic in Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu's *Birdman*

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## Abstract

In psychoanalysis, pathology is broadly divided into two distinct parts: the neurosis and the psychosis. The distinction is based primarily on the subject-object relation in the three psychic registers. The lines separating them are quite ambiguous and as a result, any easy classification or intervention becomes difficult and problematic. Antonio G. Iñárritu brings out this ambiguity in his masterpiece *Birdman* (2014). The movie depicts the ambiguous position of the central character, Riggan Thomson, who is a washed-up celebrity trying to make a return to fame through his Broadway debut. In this paper, we will attempt to bring out the subtle differences separating Riggan's subjective position from a psychotic and also provide a reading of the ending, where we argue that we get to see the emergence of an ethical subject. The suicide attempt of Riggan becomes a Symbolic suicide, an Ethical Act par excellence because of its manifestation as a radical break, a paradigm shift that changes the very frame of subjectivity. The researcher proposes a reading of the film that locates in Riggan, a journey from the pathological to the ethical, in a similar vein to what the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan describes as navigating through desire and into the realm of the drive.

**Keywords:** *Drive, Ethics, Metaphysics, Psychoanalysis, and Symbolic.*

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### The Pathological and the Ethical: The Framework of an Act

**T**he notion of the Drive at first glance appears to have apparently distinct and opposing meanings in Kantian metaphysics and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Kant defines the pathological act as something that has as its motivation a compelling force— the name given by Kant to this force is the drive (Triebfeder). Anything can serve as this compelling force— from the most basic passions to the most abstract ideals. Kant formulates an action in the manner of form/content, where the form is the act and the content is the driving force behind this act. In this context, that which one calls normal life therefore becomes pathological. Normality itself is pathology (Zupancic 7). One finds a parallel here to the concept of neurosis in Lacanian psychoanalysis, where there is no ‘normal’ psychological state of a Subject; rather that very normality requires a symptom to be sustained. Normality becomes a neurotic position then. A neurotic always has an object of desire, that which drives their actions; and the relation between the object and the Subject is mediated by fantasy. The Subject fantasizes about possessing the desired object and this fantasy sustains the very subjectivity or ‘being’ of the Subject.

However, the similarities between Kant and Lacan run deeper than just the pathology of daily life. Indeed, Lacan took a great deal of inspiration from Kant, as he himself repeatedly emphasized in his seminars. According to Alenka Zupancic, Kant through his insistence on the primacy of form over content is not advocating a negation of content (drive) but rather making this ‘emphasis of form’ into the driving force (content or intent) of the action (Zupancic 14). This becomes evident by the following passage from *Critique of Practical Reason*, quoted by Zupancic:

a respect for something entirely different from life, in comparison and contrast to which life and its enjoyment have absolutely no worth. [Man] lives only because it is his duty, not because he has the least taste for living. Such is the nature of the genuine drive [echte Triebfeder] of pure practical reason. (Zupancic 7-8)

Here we see introduced a difference between drive (Triebfeder) and pure drive (echte Triebfeder), the latter getting defined by Kant as being the absence of any drives but nonetheless having the structure of Triebfeder itself. In psychoanalysis we find an echo of this in what Lacan called ‘objet petit a,’ which designates the lack of the object of desire, specifically how desire always constitutes in itself the demand for an object (something that is elevated to the position of The Thing or *Das Ding*)<sup>1</sup>.

The ethical act then coincides with what Lacan described as the end of analysis when the Subject becomes conscious of their symptom and through this awareness the very contours of desire is changed for the Subject. They are no longer bothered by whether the desired object is giving them maximum satisfaction or not; the object loses the position of *Das Ding* in the Subject’s Symbolic Order. This does not mean that the Subject takes on an ascetic life of renunciation of desire and sacrifice of pleasure, nor does it imply any kind of gradual shift of preferences. On the contrary, as highlighted by Zupancic, the loss is not seen by the Subject as a loss because the very subjective Order which would register it as a loss has collapsed: the Subject has been reborn; their new subjectivity is sutured by the Ethical Act. This Act always involves a paradigm shift, a violent cut in the Symbolic. One shall see how in Alejandro Iñárritu’s *Birdman*, suicide becomes an Ethical Act

and saves Riggan Thomson from a regression into psychosis.

### The Onset of Psychosis through Superhero Identification in *Birdman*

The difference between neurosis and psychosis can be expressed as the difference between repression (Verdrangung) and foreclosure (Verwerfung). In his seminar titled *The Psychoses*, Jacques Lacan describes repression in a neurotic as follows:

What is repression for a neurotic? It's a language, another language that he manufactures with his symptoms, that is, if he is a hysteric or an obsessional, with the imaginary dialectic of himself and the other. The neurotic symptom acts as a language that enables repression to be expressed. This is precisely what enables us to grasp the fact that repression and the return of the repressed is one and the same thing, the front and back of a single process. (Lacan 60)

The repressed therefore always includes within it a return. He further elaborates:

Verdrangung, repression, is not the law of misunderstanding; it is what happens when things don't hang together at the level of a symbolic chain. Each symbolic chain we are linked to comprises an internal coherence, which means that we can be forced at any given moment to render what we have received to someone else. Now, it sometimes happens that we are unable to do this on all levels at once - in other words, we find the law intolerable. Not that it is intolerable in itself, but the

position we are in comprises a sacrifice that proves to be impossible at the level of meaning. So, we repress some of our own acts, discourse, or behaviour. But the chain nevertheless continues to run on beneath the surface, express its demands, and assert its claims – and this it does through the intermediary of the neurotic symptom. This is where repression is at the base of neurosis. (84)

One sees then that neurosis always has a consistent chain, something that is sustained by the symptom, meaning, the symptom of a neurotic gives him the inner subjective consistency. In contrast to this, a psychotic position is defined by a foreclosure, a hole in the symbolic of the Subject. Psychosis always involves the Subject identifying directly with their symptom – the desired object. As highlighted by Arka Chattopadhyay in his reading of Lacan's *Seminar 22 R-S-I*, there is a difference in the 'beliefs' of a neurotic and a psychotic. A neurotic believes in his symptom's ability to speak whereas a psychotic goes a step further and also believes in what the symptom has to say.<sup>2</sup> This results in a complete identification with the symptom in the case of a psychotic and marks a shift in the matheme of fantasy:  $\$ \diamond a$  (where '\$' is the Subject and 'a' is the object of desire) becomes  $\$ = a$  (Chattopadhyay 10). A psychotic subject therefore fully identifies with his fantasized object; he becomes the object, thereby getting rid of the mediation of fantasy. Now in the context of the movie, we shall see how Riggan displays this absolute identification with his symptom, the superhero figure of Birdman. However, the important thing to keep in mind is that psychosis does not fully take hold of Riggan and retroactively one can show how Riggan's position differs from that of a psychotic, despite certain similarities. Such similarities further prove

the ambiguity associated with neurosis and psychosis and the difficulties in analyzing them, something which Lacan repeatedly warned and emphasized in his third seminar.

Before going into the plot and the events it would be worthwhile to observe the cinematic techniques used to film the movie. The movie is filmed to look like a single-shot movie and apparently has a total of sixteen visible cuts. This single-shot take creates a very interesting effect from the perspective of the viewers - it blends reality and fantasy; one is never sure which action is taking place in reality or what is being fantasized by a character, often times, the reaction of the other characters serves as a guiding point for the viewer to deduce the actuality of the situation. A good example is the morning after the first preview, when Riggan learns that Mike had given an interview belittling Riggan. After a heated scuffle, Riggan returns to his dressing room and upon being chastised by Birdman, starts trashing the place. The segment begins with him apparently using his powers to lift up objects and throwing them around, until eventually his friend and lawyer Jake shows up and then we see that Riggan had been using his hands and there never were any superhuman powers involved. The movie has many such moments blurring the lines, where the gaze shifts from Riggan's to someone outside of his fantastical construct. Director Iñárritu plays with this uncertainty inherent to fantasy and reality from the very first scene till the ending, all the while making audience question whether Riggan truly has superpowers or is it all his imagination that one is seeing.

The movie follows Riggan Thomson, a Hollywood celebrity known for playing the titular superhero in the Birdman movies. After losing his position of fame and superstardom in Holly-

wood, Riggan prepares to stage his own Broadway adaptation of Raymond Carver's short story *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*. The intention behind such a drastic change of careers is left unsaid although many characters question Riggan's true motives. Newspaper interviewers question whether this is publicity bid to regain the limelight, something which Riggan vehemently denies. Riggan himself justifies his decision as "finally being able to do something that truly matters." Throughout the movie, there is a constant tension between mainstream popular media as lacking any artistic merit whereas theatrical adaptations are regarded as high art. Riggan is viewed as an intruder by the theatre critic Tabitha Dickinson who classifies Riggan as the representative of the 'untrained and unprepared' Hollywood who are unable to attempt 'real art.' Riggan's co-actor Mike Shiner, a theatre star, calls Hollywood and its mainstream superhero movies 'cultural genocide.' The split within Riggan is articulated through his symptom, Birdman communications with him and Riggan replies back to him. When Birdman describes the play as being 'an infantile adaptation of a genius book' and calls Riggan an imposter who does not belong in Broadway, it is effectively Riggan's own uncertainty that is getting articulated. This is why this same Birdman also calls the theatre as being a 'boring philosophical crap' before the flying sequence. Riggan is constantly having a radical self-doubt which constantly makes him question his subjective position. It is because of this subjective split that the theatre is both a condition of 'high art' and 'pretentious nonsense' for him. In other words, Riggan embodies the divided subject, who is constantly reminded of his split position through his interactions with the other characters. A subject who is aware of the inner inconsistencies of his symbolic order finds it intolerable to exist in that order; as such,

that awareness results into a breakdown of subjectivity in the way it exists. This point becomes very pertinent, as we see through the multiple repetitions of the play's scenes presented to us in the movie. Each version changes drastically from the previous and should be read not just as the circumstantial difference of events that caused the changes but rather as indicative of the changes in Riggan's subjective position. Riggan grapples constantly with his apparent 'inexistence of being.' He is told by his daughter that he 'doesn't exist' because of his contempt for social media and its users. He feels alienated from both Hollywood and Broadway, unable to concretely locate himself in either world. This anxiety of 'ceasing to exist' is what drove him to write the adaptation and we find that even in the adaptation, the character played by Riggan has a position pretty similar to him, something that Riggan himself comments on after the final preview. The fantasy of the superhero figure of Birdman therefore becomes a way to create a sort of 'distance' from this ontological deadlock. However, problems arise when Riggan begins to identify with Birdman, which creates the possibility of psychosis.

The relation between Riggan and Birdman is quite tense. Riggan initially tries to ignore the 'voice' in his head, calling it a 'mental formation,' no doubt indicating that he had undergone some form of psychological therapy since his last Birdman movie in the 1990s. However, as the movie progresses, Riggan starts arguing and conversing with Birdman until eventually apparently believing in his speech just before the final performance of the play towards the end. This sort of linear reading while apparently satisfying the explanation of the plot, falls short when one attempts a reading of the ending as well as the suicide attempt. The researcher proposes a slightly

different, almost opposite reading. It is not that Riggan falls deeper into his psychosis through his increasing interactions with Birdman but rather that said interactions prevent the sort of absolute identification required for psychosis, as one has seen earlier. There are a few instances in the movie, the most prominent being quite early on when there is an accident involving an actor disliked by Riggan, which provides the evidence of psychosis inherently present in Riggan. This incident is quite important and merits further elaboration. The accident involves a stage light falling on the actor, who Riggan could not tolerate because of his lackluster acting skills. Before the light falls and hits the guy in the head, Riggan is shown to look at the light a few times. Immediately after the accident, Riggan walks away and Jake confronts him out of legal and technical concern—the actor is going to sue them and they need to find someone else for the role as it is a main role. Riggan tells Jake that "it was no accident" and that he "made it happen," to which Jake responds by ridiculing and asking if Riggan was drunk. This is the most direct example of psychotic identification in the movie. Riggan believes it was through his Birdman powers that he managed to cause the light to fall. A similar reading can be provided of all the instances of Riggan using his 'powers;' those are the moments of absolute identification, where he is almost psychotic.

However, his identification with the text of the play, the 'non-existence of the subject' if we may call it that, counters his psychosis. Riggan effectively situates himself in the 'gap'—the inconsistencies of his subjectivity. He in a way sees through the fantastical image painted by Birdman, who is nothing more than his symptom. So, during the finale, when one gets the final iteration of the motel scene and Riggan exclaims, "I



don't exist," it cuts through many layers, ultimately pointing to the fact that Riggan, the subject (the one sees throughout the movie) does not exist. Riggan's suicide attempt equates to the death of the Subject which coincides with the birth of the Subject as well. What this means is that the suicide attempt becomes an Act par excellence; a point that can be traced as the beginning point of a new subjectivity.

### Suicide as an Ethical Act

The concept of the Ethical Act as a radical break in the symbolic is tied to the concept of creation ex nihilo<sup>3</sup>. It is one of the central concepts found in multiple works of Slavoj Zizek. This extract<sup>4</sup> shall sum up the core of the argument:

act is therefore not 'abyssal' in the sense of an irrational gesture that eludes all rational criteria; it can and should be judged by universal rational criteria, the point is only that it changes (re-creates) the very criteria by which it should be judged ... it does more than intervene in reality in the sense of "having actual consequences" – it redefines what counts as reality. (Zizek 171–72)

The Ethical Act therefore manifests as a necessarily violent cut in the established order, and the very reality gets reconstituted after the Act. The next question then becomes how does this relate to suicide? A remark made by Zizek in *A Pervert's Guide to Cinema* can throw some light on the issue. While discussing about the liberating aspect of the movie *Fight Club* and its infamous office scene, Zizek says,

... in order to attack the enemy you first have to beat the shit out of yourself. To get rid in yourself of that which (in yourself) attaches you to the conditions of slavery. (00: 28: 00 to 00: 28: 25)

What this means is that the Other (the figure of the Master) is not out there in reality but rather a part of the inner-symbolic order of the subject. Any attempts to break free must therefore target the Other within the subject himself. And on a side note, the movie *Fight Club* shares this precise element with *Birdman*.

During the final iteration of the motel scene, Riggan is in a position that can only be described as being between-two-deaths.<sup>5</sup> His decision to commit suicide has effectively resulted in a symbolic death: sort of like an individual who has jumped from a tall building to kill himself but has yet to hit the ground; the brief moments when he knows that he is 'dead' and yet he is physically still alive. That is what the final "I don't exist" points to. Riggan goes forward with his plan and pulls the trigger. Then the unprecedented happens. He survives! In a way Riggan dies on the stage, something in him dies through the Act of shooting himself.

Who or what is this something? It is the Master figure, Birdman, his symptom. After the rhinoplasty, this completely changes the appearance of Riggan, further solidifying the aspect of the reborn subject, not in capitals one does see Birdman one final time. He is shown sitting on the toilet, rendered speechless, and Riggan gives one final remark: 'Bye Bye.' Unlike all the previous instances, Birdman does not speak. He is rendered impotent and powerless. He is no longer the symptom constituting the subjective identity of Riggan. The element of the Ethical also presents itself through Riggan's reaction to Tabitha's glowing review of the play. When Jake reads out the article and displays the huge nationwide support that Riggan has been getting, there is no reaction. Jake asks Riggan why he is being so quiet, "This is what you wanted wasn't it? Riggan this is what you wanted" and Riggan only gives a

dazed response, "Yeah, this is what I wanted." This is in fact not what Riggan wanted; he was not even aware of the remotest possibility of him surviving and all these events playing out in his favour and neither did he care. What he wanted was liberation; liberation from the anxiety inherent in a symbolic order and he acted strictly in ethical terms without giving grounds to any pathological concerns. All the rest happened as a surplus of the radical break enacted by his suicide attempt. The entire hospital sequence shows the extent to which Riggan has changed as a subject, he reconciles with his daughter, well and truly this time through the symbolic gesture of his daughter opening a Twitter account for him, something he used to mock and deride previously. And the flowers which used to play a significant role in his past, something we are reminded multiple times throughout the movie with various characters commenting how he dislikes rose and likes other flowers etc., those same flowers now also lose their position as he loses his olfactory power because of the gunshot. In this context, the ending scene where he flies out of the hospital room and Sam rushes in and smiles while looking to the sky can be read in a quite straight forward manner: it is only through the negation of the superhero identity that he truly gains the 'power of flight' so to say. Of course, none of that happens in reality. It is not difficult however to picture the reality that would continue—something along the lines of Riggan continuing on his Broadway career, writing further adaptations for the stage, while also participating alongside his daughter in social media activities like other people. There will of course be anxiety as there is no going beyond the symbolic order forever; the symbolic reinstatement is not only necessary but also inevitable for a neurotic. However, one can say for sure that the Birdman symptom that nearly drove Riggan to psychosis has been sublated, cured completely.

## Conclusion

Throughout the entirety of the film, Riggan seems to be tied to a projection of his past, a past which returns back to his present state as a recurring deposit of time. It will be important to understand the plight of his consciousness in non-reducible differentially related terms: alienation and confirmation. A subject never understands the interiority of his existential condition without alienating himself from the gaze of the Other. And, at the same time, his subjective alienation (as a process of situating oneself with oneself) needs to be re-conformed by the presence of an Other. In *Birdman*, this subjective correspondence takes place in the guise of a dialectical tension, a fundamental conflict in the case of our theatre actor. Riggan suffers from a subjective arrest, meaning, he attains his flight of salvation only by forcing himself to swim through a dialectical conflict, by becoming 'a lack of being,' as Jacques-Alain Miller puts it:

It was essential to him that the unconscious not be taken as an interiority or container in which some drives are found over on the one side and a few identifications over on the other ... He took the unconscious not as a container, but rather as something ex-sistent – outside itself – that is connected to a subject who is a lack of being. (11)

The understanding of the term 'lack' becomes very important in the case of Riggan. Throughout the entirety of the film, Riggan feels that he is 'lacking' something which he himself does not clearly understand. Paradoxically, his feeling of 'lack' is the flight of unrest that pushes him to take bold decisions in his career. The feeling of 'having'/'carrying' a lack in Riggan's subjective totality are actually quite performative and

disruptive. The lack performs in an intermezzo and is never quite recuperated into the Symbolic. At the same time, the performativity of 'lack' provides a conflictual understanding of its relationship with Riggan's Symbolic Order, meaning, it acts in a contrapuntal fashion negating the illusion of a subjective whole (unbroken, fully circuited subject). What Riggan does is to act upon the gaps in his selfhood and makes his position vulnerable. The radical acceptance of his vulnerability challenges the ontological question of selfhood who performs his subjectivity and thereby understands himself as a confirmed subject in a macro social space. The 'mirror-image' as Lacan calls it, provides a tremendous possibility of a double negation: firstly, Riggan fails to understand his current subjective coordinates and locates himself in a perennial conflict with his theatrical space and, secondly, he is in a constant conflictual dialogue with his past, that is the symptom of the character of Birdman. The self (as an assemblage) is never unitary neither in action nor in content. Riggan's subjectivity is the projection of a lack, a projective lack that determines the multiple critical turns in his subjectivity. The lack is a part of the Whole and never an aside that falls out of context. It is within the limits of the interiority of a subject who attains subjectivity out of socio-pathological borrowings from his environment. The lack, too, becomes a part of such poly cultural borrowings. The lack feeds on the Whole as a kind of parasitic symbiosis. It is fluidic in nature and thereby suits itself to the projection of a counterbalancing mirror. Also, Riggan has no idea about the quality of his lack. He is totally unaware of its future and potential disruptiveness. *Birdman* treats this idea of uncanny disruptiveness as a radical break from the classical leftist determinism of ideological finiteness. Riggan is totally not aware of his theatrical future which makes his character very liq-

uid in type, meaning, he is in a constant flux and his radical sensibility to art only reflects his conflictual inward projection. The unconscious is the gateway to the conscious dismissal of wholeness in his social space, which is an ethical subtraction from the mediation of capitalist logic of speculative additive reproductions. Lévi-Strauss speaks of the unconscious as an 'empty space in which the symbolic function achieves autonomy, meaning, a space where "symbols are more real than what they symbolize" (Roudinesco 211). The theatre, for Riggan, is this 'empty space' that moves and glides along the path of autonomy and free will, a characteristic that is emblematic of Riggan's redemption. There is no simulation of any agenda of any sort in his theatre. It is his intimate other and reveals an authentic irreducible reciprocal relationship with his 'lack of being.' Herein, alienation is juxtaposed with ethics of confirmation where one informs the other in a transmodal dialectical tension. The lack is that intermediary space between two modalities of being that actualizes the circuitous multiplicity within Riggan; his traumas, his identities, his past, his relationships, his career, his brokenness, his present, his tension – all arrive to inform his transmodal performances and capitulations. To put it bluntly, Riggan is a free-floating signifier in the signifying chain of being where he emerges out of his lack, which, in turn, allows him to seek for anti-essential strategies for survival. Riggan's survival is like a theatre of chaos and it is this chaos that mutates into self-reflexivity that finally counters the challenges of psychological boredom.

The image of Birdman, in our text, seems to be a problematic mirror, as in, it is both a language that speaks and also is a language that is absent. The figure of Birdman claims to be the desirable Other but it is not really what Riggan wants. He contemplates his future by chaotically

tolerating his present whilst negotiating with his past. The split happens and Birdman (as an image of the Other) fall out of place in the realm of desire. Riggan is symptomatic of a broken subject whose desire lies in subtracting need from demand:

Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting. (Lacan 287)

For Lacan, a subject becomes aware of its selfhood when he is in a constant dialogue with his symbolic order. For Riggan, the image of Birdman (as the Other) never succeeds in fully commodifying him as an object of past whereas the actor (the other of the Other) distances himself from the image of the Other and thereby is in a conflict with his knowledge of self. What he is left with is a gap, a 'blind spot,' a lack or, an unmediated space which is where he achieves full autonomy of challenging the Symbolic order. The lack rests within the Symbolic function that makes the order fragile and open-ended and not closed and fixed. Therefore, Lacan's subject resists signification and is constantly appearing and disappearing. This gap or lack is not exactly the negation of a Whole. Rather, it is a 'hole' in the symbolic space which resides within the narrative of the Other yet remains unknown to the Other. Meaning itself ceases to be meaningful in the symbolic space for Riggan as well as his subjectivity. Theatre is this endless meandering of signs that goes in full motion for Riggan to acquire a dialectical sense of self. To conclude then, in this paper, the researcher has tried to show the ambiguous nature of pathology in a subject with the example of the movie *Birdman*, where one gets both instances of neurosis and psycho-

sis. The researcher has also shown how any attempts to cure the pathology, if it wants to avoid a regression into psychotic identification, must manifest as a radical break, or, what can be termed as the Ethical Act; and finally, how such an Act always will appear violent and self-destructive but will carry a distinction from a *suicide-in-reality* as the Act must be a *suicide-in-symbolic*.

### Notes

1. Summarised Version. For more details refer to Ch.1 "The (Moral-) Pathology of Everyday Life" of *Ethics of the Real* by Alenka Zupancic.
2. This section is from Arka Chattopadhyay's 2018 article titled "I am Jack the ripper, a Golden Eagle: Ethical Alterity and Dangers of Narrative Travel in World Literature" published in *Interventions*.
3. Creation ex nihilo is a concept present in many of Zizek's works, and as such it is difficult to cite any one particular work. An article that provides a summation can be found at the website *No Subject - Encyclopaedia of Psychoanalysis* - [nosubject.com/The\\_Act](http://nosubject.com/The_Act)
4. The extract is from *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis) use of a Notion* by Slavoj Zizek.
5. The concept of between-two-deaths was first developed by Lacan in his seventh seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, where he provides a reading of Antigone as being between-two-deaths.

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# Who Kissed the Sleeping Beauty? Alice Walker's Revisionist Mythmaking in *The Color Purple*

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## Abstract

Revisionist mythmaking is a favourite strategy especially for women writers. They reread and rewrite oral, folk as well as mythic narratives, often giving new dimensions to the stereotyped and silenced women characters. Fairy tales have been thus retold numerous times breaking the Eurocentric patriarchal codes with which most of them were constructed. The paper attempts to read Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* as a Black Womanist retelling of the fairy tale 'Briar Rose' commonly known by the name "The Sleeping Beauty." As it analyses revisionist mythmaking by Walker, the paper highlights notions such as Black beauty and woman bonding.

**Keywords:** *Fairy tale, Revisionist mythmaking, Briar Rose, Subversion, and Womanism.*

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The phenomenon called literature is always open ended and under continuous analysis. A scrutiny of it reveals how great works of art draw heavily from pre-literary categories like ritual, myth, and folk tale. Every culture has popular stories meant for children in the form of folk tales, legends, myths, or ballads. Fairy tales have their roots in old oral folk tales. Many stories that we associate as deriving from European roots can be traced back to some other oral folk culture in ancient times. Thus they transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. As such, they serve as reservoirs of culture and tradition and thus express the thoughts and aspirations not of an individual but of a collective psyche.

The term 'Fairy' is derived from the French word *faerie* which refers to the residences of the local fee. The fees were village women who distributed herbs and incantations, and often regarded as transmitters of mystic stories. This is a pointer to the involvement of women in the propagation of folk fairy tales. It is natural that these tales might have been centered on female experiences and female protagonists as they were narrated by women. Their narratives unveiled a world where women play active or extraordinary roles as protagonists who go beyond prescribed norms of society, overcome adversaries, and transform obstacles to their advantage. However, the female views and motifs underwent successive stages of patriarchalisation as the oral tales were translated into graphocentric texts. As Jack Zipes says,

these tales became canonized because they were adapted from the oral tradition of folklore for aristocratic and middle-class audiences as print culture developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and basically reshaped

and resold during this time to reinforce the dominant patriarchal ideology throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (1)

Many among such tales represent White Eurocentric cultural values while upholding male hegemony. Accordingly there has been a growing awareness of the ways in which women are portrayed in fairy tales.

Revisiting, rereading, and rewriting folk, epic, and mythical narratives have been a prominent strategy of women's writing where they fill and correct the omitted and misrepresented female. They have employed various tools both to deconstruct the gender biased myth, folk, and fairy tales and to reconstruct them focusing on the silences and blanks between their lines. Women writers use the language and narrative graphed by men and uses the same to voice their protests and aspirations and thus, as Alicia Ostriker calls, become "thieves of language, female Prometheuses" (69). She writes,

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual port but ultimately making cultural change possible. (72)

Patrician Klindienst has the same idea as she says,

In returning to the ancient myths and opening them from within to the woman's body, the woman's mind, and the woman's voice, contemporary

women have felt like thieves of language staging a raid on the treasured icons of a tradition that has required women's silence for centuries. (612)

In *The Color Purple* itself, Alice Walker points to the cultural invasion and Westernization of original folk narratives of Africa:

Olivia feels that compared to Tashi, she has no good stories to tell. One day she started in on an 'Uncle Remus' tale only to discover Tashi had the original version of it. (Walker 149)

Hence, traditional fairy tales like that of Brothers Grimm have been revisited and rewritten many a time subverting such stereotypes like the damsel in distress, the male rescue hero, or the idea of female beauty.

The story of the sleeping beauty, also known as "Briar Rose" is one such fairy tale that has undergone revisions. After prolonged waiting, a daughter is born to a king and queen who host a great feast and invite twelve good fairies to bless their daughter. Just as eleven of them have done blessing her, one wicked fairy, being angry that she was not invited, decides to take revenge. She curses the princess: "The king's daughter shall, in her fifteenth year, be wounded by a spindle, and fall down dead" (Grimm 37). Then the twelfth fairy, who had not yet given her gift, blesses that the spindle wound shall not kill her, instead, the princess shall fall asleep for a hundred years. After fifteen years, the prophecy is fulfilled and along with the princess, the entire palace falls asleep. After a hundred years, a charming prince arrives and kisses the sleeping princess out of her sleep and thus redeems the curse.

There have been many subversions of "Briar Rose" by women writers. While Jane Yolen's revision retells the story in the backdrop of Nazi Germany, Carolyn Gage's *The Spindle* is from a lesbian point of view. In her reconstructive tale "The Lady of the House of Love," Angela Carter subverts the concept of beauty. In all these revisions, the structure and style have been inverted by the authors to suit their varied needs and goals. The objective linear narration has been replaced by a subjective style, often non-linear where a juxtaposition of time is brought in through interior monologues. Instead of the idyllic and fascinating world in the fairy story, these writers employ violent, sexual, and sometimes gothic imagery in order to bring out the complex psychic state of characters. Alice Walker's Womanist parable *The Color Purple*, which traces an oppressed Black woman's journey from slavery to freedom, could be considered as a Black womanist reselling of "Briar Rose."

Celie, the protagonist of *The Color Purple* is a young girl of fourteen, ignorant, naive, and vulnerable. To be born as a Black girl in a white patriarchal society itself becomes a curse for her. As any other Black woman cursed to be in a Eurocentric society, Celie too is a victim of multiple oppression. She is repeatedly raped by a man who she thinks is her step-father. She is too innocent to know what is happening to her and hence repeatedly seeks answer from God: "I have always been a good girl. May be you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me" (Walker 3). The guilt of compelled incest torments her mind and she thinks she is a sinner. This sense of sin is aggravated by the lack of love and care from her mother, who becomes a silent partner in her victimization by Pa. Celie is deprived of the comfort and security from her mother, who herself is a victim of patriarchal oppression. As



Celie becomes pregnant by Pa, her mother dies cursing her: "My mama dead. She died screaming and cussing. She screams at me. She cusses at me" (Walker 4). The mother's curse at her death bed is equivalent to the wicked fairy's curse in the fairy tale. Both the mother and the fairy are humiliated by the society and their curse arises from this grief and self-hatred. Just like the princess in "Briar Rose" who is cursed for the mistake done by the grown-ups, the protagonist of *The Color Purple* too is accursed due to the flaw of the society into which she was born. The inescapable fact of being a Black and a woman haunted her destiny. For Celie, her mother's self-hatred, lack of support and the eventual curse results in her lack of self-esteem and stunted psychic growth. To aggravate her misery, her own children were taken away by her step-father and he marries her off, like a chattel, to a man Mr. \_\_\_, who was in search for a mother for his children.

Amidst all these negative experiences, the only happiness to Celie is the presence of her little sister Nettie who is like the twelfth friendly fairy in the fairy tale, softening the curse that "she should not really die, but should only fall asleep for a hundred years" (Grimm 37). The love and concern for Nettie used to make Celie bold and thoughtful, and it is then her inner spark is occasionally kindled. The two sisters loved and cared for each other and Nettie always tried to instill knowledge and strength into Celie's mind. So Nettie's running away and supposed death was to Celie the needle prick which put the princess into the long sleep:

I think about Nettie, dead. She fights, she runs away. What good it do? I don't fight; I stay where I'm told. But I'm alive. (Walker 22)

Celie chooses a state of slumber so as to forget her sense of sin and guilt. However, "she was not dead, but only fallen into a deep sleep" (Grimm 38).

Instead of asserting herself, Celie remains silent even when she is beaten like an animal by Mr. \_\_\_: "I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you a tree" (Walker 23). With no one intimate to open her heart or share her feelings, she starts to internalize the White patriarchal notions of womanhood. She believes herself ugly and impotent as told by Pa, "She ugly . . . She ain't smart either . . . She tell lies" (10), and Mr. \_\_\_, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (187).

Raped, beaten, silenced, and sold into marital slavery by the man she thinks is her father, Celie begins to doubt humanity, and as her debasement continues in the hands of Mr. \_\_\_, she actually entertains thoughts of self-erasure (Allan 130).

Celie gradually forgets her own potential, forgets that she ever enjoyed the status and dignity of a human being. The extended sexual oppression led to the "negation of inner erotic power" symbolized through Celie's premature menopause (Kulkarni 83). Her mind becomes rotten and deserted like the palace in "Briar Rose" surrounded by thickets: "A large hedge of thorns soon grew around the palace, and every year it became higher and thicker" (Grimm 39). Ignorant of the richness of her native roots and distinct human status that women enjoyed in pre-slavery Africa, Celie struggles in vain to fit herself into the definitions of the White androcentric society. Her mind becomes rotten and deserted like the palace in the fairy tale surrounded by thickets. Just like Angela Carter describes in "The Lady of the House of Love,"

Depredations of rot and fungus everywhere. The unlit chandeliers is so heavy with dust the individual prisms no longer show ant shapes; industrious spiders have woven canopies in the corners of this ornate rotting place, have trapped the porcelain vases on the mantelpiece in sot gray nets. But the mistress of all this disintegration notices nothing. (120)

As Celie hibernates, her household too, a microcosm of the society, fails to understand the value of their native culture and tradition as well as to acknowledge womanhood.

So many princes try to break the thicket and enter the palace to rescue the princess but all of them fail. Likewise other women like Mr. \_\_\_'s sisters tell Celie that she must fight back. In spite of the efforts, all of them fail to wake her up from her sleep. Her mind being a thorny thicket, Celie grows jealous as Sofia challenges racism and sexism and asks Harpo to beat her. But then she feels guilty of her action and senses that something is wrong: "A little voice say, something you done wrong. Somebody spirit you sin against" (Walker 38). Nevertheless, Nettie who tried to fight, Celie believed, met with death. Later, Sofia, who hits the White mayor, is imprisoned. Thus Celie continues to be silent and submissive until the arrival of Shug Avery who kisses her out of her sleep.

Alice Walker thus weaves the story of Celie using the thread and pattern of "Briar Rose" there by deconstructing the dominant Eurocentric patriarchal semiology. The basic narrative element in a fairy tale, that is, the element of quest is retained as *The Color Purple* is all about Celie's quest for her identity and self. The thickets that have covered the palace are equivalent to Celie's emotional deadness, for many a time she compares

herself to a wood. The twelve friendly fairies stand for the community of women in the novel. Sewing and spinning which has been a main part of women's labour, are terms often found in fairy tales. Walker uses the same symbols – sewing and quilts – to show women's creativity. Quilt composed of diverse patterns sewn together is suggestive of Walker's womanist concept where men, women and nature exist in unity. Again, the epistolary form of narration, and the vernacular language employed takes the novel closer to the heart of the readers, just like fairy tales. Walker employs the epistolary form as a means to unfold the inner thoughts and feelings of the protagonist Celie. Though it deviates from the objective nature of narration commonly found in fairy tales, the epistolary style, with its medium of vernacular, retains the oral flavour with which fairy tales are told. Walker's subversion of the White man's standard language with Afro-American vernacular is a bold statement of the presence and value of Black culture and heritage. However, Walker subverts two main concepts embedded in "Briar Rose."

Most of the popular fairy tales like "Cinderella" and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" associate what is pretty, beautiful, and fair with the heroine who is most often described as having blue eyes, rosy cheeks, and golden locks of hair. Many tales connote goodness and beauty with such characters who are rewarded in the end. The opening sentence of "Mother Holle" says,

Once upon a time, there was a widow who had two daughters; one of them was beautiful and industrious, the other ugly and lazy. (Grimm 113)

When the story ends, the beautiful daughter is rewarded: "a shower of gold fell upon her,

and the gold clung to her, so that she was covered with it from head to foot" (115). But for the ugly daughter, instead of the shower of gold, "a great bucket of pitch came, pouring over her" (117). In this way, beauty was associated not only with fairness, but also with goodness and economic privilege. The White beauty concept is a manifestation of Western prejudices of race and gender that identifies darkness with inner ugliness, a spiritual and moral failure. In "Briar Rose" too, the princess is described as "so beautiful and well behaved, and good, and wise, that everyone who knew her, loved her" (Grimm 38), and the friendly fairy is "with a high red cap on her head, and red shoes with high heels on her feet, and a long white wand in her hand" (37). The white wand is symbolic of the goodness and kindness of fairies. The wicked fairy is contrasted from the rest by associating her with black colour. She comes "with a black cap on her head and black shoes on her feet, and a broomstick in her hand" (37). Apart from the contrasting colours, what separate the good and bad fairies are the white wand and broom stick they carry. The red attire and white wand is suggestive of wealth and royalty whereas broomstick is always liked with working class. Only the twelve fairies are invited for the feast in the palace, a pointer towards the differentiation of race and class in "Briar Rose." Walker subverts this notion of Eurocentric beauty and emphasizes Black aesthetics in *The Color Purple*.

In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker demythologizes racial discrimination through characters like Sofia, Nettie, and Tashi. Nettie's letters glorify African culture and tradition and show how colonial invasion has ruined the native culture. As Nettie writes from Senegal,

They are so black, Celie, they shine.  
Which is something else folks down

home like to say about real black folks. But Celie, try to imagine a city full of these shining, black blue people wearing brilliant blue robes with designs like fancy quilt patterns. Tall, thin, with long necks and straight backs . . . Because the black is so black the eye is simply dazzled, and then there is the shining that seems to come, really from moonlight, I is so luminous, but their skin glow even in the sun. (Walker 126)

The central metaphor, 'purple,' is again a pointer to Black beauty. It signifies royalty and energy of the black people as well as spiritual strength. It is a symbol of happiness and independence. The purple colour is akin to the rosy cheeks of the princess in "Briar Rose." Again, Celie is described as 'a big rose' (175), and as she explores her body, it looks to her like a 'wet rose' (75). By associating Celie with purple flowers and rose, she is made an icon of Black beauty. The concept of Black beauty itself is a reversal of Eurocentric definitions. Thus Walker subverts the concept of beauty as patterned in "Briar Rose" and shows how black people take pride in their Blackness and display unlimited potential for the assertion of the self and the entire community.

Another major aspect that Alice Walker subverts in her novel is the figure of the male hero as the knightly rescuer of the damsel in distress. In "Briar Rose" the charming prince makes his way through the thorny thickets and reaches the palace. He falls in love with the sleeping beauty and kisses her:

The moment he kissed her, she opened her eyes and awoke, and smiled upon him; and they went out together, and soon the king and queen also awoke, and all the court, and gazed on each other with great wonder. (Grimm 40)

In *The Color Purple*, Walker replaces the male rescue hero with Shug Avery who is called "Queen Honeybee" (Walker 42) and has already stepped out of the definitions of the male hegemonic society. But unlike the prince in the fairy tale, Shug Avery is not all of a sudden enchanted by Celie; instead she abhors her:

She looks me over from head to foot.  
Then she cackles. Sound like a death rattle. You sure, is ugly, she say, like she ain't believed it. (44)

Their relationship grows through mutual understanding and the relation makes drastic changes in the dormant self of Celie. It is with Shug's help that Celie is awakened to her own sexuality with makes Celie record truthfully: "I thought I had turned into a man" (47). For Celie, to be able to appreciate her own body is an initiation to the potentials of her own identity. From Shug, she not only obtains the awakened sexuality but also acquires the ability to love herself and others. Until Shug introduces her to the beauty of her body, Celie remains in the wilderness of ignorance devoid of any sense of self-esteem. The pleasure and comfort that she has from their relationship is explained thus:

Little like sleeping with mama . . . little like sleeping with Nettie . . . it feel like heaven is what it feel like, not like sleeping with Mr. \_\_\_ at all. (104)

Shug thus becomes the very source of encouragement, acceptance, and love that Celie needed in her search for selfhood:

As Celie learns to love Shug, she finds her mother, sister and lost babies within. No longer isolated and full of her remembered relations, Celie begins to experience a sense of wholeness. (Williams 83)

Shug introduces to Celie a liberated world of bonding between women and all human beings that propels her journey to selfhood.

Shug and Nettie's interpretations of God serve to demolish the portrait of a paternal God in Celie's mind and introduces her to Mother Nature. The awareness of the presence of God inside her, inside other, and in the entire Nature leads Celie to the "feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all" (Walker 176). Shug also leads Celie to Nettie and through Nettie Celie knows about her lost children Adam and Olivia and learns a more important truth that Pa is not her real father and thus the stigma of guilt and incest is removed from Celie's mind. Nettie's letters open to Celie a world beyond her domestic boundary:

Oh Celie, there are colored people in the world who want us to know! Want us to grow and see the light! They are not all mean like Pa and Albert, or beaten down like ma was. (119)

Through Nettie's letters Celie also realizes the bonding of women in the traditional Olinka culture:

It is in the work that women get to know and care about each other. It was through work that Catherine became friend with her husband's other wives. (150)

Along with an awareness of her cultural identity, Celie gets a sense of belongingness to her own community, that is, of women.

The sense of belongingness to a community of women work wonders in the life of a woman. The idea of a community of women is a very old one and could be unearthed from our ancient myths and legends:

The communities of women which have haunted our literary imagination from the beginning are emblems of female self suffering which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears. (Auerbach 37)

The twelve friendly fairies in "Briar Rose," are, then, representation of a female community. They,

gave all their best gifts to the little princess. One gave her goodness, another beauty, other riches, and so on till she had all that was good in the world. (Grimm 37)

Likewise in *The Color Purple*, Celie is empowered by the community of women to which she belongs.

Awareness of her community gained through Nettie and Shug makes Celie love and care the women around her like Sofia, Mary Agnes, Odessa, Henrietta, and even Catherine and Tashi. The making of quilt by Celie and Sofia gains significance through its name 'Sisters' Choice' (Walker 56). Quilt, which is symbolic of women bonding in the novel, connects Celie with her children. It also enables Celie to attain economic independence through the execution of her creativity. Spindle, which puts the princess in the fairy tale to her long sleep, is here substituted with the needle through which Celie attains economic independence. Again, it is Shug who gives Scissors to Celie so as to start a new career through stitching. She takes Celie along with her to Memphis where she starts her career as a fashion designer.

With the help of other women she transforms her interest in stitching into a business venture – she stitches pants,

wears them, sells them and learns to manage her own life. (Gaur 36)

And Celie says, "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends, and time" (Walker 194). Thus the curse that fell upon Celie is removed by the kiss of Shug Avery. Through an awakening that is sexual, spiritual, and creative, Celie is able to identify the beauty and strength within her. The awakening that happens in her not only empowers the women around her, but also changes the attitude of men like Mr. \_\_\_ who no longer view women as mere objects, but acknowledge them as human beings of equal status. It resembles the awakening of the entire palace in "Briar Rose."

Alice Walker's tradition of oral narratives, folk and fairy tales has contributed much to the weaving of *The Color Purple* thereby regenerating a fairy tale to suit the purpose of voicing the marginalised and miserable human situations and moreover to assert the beauty of an 'othered' culture. Walker thus gives the story of sleeping beauty a new dimension by subverting it from a marginalised and later magically transformed Black Woman's perspective. The myth of the sleeping beauty acquires a womanist interpretation in the novel incorporating the subversion of the Eurocentric values of culture, race and gender in the wider context and requirements of the Afro-American situation in particular.

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# Aversive Racism and Its Manifestation in *Pride and Prejudice* *We Are Not Like Them*

Dr. Shazia Rose\* and Zaryab Khalid\*\*

## Abstract

In contemporary American society, explicit racial hatred towards Blacks has been dominantly replaced by the subtle, implicit, and indirect form of racial prejudice that is Aversive Racism. Aversive Racism manifests as a result of Whites' conscious commitment towards being unprejudiced and unconscious absorption of negative stereotypes and bias against Blacks. Being a product of a culture that values egalitarian ideals and supports racial equality but at the same time perpetuates negative stereotypes as a result of racist history penetrating the symbolic cultural matrix, Whites become influenced by two contradictory notions which results in unconscious/implicit racism towards Blacks. Investigation of the novel reveals that even the most progressive and well-meaning Whites unconsciously harbour negative racial attitudes, bias, and prejudice towards Blacks because of the undetected influence of racist culture and stereotypes that connote Blacks with violence, crime, danger, badness, immorality, laziness, ugliness, and stupidity. Black bodies become the symbols that activate all the latent stereotypes and bias residing in the subconscious of the Whites' mind to dictate their behaviour and actions towards Blacks. Since they have created a un-prejudiced self-image for themselves and cannot fathom being racists, they fail to recognize when they are being racist or biased towards Blacks.

**Keywords:** *Racism, Unconscious Racism, Aversive Racism, Racial Stereotypes, and Prejudice.*

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### Changing Racist Styles in American Society

**R**acism, the discriminatory treatment of other races based upon the assumed superiority of one's race and inferiority of the others, is an issue that has remained prevalent in America since its inception. The passage of time has repeatedly altered the American racist styles i.e., from domination to aversion (Kovel 93). Initially, White racism gained expression in the massacres, genocides, and institutional slavery, and after its abolition, it was through strict segregation, lynching, and racially motivated hate crimes. These explicit or overt expressions of racism that chiefly targeted Blacks were part of dominative racism, an old type of racism. As civil rights movements gained momentum and anti-racism laws were introduced, these explicit occurrences of racism slowly begin to reduce until it gave the illusion that American society was finally overcoming racism. However, the truth of the matter is that these explicit forms of racism were inconspicuously replaced by the new implicit forms of racism because as Joel Kovel says,

American reform has been to paint over an older symptom with a newer one in order to protect the underlying disease. Thus...dominative racism was succeeded by aversive racism as the principal mode employed by our culture to utilize and defend against the darkness within it. (211)

Like a mutating virus, as Samuel L. Gaertner and John F. Dovidio call it, racism simply evolved into new forms which are harder to recognize because they are either subtle and less direct or they are unintentional and non-conscious ('Aversive Racism' 26; Pearson, et al. 316). However, that is not to say that dominant forms

of racism have completely disappeared as it occasionally surfaces and makes its presence known when incidents such as police brutality, racial violence, and racially targeted attacks and shootings happen.

This shift in the racist style, from explicit to implicit, occurred due to the development of White egalitarian ideologies that deemed racial prejudice towards Blacks as wrong but despite this realization racism's eradication remains unattainable because it has become part of the American culture that was structured by America's racist history. American history is dominantly the history of atrocities committed especially towards the Blacks by the Whites and the rationalizations upon which were based those actions, have now penetrated into the American culture in the form of racial stereotypes to influence the Whites even today. Focusing upon the psychohistory of racism in America, Kovel has arrived at the conclusion that all the racist fantasies Whites had created about Blacks for centuries seeped into the symbolic matrix of the American culture and since there is congruence between the culture and a person's personality, these become part of the Whites' sub-consciousness. Prevented by their morals or fear of society's scorn to be openly racist while being unable to escape the influence of racist culture, they all become the "victims of...culture's racism" (Lawrence 236). This "paradox between historical egalitarian values and racist traditions in United States" that is identified by Gunnar Myrdal as an American dilemma, has become a fundamental part of the American identity (Dovidio and Gaertner, "Aversive Racism" 1; Pearson, et al. 314). Out of this American dilemma is born Aversive Racism, a contemporary form of racism that can be observed in American society today.



## Aversive Racism

Aversive Racism is a term that was first introduced by Joel Kovel in his book *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (1970) and later on, was developed into a theory by Samuel L. Gaertner and John F. Dovidio. Aversive Racism is an indirect, unintentional, and subtle form of racism wherein Whites,

sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but, at the same time, possess negative feelings and beliefs about blacks, which may be unconscious. (Dovidio and Gaertner, "Aversive Racism," 3)

This type of racism is a legacy of the American Dilemma that is between Whites' endorsement of egalitarian principles and ideals, and the maintenance of personal, social, and cultural forces which perpetuate prejudice and discrimination against blacks (2). Aversive racists strongly believe in racial equality due to instillation of morals and egalitarian values since childhood, which results in the creation of a positive self-image or self-concept that is unprejudiced about race; however, unbeknownst to them, they also absorb negative stereotypes and biases about the Blacks because they occupy a socio-cultural space that promotes racism. As a result, they develop the awareness that racism, racial prejudice, and racial discrimination is morally wrong and actively avoid doing so, but since the absorbed stereotypes and negative racial views reside latently, they are unable to recognize their own prejudiced and biased behaviours and attitudes they unconsciously exhibit. Therefore, Aversive Racism is characterized by "conscious (explicit) egalitarian attitudes and negative unconscious (implicit)

attitudes and beliefs" (26). Aversive Racism represents the ambivalence that arises from the two contradictory influences of consciousness and unconsciousness.

## Racism in America Today

In "The Nature of Contemporary Prejudice: Insights from Aversive Racism," Pearson, et al. infer that Whites' current racial attitudes towards Blacks in America are ambivalent and inconsistent which is consistent with a contemporary form of racial prejudice that is Aversive Racism (314). Since this form of racial prejudice manifests in subtle and indirect manner through Whites who are oblivious of the manipulations of their unconscious racial biases, it is hard to recognize it, and thus impossible to rectify. It is imperative that attention be paid to this unconscious racism that is plaguing the contemporary American society.

## We Are Not Like Them

To understand how Aversive Racism operates in the American society through the unconscious racial bias of Whites, Christine Pride and Jo Piazza's novel *We Are Not Like Them* (2021) has been selected for this study. Structured to support two voices and perspectives simultaneously, one that of a Black woman and the other that of a White woman, this narrative begins with the shooting of a fourteen-year old black boy by the police and rest of the narrative explores this incident's consequences on the lives of both women, and its implications on the involved racial groups on a larger scale. Riley and Jen are best friends since childhood but their friendship is tested when the latter's husband, who is a cop, is involved in the shooting of an unarmed black boy, and Riley as a journalist and a member of black community becomes a leading voice of her

community during the media coverage of the incident. Conflict arises as both women struggle between their devotion to each other and their loyalty and allegiance to their own communities or racial groups they belong to. By focusing on the relationships between Whites and Blacks and their interracial interactions, this book deals with race related issues such as racism, police shootings of Blacks, racial discrimination, racial violence, white supremacy, and racial stereotyping. Putting the novel's white characters under the lens of Dovidio and Gaertner's Aversive Racism and observing their interactions with Blacks permits comprehension of how implicit form of racism functions through the unconscious biases, prejudices, and attitudes of Whites.

### Exploring Aversive Racism in the Novel

Pride and Piazza's *We Are Not Like Them* (2021) offers a true picture of American society plagued by Aversive Racism through its portrayal of white characters engaging in the acts of unconscious racism. The White character, Kevin, is the very embodiment of 'American Dilemma' that captures the very essence of Aversive Racism as he is a good person with high moral values who consciously helps people regardless of race but on the other hand, exhibits some subtle signs of aversion and biasness towards Blacks unconsciously. He actively helps out an immigrant woman who is caught stealing food by buying her groceries and quietly leaving them at her door without even taking credit for his good deed. This good deed towards a person of another race establishes him as a moral person and solidifies his own self-concept of a non-prejudiced/non-racist person but it is only the result of his awareness of moral codes and his intentional practise of them, combined with his individual determinism; he has no access to the subliminal part of his brain that stores his true thoughts free from the

influence of preached morality and egalitarian ideals so sometimes without realization his prejudice makes appearance. His Aversive racism becomes apparent when his attitude towards Riley, a Black woman, is taken into consideration. The first time he meets her, he comments to Jen on their friendship that "she's cool, you guys are just so ... different" and while their personalities are different from one another, he couldn't have observed the fact right at their first meeting, which could only mean that he was unconsciously speaking of their races under the guise of claiming it to be about personalities (15). Here, the visible difference between both women is that of the colour of their skin that represents their White and Black races. Kevin neither likes Riley, nor approves of her friendship with his wife.

When Jen brought home a check from Riley, Kevin looked at it with 'actual disgust' and 'demanded' to 'return it' and 'shouted' that he 'don't want to be in debt to her.' Kevin not being a "huge fan of Riley under the best of circumstances... thinks he hides it, but...can't hide anything." He says things like, "Riley thinks she's the shit, doesn't she?" or, "You always do what Riley says," but Jen ignores them thinking that he is just "jealous" (111). Kevin and even Jen delude themselves into believing that his dislike for Riley stems from his jealousy at the closeness of both women but that is not the entire reality, just a fraction of the cause. Even though Jen and Riley are best friends, they lived most of their lives in different cities, away from each other and even when Riley moves back home, they rarely meet while communicating via cell phone irregularly because they are both busy which is why Kevin's dislike for Riley cannot be explained away as simple feelings of jealousy. Moreover, any sort of relation and interaction between Kevin and Riley is non-existent so his aversion for her is for

no good reason and his discomfort at their friendship hints at a deeper level of issue. His irritation about Riley that she thinks highly of herself doesn't make sense when he doesn't even personally know her beyond her just being his wife's friend, unless his unaddressed bias against her is considered to be an issue about race. He is disgusted and angry at receiving financial help from Riley instead of being happy or grateful that they'd be able to afford fertility treatment and these feelings are not caused by reluctance to be in debt to someone but to be in debt specifically to her because he does receive financial aid from family too so it is not about his ego being bruised by the feeling of inadequacy. If it weren't for his history of explicit dislike for Riley and lack of attempt to befriend her even though his wife considers her family, his extreme reaction could have been dismissed as him not wanting to be in debt to someone he is not close to unlike he is with his family. Here, cultural context can offer clarity to the motivations behind his persistent dislike and rejection of financial aid. Because American,

culture attaches specific meaning to the assignment of racial groups to certain occupational and hierarchical roles, behaviour that maintains those role assignments will have racial meaning. (Lawrence 252)

Certain cultural meanings are attached with White and Black racial groups in America which are based upon the beliefs about the inferiority of Blacks and superiority of Whites along with the stereotypes about Whites being successful and Blacks being utter failures because they've been kept away from high socioeconomic positions which are reserved for Whites. On an unconscious level, Kevin, a White person who is supposed to be successful, does not want help from a Black person who is supposed to belong

at the bottom of economic strata because her financial success and help threatens to subvert the traditional socioeconomic roles Blacks and Whites are supposed to occupy. His feelings of jealousy bubble to the surface not just because of the closeness between both women but also because on some level he is jealous of her success as Black person, which explains his remark about her thinking highly of herself without even having any interaction with her. This hints at an unacknowledged inferiority complex. Her financial aid triggers his unconscious racial bias and all the cultural meanings associated with being a White and a Black person. Help of a Black person who is more successful and financially stable threatens his self-esteem and position as a superior White man (this sense of superiority doesn't come from being White or belonging to a superior race but from the cultural connotations that are associated with Whites) and makes him feel inferior to people who were supposed to be failures in the society. Since he is unaware of his own racial bias and prejudice, his sense of inferiority manifests in obvious emotions such as jealousy, anger, and dislike.

The biggest instance of his Aversive Racism occurs when he shoots a fourteen-year old black boy named Justin even though the boy's appearance does not match the description of the man he and Travis were chasing; the only similarity between both was that they were Black. This incident happens because of his unconscious bias towards Blacks based upon the connotations that were attached with Blacks in the past which have now become part of the culture that Whites unconsciously acquire. Historically, Blacks have had their individuality stripped and as a result the distinction between one person to another person diminished and what remained was just the black skin. Blacks look alike to Whites as they are unable to look past their skin. The boy and

the man had different physiques and clothes but he still shoots the boy because he doesn't get the chance to create distinction between both people as everything happens within seconds. He doesn't stop to question the identity of person he is shooting because his unconsciousness supercedes his consciousness that only sees the blackness, and thus, he is unable to distinguish between both Black people.

Kevin claims that he shot the boy because he feared for his life and the origin of this fear is explained by Kovel through psychohistorical matrix of America. Whites created scary myths and racial fantasies about Blacks that deemed them evil, devil, and primitive so that they could rationalize their exertion of power over them but this "process that generated this white power also generated the fear and dread of blacks" (Kovel 95). These old myths and fantasises slowly travelled through the cultural matrix in the shape of stereotypes about Blacks being dangerous, violent criminals, and homed fear in the hearts of Whites about Blacks. Since the stereotypes and beliefs automatically active by the mere presence of the object or symbol, as Dovidio and Gaertner state, Justin becomes a symbol whose sight automatically activates all the dormant stereotypes Kevin had absorbed about Blacks being dangerous, evil, and instigators of violence ("Aversive Racism" 19-20). This arouses fear in him, so much so that he doesn't even think to confirm whether the boy actually had a gun or not. His judgement is questioned by others that "would Kevin have been so afraid of a fourteen-year-old white kid that he would have shot him?" (Christine and Pride 74). It doesn't make sense to be so scared of a child that he doesn't even try to entertain other options before shooting unless he harboured prejudice against blacks on an unconscious level. His prejudice is flamed by the black stereotypes

so much so that even a black helpless child is assumed to be a danger.

Kevin and Travis both shoot the young boy, killing him, but their act of racism is in stark contrast to each other because Travis' is the dominant form of racism and Kevin's is Aversive form of racism. Travis is the one who shoots first, claiming that the boy had gun, but even after knowing that the boy was unarmed and he killed an innocent child, he shows no remorse and regret. Moreover, his first reaction after shooting is to excitedly brag about his shooting skills which shows that his was an act of explicit hatred towards the Blacks. Kevin's reaction is the opposite of Travis' because he instantaneously realizes his mistake as his unconscious fear is pushed aside at the sight of an innocent bleeding child and his morality takes over. While the sources of racism are different, one being explicit/intentional and the other being unintentional, they both lead to the same result, that is the act of dominative racism, which proves Dovidio and Gaertner's point that Aversive racism is just as detrimental to Blacks as the old fashioned explicit form of racism ("Aversive Racism" 18).

Involvement in the murder of a black child crumbles his carefully crafted non-prejudiced self-image that was built by his consciously monitored egalitarian behaviour and attitude; he questions to Jen as much as to himself that "Am I a monster, Jenny? Do you think I'm a monster?" (Christine and Pride 36). His believe and confidence in his morals and goodness is replaced by guilt, regret and shame after the incident. His body language, such as pacing, talking while facing away from people, looking down, and averting gaze, suggests not only his shame at the shattered self-image and public image but also unsettling restlessness at the unrealized reasons behind his unintentional actions threatening to

bubble up the surface, and his avoidance of it as way to protect himself from facing his true nature. "Kevin speaks into the wall. 'I'm a good cop. I'm not an asshole. I'm definitely not a racist. All the things I've done for people..." (75). This scene of Kevin claiming not to be a racist whilst facing the wall is highly symbolic: this tangible wall represents the amorphous wall of sub-consciousness that is blocking his access to the awareness of his racial prejudice because of which he still maintains that his actions were not prompt by racial hatred. By preventing reconciliation between his actions and hidden causes, this wall almost operates as a defence mechanism for him so that he remains oblivious of his own unintended racism. His actions arouse confusion within him and give a rise to the conflict between his consciousness and unconsciousness; he says,

I can't get on that stand and say that I feared for my life ... May be I did in the moment. Maybe I want to believe that I did. But it's still no excuse. I... reacted.  
(260)

The entire defence of his action was built upon this fear that he claimed he felt for his life but reflection on his action is not enough to incite the revelation of the source of this fear because which is why he is confused about this correlation between his fear and action it evoked.

Kevin exhibits all the signs of being an Aversive racist, identified by Dovidio and Gaertner, which involve discomfort, disgust, uneasiness, avoidance and fear ("Aversive Racism" 4; "The Aversive Form of Racism" 63). He avoids building a relationship with Riley because her presence is uncomfortable for him, he is agitated at Riley's friendship with his wife, and the sight of a black child arouses fear in him. He is a racist on an unconscious level because of the,

importance of the egalitarian value system to aversive racists' self-concept, these negative feelings and associated beliefs are typically excluded from awareness." ("The Aversive Form of Racism" 62)

He is an aversive racist who remains oblivious of all the negative beliefs that dictate his actions which makes him a "purest kind of aversive racist [who] would hold these beliefs but not admit it even to himself," which means that he practices 'double aversion'—an aversion from a Black person, as well as an aversion from his consciousness of his own experiences (regarding racial biasness and prejudice) (Kovel 84).

While Kevin is a pure Aversive racist, his brother Matt who is also a cop is a "more typical aversive racist [who] would be too scrupulous to admit these [negative racial] beliefs openly," which is why he hides his discrimination against Blacks behind plethora of excuses (84). On a surface level, he claims that cops are not racists and supports the white cops involved in the shooting with excuses that the cops were just doing their job and that they shot in order to protect themselves but these reasons that he develops are a ruse to prevent exposing his aversion towards Blacks. His bias against the blacks is evident in his words and thoughts about the blacks even when he constantly maintains that he holds no racial prejudice towards them. He says about the blacks that "they're gonna riot...Set fires, break windows, punch a police horse. That'll be good for us..." No one reminds him that the one time someone punched a police horse in this city, it was a drunk white guy" (Christine and Pride 69). He strongly believes in the stereotypes about Blacks being dangerous and violent criminals and uses these same stereotypes to justify police's violence on them. Matt finds reasons to hate Blacks

that he claims to have nothing to do with race but the fact that he uses the racist stereotypes to justify and express his hate towards them makes him a racist whether he realizes/admits it or not. Furthermore, he projects the whole incident of a White guy punching a horse onto all the Blacks because, as Kovel explains,

whatever a white man experiences as bad in himself...whatever is forbidden and horrifying in human nature, may be designated as black and projected onto a man whose dark skin and oppressed past fit him to receive the symbol. (65-66)

Projection is a way for him to deflect all the negative traits from his own group in order to establish his own racial group's moral superiority over the Blacks. Moreover, his consistent use of dichotomy of us/we versus them/they is very problematic as he uses these to create a contrasting distinctiveness by associating all the negative characteristics to Blacks and thus, reserving the opposite characteristics for Whites. The title of the book *We Are Not Like Them* reinforces this dichotomy that is established by Whites about themselves and Blacks that they are not immoral, dangerous or violent like them.

The black man is the symbol of Evil...of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness ... the black man stands for the bad side of the character...and, on the other side, social image prejudice free but in this particular instance his ego doesn't get the time to process or censor out his thoughts and words, and in blinding rage he blurts out the words 'black' which is the manifestation of his unacknowledged racism. His anger towards her can be understandable because her

interview could play a part in Kevin's incrimination but his emphasis on her being Black shows that he only sees her 'black' skin, her 'black' race, and this 'blackness' is aversive to him. He never explicitly admits his hatred towards the Blacks; he reveals it implicitly among other Whites where it is safe to do it and he can cover it up behind reasons.

Kevin and Cookie repeatedly call Blacks animals and while the very act of likening them to animals is racist, adding the historical racial context reveals a deeper meaning. They intended it to mean that Blacks are violent and dangerous based upon the common racial stereotypes, but historically Blacks were considered to be half human and half ape, and despite it being proven wrong, to this day they are called 'apes' and 'monkeys,' thus Kevin and Cookie's use of the term animals to describe them carries those older and newer meanings. Even though their intent is not to be racist and they are ignorant of layers of racial meanings their words contain, nonetheless, they are racists who lack awareness or consciousness of their own racist behaviours and actions. They find Blacks aversive, as well as any insinuation that they are biased also aversive because they do not realize that they are racist.

Cookie is an Aversive racist but a minute difference between her and Matt is that her bias is rather subdued, subtle, and indirect. It peeks through in subtle manners when she chooses White people over Black people. For example, she tries to get Jen to replace Riley with Annie as her maid of honour and since she cannot taint her unbiased public-image, her reasoning is that,

Are you sure you want Riley to be your maid of honour? You [Jen] and Annie have gotten so close. It would mean so

much to her, and wouldn't she look beautiful up there at the altar with you? She's going to be family, after all. (Christine and Pride 70-71)

Her insistence to have Annie be the maid of honour because she'd be married into the family soon is an attempt to cloak her bias towards Riley but her true intentions are revealed when she adds that she'd look beautiful standing next to Jen. The implication is that a White woman would look better standing next to her rather than a Black woman because a Black woman among all the Whites can ruin the aesthetic. Even Jen is able to pick up on Cookie's biasness that in her mind, "Annie made for better wedding pictures" (71). Even though her intent is conscious, she tries to mask it behind an excuse that has nothing to do with race as to not appear racially prejudiced because racial prejudice is morally wrong. While her bias is obvious to Jen, Cookie is unaware of the underlying cause behind her action. Cookie is not a conscious or overt racist because she does not avoid Riley and regularly tries to communicate with her while planning Jen's baby shower and even claims her as a 'personal family friend' (70). Instead of directly rejecting Black people, she unconsciously discriminates by preferring her own race over the other race.

Lou is another character that is unintentionally or unconsciously racist but her Aversive Racism is characterized by her ambiguous and inconsistent attitude, that is, saying racist things and lacking empathy for the victims of racism, and on the other hand, speaking up in the favour of Blacks and interracial interactions. Ambiguity is visible in her actions and behaviours when she speaks of people belonging to different races. She remarks how nice it would be when there'll be a lot of mix-raced kids or how her daughter should adopt a 'brown' kid whilst making inappropri-

ate racist remarks without even the realization of its implication. She is very indifferent and unsympathetic about the incident of police killing a Black child but at the same time defends Riley's media coverage in the support of victims to her daughter whose husband is one of the perpetrators. Although her defending Riley has nothing to do with race and her racist remarks are not the result of her explicit hatred towards other races, she is racist even if on an unconscious level. She is an aversive racist who says racist things without the intentions of being a racist. For example, when a bar she works at burns down she calls it a case of 'Jewish lightning' that is a derogatory term used for Jews which is based on the stereotypes about Jews being greedy and money hungry (113). Even though the bar isn't even owned by a Jewish person, she still uses this term and excuses her use of the term by claiming that it is what other people say which goes to show that she learns these things from her surroundings which nurture these stereotypes about other races and then she unconsciously perpetuates these stereotypes by utilizing them. This unconscious racism is the result of "tacitly transmitted cultural stereotype[s] ... [which are] learned, internalized, and used without an awareness of its source" (Lawrence 241). It means her unconscious racist behaviour is the result of the cultural, social, and cognitive forces. She becomes an active agent in the unending cycle of unconscious racism where she is unconsciously affected by the stereotypes permeated by culture and then by acting upon those internalized stereotypes, she contributes towards the solidification of these stereotypes in culture even further.

Another example of her ambiguous feelings about Blacks is when she shuts her boyfriend down when he calls the Wilsons 'niggers' and questions her choice of letting her daughter be

around Blacks but she does so in a quite nonchalant manner without confronting or condemning his racist attitude. At another instance she says that,

I got such a kick out of it when we showed up at the Wilsons' and I saw all these Black kids ... You were like a snowflake in a coal mine! I thought may be you'd all form a little rap group. (Christine and Pride 30)

This dialogue encapsulates her ambiguity regarding race relations perfectly: she apparently does not discriminate against Blacks and wants her child to be friends with other Black kids but if the juxtaposition of two images she uses to describe her White child and other Black children is brought into the equation then the picture seems different. Considering that she is an impulsive person who speaks without a second thought, chances are she used these words because of their apparent semblance to the children's skin colour but the objects of her choice, 'snowflake' and 'coal mine,' are questionable: a captivating 'snowflake' that glimmers in the sunshine versus the deep, dark place, void of even an iota of light. The reason behind her choice of words is the problematic American symbolic matrix that connotes everything that is dark, sinister and ugly with Blacks and everything that is bright, beautiful and positive with Whites. The fact that she unintentionally uses these words despite her best of intentions shows how she is conditioned to think in a way that aligns with the American cultural matrix's reservoir of racist symbols. Besides these words' racist symbolic meanings, they also reflect the general beliefs about the physical appearance of Whites and Blacks: Whites are considered to be beautiful whereas Blacks are considered to be ugly so even if Lou doesn't consciously thinks that, her asso-

ciation of a 'snowflake' and a 'coal mine' with her White child and other Black children respectively certainly hints at the influence of society's racist beauty standards on her unconsciousness. She harbours no malice towards Blacks, just simply lacks self-awareness.

Besides the White characters who act as the conductors of Aversive Racism, the book *We Are Not Like Them* (2021) is filled with examples of Black characters' confrontation with everyday Aversive Racism. One such example is of Riley's interaction with a bartender who is not an explicit racist but he does show some unconscious behaviour and attitude that serve as clues to his participation in Aversive Racism. As discussed before, some of the telltales of an Aversive Racist are that they are uncomfortable in the presence of Blacks so they try to avoid interacting with them instead of directly confronting them, and they mostly choose their own racial group over the Blacks. These aforementioned signs are unconsciously displayed by the bartender: he consistently ignores Riley when she tries to get his attention to place an order and he only pays attention to White women. Before he busies himself with 'blonde' customers and when he finally arrives at Jen and Riley's table, he only addresses 'Jen,' who is another blonde woman, while ignoring Riley. Here, 'blonde hair' becomes symbol of 'whiteness' and the bartender unconsciously gravitate towards Whites while ignoring Riley who is Black which reveals his bias. His discomfort at the sight of 'black' skin is evident in his attempt to avoid interaction with Riley at first but since the situation requires him to take their order, he hurriedly asks their order and is gone before Riley has the chance to even set the menu back on the table. Close proximity to her causes him discomfort which is why he hurries to move away from the table so that he can put some distance between himself and her. Another



reason why he only addresses Jen while taking order could be that he assumes that Jen, being White, would be paying rather than a Black woman due to the stereotypes about Blacks being poor and unsuccessful and Whites being wealthy and successful. The bartender himself and even Jen are not aware of what transpired but Riley is very much aware of it which is why she asks Jen to call the bartender over because she realizes that he would not pay attention if she is the one who is calling him.

Interaction with the bartender is not the only example of everyday occurrence of Aversive racism; it happens again when Riley attends an event and her interaction with an Aversive Racist goes as follows:

I turn and a white guy ... is thrusting his coat at me. It clicks.

"Excuse me?" I glare at him, forcing him to admit his mistake.

"Sorry. I thought you were working here. I didn't mean... Shit. I'm really sorry. It's the outfit."

Yes, I'd slipped off my coat and I'm wearing black pants and a black sweater. But no, it isn't the outfit. (129)

Riley is dressed in a similar fashion to other reporters, not like employees overseeing the event, so the fact that he approaches her straight-away after entering through the door and not any other White reporters indicates the activation of stereotypes that were resting in the subconscious at the sight of the Black person. Lawrence explains that due to the employment discrimination Whites are accustomed to seeing Blacks performing menial jobs which results in "occupational stereotypes born out of habit" (252). The White man's actions are the result of general as-

sumptions about blacks occupying menial jobs and lower positions in society and since he is so used to seeing them as such he moves to her without a thought or the awareness that he is being influenced by racial stereotypes. Moreover, this event is held at an extremely posh White neighbourhood where the rich White people outnumber the Black attendees, so it is possible that on some unconscious level the man believed that her presence here can only be explained if she were here as a server. This man is a true Aversive racist because he holds egalitarian beliefs as well as unconscious biasness: he attends the event that is held in the support of blacks to spread awareness about racial violence and he listens to Sabrina's speech about it with gusto while clapping and whistling which is proof enough that he supports racial equality and is against racism, but on the other hand he is unintentionally moved by the stereotypes after seeing a Black person and partakes in Aversive Racism. Since this man actively supports blacks, he has created for himself a nonprejudiced self-image; thus, he justifies his action of mistaking a Black person to be a coat collector by saying that it was due to her attire as a way to protect his self-concept because people like him who consciously practice morals cannot bear to have their self-image shattered—neither in front of others, nor to themselves.

Shaun also experiences Aversive Racism at his job; he says,

the woman watched us like a hawk, like we were going to make a run for it...What really kills me is you show up in work gloves and sweats and these people treat you like you're a moron. I swear she was talking to me extra slow like I have two brain cells. (Christine and Pride 49)

This woman is not an explicit racist but an implicit racist who keeps close eyes on him because of her biasness against Blacks. Her actions suggest that she is being influenced by the stereotypes about Blacks being dishonest and criminals which instigates fear in her that they might steal her things, and also by the stereotypes about them being intellectually inferior and uneducated which is why she unconsciously speaks to Shaun as if he won't be able to understand her properly. Once, Corey also engages in Aversive Racism when he asks Riley if it is safe out here when they go to a Black neighbourhood. Corey is not a racist because he is dating a Black woman whom he loves but what he says shows how he is being impacted by the cognitive, social, and cultural forces unconsciously. When Riley and Corey are at the restaurant, a White woman consistently stares at them and while the act of simply looking at them may seem innocent enough, it has a deeper meaning in a culture where interracial relationships are frowned upon and where Whites believe that they shouldn't establish intimate relations with Blacks because they are superior to Blacks. Even Riley is able to understand that the woman does not approve of their interracial relationship because she thinks of her as inferior.

Riley being told that she is not like the rest of them (Blacks) or when Justin is portrayed as one of the good ones by Whites are instances of unconscious racism where White Aversive racists believe that they are praising these Black people because they are supportive of Blacks but what they fail to realize is that they are insulting their whole race by treating them as exceptions. Treating them as 'one' of the good ones or successful ones or complimenting them as such is equivalent to labelling their whole race as 'bad.' Riley being accused of cheating by White teachers when she does well or being told by her White

peers that she talks like Whites when she uses SAT vocabulary is evidence of them believing that Blacks are intellectually challenged and that they consider 'whiteness' to be the standard of 'goodness' so they attribute all of her good qualities to her 'acting' or 'behaving' like a White.

Not only White people but the whole justice system is plagued with symptoms of Aversive Racism. Due to the unacknowledged biases and racial prejudice against Blacks, Blacks are sentenced harshly comparatively to Whites by the institution that is supposed to uphold justice impartially. Shaun and Kevin both get ten year probation even though the gravity of their crimes is incomparable. Kevin getting the same punishment for reckless murder as Shaun for simply being in the car of a person who has unlicensed gun highlights the unconscious or unchecked bias that dictates the consequences of crimes and affects the outcomes of trials. Even in the eyes of the society, Blacks are criminals whether they commit crimes or not, but Whites are still given grace. Shaun is unable to find a job after his incrimination but Kevin easily gets one and even though the job is offered by a relative, it shows that their business would have no detrimental consequences for having a White employee with a criminal record because society is forgiving towards Whites. It alludes towards the society's racially prejudice attitude towards Blacks.

### Conclusion

In contemporary American society, explicit racial hatred towards Blacks has been dominantly replaced by the subtle, implicit, and indirect form of racial prejudice that is Aversive Racism, due to Whites developing strong sense of morality in addition to fear of backlash for expressing outward racial hatred as racism has become unacceptable. *Aversive Racism* manifests as a result of White's conscious commitment towards being

unprejudiced and unconscious absorption of negative stereotypes and bias against Blacks. Investigation of the novel reveals that even the most progressive and well-meaning Whites unconsciously harbour negative racial attitudes, bias and prejudice towards Blacks because of the undetected influence of racist culture and stereotypes that connote Blacks with violence, crime, danger, badness, immorality, laziness, ugliness, and stupidity. Black bodies become the symbols that activate all the latent stereotypes and bias residing in the subconscious of the Whites' mind to dictate their behaviour and actions towards Blacks. Since they have created a non-prejudice self-image for themselves and cannot fathom being racists, they fail to recognize when they are being racist or biased towards Blacks and this lack of awareness of their unconscious racism can result in detrimental at best and devastatingly deadly consequences at worst.

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# Unsettled Lives: Displacement as a Major Theme in the Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Kate Drumgoold

Dr. Anu Paul\*

## Abstract

Transatlantic slave trade had long supplied enslaved African labour to work on the plantations and they became the major labour force in the Western Hemisphere. The slave trade between Africa and the United States was initiated by 1619 when a Dutch privateer deported blacks to the English colonies in North America. Jamestown witnessed the arrival of the first slaves and it was the first chapter of a series of unending cruelty meted out to humanity in the name of slavery. Displacement evolves as a recurring theme in the selected slave narratives and to know how men and women coped with it is intriguing. Removed from their native land to a different geographical area was a painful challenge for the Africans who never travelled beyond their village or tribal areas. Many narratives record how they even found the skin of whites as something alien and even their marine skills were perceived by Africans as magic. This theme of displacement is common even during the era of globalization, when one can find resourceful people migrating from weaker countries to developed countries. Incorporating trauma theory into the discussion of the transatlantic slave trade enhances our understanding of the profound psychological and emotional impact on individuals who endured this horrific experience.

**Keywords:** *Slavery, Displacement, Narratives, and Exploitation.*

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Slavery in itself had many degrading qualities but even the transportation of slaves from their native land to America was marked with untold hardships. Slaves were transported across the Atlantic Ocean, which was termed as the 'Middle Passage.' The entire process of slave trade constituted three stages and the initial part was the journey of the ship from Europe carrying cargos to be exchanged for slaves. African rulers were tempted to sell their war captives or members of a different tribe in exchange of goods like iron, firearms, brandy, clothes, and gunpowder. The second stage of journey was called 'Middle Passage' and this journey was the most excruciating one because the ships were often precariously loaded with Africans. Captured Africans were distributed mainly in Brazil, Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean. Thus, displacement from the native land was a fundamental feature of Afro-American slavery as people were uprooted from their families just for the economic gains of the whites. From a trauma theory perspective, the economic motivations driving the slave trade can be seen as perpetuating cycles of violence and trauma. The commodification of human lives, with individuals treated as goods to be exchanged, inflicted deep wounds on the collective psyche of the affected communities. As Brewin points out continuous exposure to trauma may lead to the "temporary breakdown in continuous, interrelated processes of perception, memory or identity" (2011). Even after generations have passed since their ancestors were forcibly removed from their homeland, African Americans continue to struggle with a deep-seated identity crisis, feeling increasingly alienated from the prevailing culture.

The field of trauma studies revolves around the exploration of psychological trauma, its portrayal through language, and the role memory

plays in shaping both individual and cultural identities. It is primarily concerned with analyzing representations of severe experiences and their impact on identity and memory, drawing from various theoretical frameworks like psychoanalytic, post structural, sociocultural, and postcolonial theories. Trauma, considered a highly disruptive event profoundly affecting emotional well-being and perceptions, is a subject of critical examination within this field. Trauma studies delve into the examination of trauma's impact on literature and society, scrutinizing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance. Scholars investigate the intricate interplay between psychological and societal elements that influence how individuals comprehend traumatic experiences and how these experiences, in turn, shape their identity and behaviour. Moreover, this field concentrates on studying the formal innovations found in texts, whether in print or media, that offer insights into the intricate connections among identity, the unconscious, and the recollection of extreme events. Slave narratives penned by former slaves, recollecting their traumatic journey through the ruthless institution of slavery, can definitely come under the scope of trauma and its effects on individuals. In its initial development during the 1990s, trauma studies emerged by drawing on Freudian theory to construct a framework of trauma centered around an intense experience that stretches the boundaries of language and, at times, completely disrupts established meanings. Significantly, the understanding of a traumatic event often occurs following a period of latency, during which the effects of the event are deferred or delayed in their manifestation. To quote Freud and Breuer, "...we may reverse the dictum 'cessante causa cessat effectus' (when the cause ceases the effect ceases) and conclude from these observations that the determining process (that

is, the recollection of it) continues to operate for years..." (1955). Still the repercussions of slavery can be traced in the psyche and lives of African Americans.

Africans were no strangers to slavery because when the tribes had conflicts, the captured people were used as slaves. The only difference was that slavery was not a defined institution in the sense that there were no constant rules and codes for slaves. Often, they could work for their freedom and slavery was not carried on to generations as in American slavery. Poverty and need for money often made Africans to opt for slavery in their tribe in order to sustain family. When one traces the history of slave trade, one comes across a race which was subjected to the chains for ages that the humanity owes them greatly for their tribulations under this institution. Trauma theory highlights how the forced displacement and enslavement of Africans had enduring psychological consequences. The trauma of being uprooted from one's homeland, the loss of identity, and the brutality of the slave system contributed to the development of coping mechanisms that shaped the psychological landscape of Afro-American communities. Many of those who have been traumatised have long-term problems with various aspects of thinking that impede decision-making and the exercise of good judgment. Slavery is a system based on traumatising the weak. The systemic trauma inflicted by slavery tends to lead to the emergence of patterns such as "...an intolerance of mistakes, denial of personal difficulties, anger as a problem-solving strategy, hyper vigilance, and absolutistic thinking..." (Alford, et al., 1988) in the victims.

Slaves always contributed to the wealth and success of masters and they were well-adapted to the natural environment of America. Everyone aspired to own slaves and it was a presti-

gious issue among white gentry to own estates and slaves. Legislation established that the children of a slave mother would become the property of the master and so they were encouraged to marry among themselves and reproduce. Masters also took care that the slave family did not function as a unit and separated them from each other by selling them. Through a trauma lens, the immense loss of life during the transatlantic slave trade is not only a statistical tragedy but also represents a collective trauma experienced by the African diaspora. The grief, fear, and anguish that characterized this historical period had lasting effects on the mental well-being of survivors and their descendants. In majority of the slave narratives one can trace the incidents of separation of families and only some of them could find their family after emancipation. Even though slave trade was outlawed in 1808 in America the number of slaves continued to increase as they were not brought from Africa but they were born as slaves in the US itself. Slavery continued mainly because being a slave owner was a lucrative endeavour and almost all the profitable plantations were supported by the free labour of African slaves.

Examining the narratives one can find several incidents which portray the cruel punishments slaves had to endure in plantations. In a plantation often a lot of slaves were managed by a single overseer and it is rather astonishing how these healthy slaves were made to obey them. It was often using violence and threat that they were tamed but even then, there were always rebellious slaves who fought for freedom. Male slaves were often punished without any reason, mainly to break them down physically and emotionally. Punishments made some slaves to retaliate and drove them to the edge of defying masters and overseers. When a slave asserted himself and challenged the authority, he was either

punished severely or sold to another plantation. Harriet Jacobs in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, mentions the support she had from her grandmother in becoming a matured human being. While her master constantly pursued her for sexual abuse it was her grandmother's determination that saved her often, even after she became a mother herself. There were instances in her life when she wanted to run away to North but the question of leaving her children behind stopped her from doing it. Thus, her narrative stresses on the domestic desires of female slaves in addition to their isolated and lonely lives. This is mainly because females had a self-sacrificing existence and they couldn't stress on individual redemption and growth due to their responsibility towards children. Jacobs narrates almost all the negative experiences she had to suffer in slavery. She blesses the memory of her mistress for teaching her to read and write and pens her gratitude for receiving that privilege denied to slaves in general. She in turn, makes good use of the blessing of literacy to record the life she endured in slavery.

In her narrative Jacobs mentions how she had to stage her escape to save herself from her intriguing master. Her master wanted to keep her as his concubine and he had constructed a house for her in the woods. Jacobs never preferred such a degraded existence and often thought of escaping to Northern states. It is her grandmother who makes her aware of her responsibility towards her children and aids her to hide in the attic of their own home. Rather than a physical displacement Jacobs goes through a mental one, and observes her children from the attic while her master frantically searches for her. Jacobs' grandmother is a dutiful person and she always stresses the importance of leading a socially justifiable life. She dissuades Jacobs from running away saying

that no one will support a mother who abandoned her children and "and if you leave them, you will never have a happy moment" (Jacobs, 1998). As Judith Lewis Herman observes,

The first principle of recovery is empowerment of the survivor. She must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery. Others may offer advice, support, assistance, affection, and care, but not cure. (1992)

Thus, Jacobs decides to fight back against her master instead of choosing the easy path of succumbing to his power.

As is mentioned already slaves were denied the conventional setup of family and often children became the sole responsibility of the mother. There were many reasons for this like the father being a white man or a black slave. In both the cases the males would not take the responsibility because slave codes considered the alliance between slave woman and white man illegal and slave fathers were often sold away from their families. Slave law also maintained that children born to slave women will continue to be slaves and masters often reared these children as assets to be sold. Though a slave woman wanted a free life for her kids she was rendered helpless as often children proved to be a hindrance for her escape. According to Carole Boyce Davies "the mark of motherhood is often ascribed to women's inability to travel and asserted her vulnerable state" (1994). Male narratives often record the escape of the male slaves to North justifying that they fought for the freedom of their entire race. Children or wife were insignificant in the life of a male slave because he had to fight for a bigger cause. It is an irony that often the children who became the vulnerability of slave women, they provided them with an amount of mental

strength. Slave women were motivated to stand for the cause of freedom for their children and they wanted to make sure that their children didn't go through their cursed fate. Jacobs in her narrative records, how she felt when she knew that her firstborn was a daughter. According to her slavery was a cruel institution and being a woman doubled the struggle. The journey of slave men from slavery to freedom is rather a physical one while that of slave women according to McDowell is a more 'personal and psychological journey' (1980). For female slaves physically running away from slavery was almost impossible and they always sought after means that ensured their psychological freedom. They were always on guard and protected their children hoping for a free future. Many slave narratives describe how the slave mothers reclaimed their lost children after emancipation.

In the journey of slave women from freedom to slavery, acquiring education and penning a narrative were also means to escape the mental servitude they had to endure. These slaves often found it gratifying to record their long-suppressed voices even through the medium of their masters. As Jacobs's records in her narrative her escape was not a solitary journey but the result of a collective effort mainly with the aid of her family. Valerie Smith described Jacobs' escape as a movement from "one small space to another," equally constricted (Smith, 1990). In male narratives one can find references as to how they followed the North Star towards freedom and how the movement from South to North symbolizes the escape from slavery to freedom. But in Jacobs' narrative such an exposure is absent and she often had to hide from her master's prying hands. Concealing oneself becomes a major theme in the journey towards freedom for a female slave. To quote Carole Boyce Davies, "confinement in the attic of her [Jacobs'] grandmother's house so that

she can watch, voyeur-like, her children" provides solace for the slave mother (Davies, 1994).

Separation from kith and kin was one of the many evils of the system of slavery and Kate Drumgoold in *A Slave Girl's Story: Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold* recollects her separation from mother,

We did not know that she was sold until she was gone; and the saddest thought was to me to know which way she had gone and I used to go outside and look up to see if there was anything that would direct me, and I saw a clear place in the sky, and it seemed to me the way she had gone, and I watched it three and a half years, not knowing what that meant, and it was there the whole time that mother was gone from her little ones. (Drumgoold 1898)

In this recollection Drumgoold recounts the discovery of an enigmatic source of solace amidst the equally puzzling disappearance of her mother. Drumgoold's narrative hints at the deep emotional scars and trauma experienced by African Americans forcibly torn from their families during slavery, while also suggesting the potential for resilience within their own agency. Even though Drumgoold children were eventually reunited with their mother, the longing and suffering they had to endure cannot be justified. As Marie Schwartz points out,

...slave youths without parents around to protect them could find themselves at high risk for sale in the market or forced to fulfill adult roles in the slave quarter. Even more disconcerting was the vulnerability to sexual exploitation that often-awaited slave girls in the absence of adults. (Schwartz 2000)



But in Drumgoold's narrative we find an extremely lucky slave girl who was under the supervision and care of a good mistress. The general theme of abuse is surprisingly absent in her narrative.

While analyzing Drumgoold's narrative we must keep in mind that she considered her mistress, Mrs. House, to be her surrogate mother and often places her in the narrative, in a more significant place than her biological mother. Even though she doesn't mention the reason why she was treated differently, one may attribute it to the fact that she presents everything through the eyes of a loved child, viewing slavery but unaware of its profound effects. Throughout her narrative she remembers white employers with kind words and also refers to her former professor with admiration. Kate Drumgoold reunites with her mother Mrs. Drumgoold with the help of a white man named Major Bailey and later she works for Hammond family. They don't allow her to study or attend church but once again she gets lucky to be taken over by Bailey family. They educate her and bring her to church and Kate Drumgoold firmly believes that white men will gradually overcome their racist attitude towards free blacks. She was writing her narrative from her own perspective and disregarded the treatment meted out towards other slaves.

[T]he impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time. (Caruth 9)

Her narrative is different from all the other narratives in the sense that she experienced slavery in a different way. According to her she was lucky enough to have a benevolent mistress and she calls her 'my white mother' (1898). Even then

she says how desolate she felt when her own mother was sold away from her and how her mother tried to free her children with the help of a gentleman from north named Major Bailey. It was with the help of him that she was placed with Mrs. Bettie House; her good mistress till their mother could repay the debts and claim them back. She speaks of her great and fulfilling experience during her stay with Major Bailey's family that allowed her to go to church and Sunday school with their children.

Whenever Drumgoold reports a death in her family she expresses it as they "... left for their home in heaven" (29). Drumgoold's narrative is not recorded in chronological order, but she moves forward and backward in time. She stresses her adherence to two principles in her life, her religion that is Christianity and her acquiring education to learn more about Bible. She bewails how her family was scattered by the institution of slavery and how by God's grace they all gained freedom. She proudly asserts the fact that her faith will remain with her till her death and she is indebted to God for saving her from many severe illnesses. She also speaks of her pleasure in teaching children and she was grateful that education was paving way for the bright future of former slaves' children. She ends her narrative abruptly with a note of hope that education will lead her and she is thankful that, "...God led me to do all that I could to help forward the great cause of education" (46).

Drumgoold's narrative is unique in the sense that it proves that there were benevolent whites who differed from the horrid individuals described by others like Jacobs. Mrs. House's positive influence may have made Drumgoold more receptive towards the behaviour of whites and she was privileged enough to acquire education. As Elizabeth Fox Genovese points out,

the kindnesses that singled out particular whites as good masters and mistresses were interpreted as the result of their own basic characters or passing whims, rather than as a response to the slave girl's good efforts. (Genovese 1988)

Drumgoold never narrates a negative encounter with whites and given the time period it is a rather doubtful situation. There are many unaccounted time lapses in her narrative and this may indicate that she had glossed over many negative experiences. May be one can consider it as a part of her survival strategy just to repress the negative experiences and to dwell solely on the positive experiences. After all, the slaves had to adapt themselves to a society with the whites and they could almost never return to their native country and culture denied to their forefathers. Ultimately, one can perceive Drumgoold as a survivor who faced slavery and its shackles with a smile and strived to educate her race. Her persistence made her a teacher, a profession largely reserved for northern white women.

White masters neglected the value of family ties of slaves which caused indescribable suffering especially for the female slaves. Harriet Jacobs in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* records how she was denied of the freedom to choose the man she loved. She takes revenge on her abusing master by deliberately initiating an affair with another white man. She also narrates how she had to hide for a considerable period in the attic of her grandmother's house to escape the advancements of her own master. She explains how males could just run away and estrange themselves from their families, only to fight for the freedom of their race. But female slaves always found themselves weighed down by their children and had to silently suffer the abusive masters. Jacobs' personal

and psychological journey is one of profound significance as it marks the transition of the most vulnerable slave women from slavery to empowerment. Separation from kith and kin is also very effectively recorded in the narratives. Kate Drumgoold portrays her plight as a small child when her mother was sold away to a distant plantation, away from herself and her siblings. Kate Drumgoold does not record any exploitation from her masters and this may be due to the fact that she wanted to focus only on the positive aspects of a slave's life. May be, it was her survival strategy because she wanted to assimilate naturally into the world of freedom and establish peaceful coexistence with the whites. Elizabeth Keckley also records the heart wrenching pain her mother and herself suffered when their father was sold to a distant plantation.

Any traumatic experience inflicts a detrimental and often pathological impact on both consciousness and memory, hindering the integration of the past into an individual's life story. Trauma inflicted through slavery underscores the anguish caused by an external force that alters the internal landscape of the mind, irreversibly reshaping one's identity. Central to the discussion of trauma is, according to Cathy Caruth is

...the idea that its extreme nature ruptures both language and consciousness, resulting in enduring harm and necessitating distinctive narrative forms for expression. (1996)

While the event remains absent in typical consciousness, it persists just beyond comprehension, existing in a timeless, non-verbal state that continues to cause psychological distress. This peculiar absence yet haunting presence of trauma in consciousness, its inability to seamlessly integrate into memory and narrative, casts a shadow

that indirectly gestures toward the significance of trauma and the truth of past experiences. Thus, analyzing slavery through these narratives convinces one that exploitation of the weak by the powerful is concurrent throughout ages and it has its manifestations in variant forms even today. Incorporating trauma theory into the analysis of the transatlantic slave trade underscores the longlasting and pervasive impact on the psychological well-being of those who endured this traumatic chapter in history. It also helps to contextualize the persistent challenges faced by communities affected by slavery and highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing historical trauma in discussions of social justice and equality.

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# Why Young People of the Twenty-First Century are Declining in Taking Literature as a Subject of Specialization?

[A Case Study of Juba City Council in  
Four Selected Schools and University of Juba South Sudan City (CES) - Juba]

Clement Aturjong Kuot Deng\*

## Abstract

The current generation in South Sudan has been observed to be declining in taking literature as a subject of specialization. The reasons were attributed to unattractive salaries, demotivation, and the welfare of the families, among others. The South Sudan public and private universities have been challenged by the lack of new teaching staff. The results are seen at the two levels of education, Higher Education and General Education. The richest nation in both, East Africa and the IGAD, South Sudan possesses an abundance of resources, including minerals, oil, cattle, agricultural goods, fishers, and rivers and streams, that the government has failed to adequately utilize. It was pointed out that human resources are the foundation of all progress, and that the foundation of any development in the modern world is education. The general public, academia, and representatives of civil society organizations have all voiced assertions that the government does not consider education to be a high priority. The outcome is that people abandon teaching in search of better opportunities. The lack of teachers of English Language and Literature resulted in poor quality of English language and Literature as well as science subjects. Educationists, linguists, and literary writers from South Sudan contended that the current generation lacks the aptitude to acquire the English language and literature, as well as the necessary knowledge and abilities. It was said that the government does not inspire or encourage members of the present generation to pursue careers as teachers. The government of South Sudan is being called out to reinstate the scholarship program for exceptional pupils. They emphasized that people who are prepared and eager to study English language and literature in the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand should be awarded the scholarship.

**Keywords:** *Current, Generation, Declining, Literature, Language, Abandoned, and Career.*

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The younger generation in South Sudan has been characterised as superfluities who do not want to put in the effort necessary to create any kind of literary work, including plays, novels, poetry, and nonfiction. They do not seem to be motivated to put in the necessary effort to become proficient in language and literature. It has been observed that several secondary and primary school teachers lack the necessary training and qualifications to instruct students in the English language and literature. The answer is straightforward: the majority of unpaid civil servants in the nation are teachers. The everyday necessities of life, such as a barrel of 200 liters of drinking water, a dinner for the whole family, and transportation for kids to and from school, cannot be met by the salaries of instructors in elementary and high schools. Many teachers have given up on their teaching careers. The present generation has been less inclined to pursue a career in teaching because of low pay, low motivation, and a dearth of social services. There was a claim that the Ministry of General Education and Instruction chose to hire inexperienced and unskilled instructors since there weren't enough people pursuing teaching careers. It was stated that secondary and primary school teachers turned down teaching careers because they could not accommodate their current schools. For example, if they receive the best offer, they are free to decide to drop out of school whenever they choose. It has been observed that the younger generation is not prepared to teach in basic or secondary education. Teaching requires hard work, for example, a teacher must prepare for lessons to teach English Literature and English language. It was suggested that teaching is seen as a vocation marked by struggle, exhaustion, and pain. It was said that to study and instruct, literary authors need to read and comprehend a great deal. It was later

argued that literature was the only way to advance South Sudanese culture and national languages.

### Research Objectives

1. To examine the reasons why young people of the twenty-first century are declining to take Literature as a subject of specialization.
2. To explore the issues those contribute to rejection in taking English Language and Literature as a subject of specialization.
3. To explore the answers and new methods that can contribute to the betterment of the English Language and Literature in South Sudan.
4. To investigate why the current generation is declining to be teachers of English language and Literature.
5. To discover the solutions that can contribute to advancing English Language and Literature in South Sudan.

### Significance of the Research

The research focused on South Sudan's rejection of the English language and literature. The study concentrated on the factors that influence educators' reluctance to instruct students in English and literature in today's generation. The study examined the opinions of educators regarding the value of English literature at the four secondary schools that were chosen. Interviews with professors, associate professors, and assistant professors at the School of Education were carried out for the study, which also included comments from students and English language and literature teachers. It was noted that the instructors' lack of accommodation, poor pay, demotivation, reduced access to social welfare, transportation, difficulties lower and social

status were all contributing factors. According to Brumfit and Ronald (1986), teaching English as a second language or as a foreign language through literature has a greater impact on student performance. It is impossible to improve English language and literature efficacy without competent, experienced instructors who are dedicated to teaching the subject.

### **The Audiences of the Study**

A wide range of people is the target audience for this research, including academicians, research organizations, universities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Global Partners for Education (GPE), students, teachers at the General Education, community members, civil society organizations, donors, international organizations, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Bank, international organizations for the Catholic Church, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and others.

### **Interpretation and Data Analysis**

The study employed two mixed methods: the qualitative method and the quantitative method. Interviews with several respondents who were students at four different schools were conducted using a qualitative methodology. The Juba Diocese Model Secondary School, St. Daniel Comboni Secondary School, Juba Day, and Juba Girls were the sources of the data. There were two categories created for the schools. The primary sources of the interviews were students, instructors, representatives from the Ministry of General Education and Instruction, academics, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, and assistant lecturers in the education department. The analysis of the four years of secondary school performance likewise employed a

quantitative technique. The eleven queries posed by the investigator were examined. To research and investigate the difficulties and uncover fresh concepts that bolster the significance of English literature in English teaching, qualitative methods were employed. The English literature and language outcomes at the secondary school level at Juba City Council in four Juba Town schools were explained using a quantitative technique. Both the advantages and disadvantages of the study were discussed or examined. The study tried to increase South Sudan's knowledge of the English language and literature. The research has employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to enhance comprehension and address certain concerns about Sheerness's (1990) research questions and challenges. The two methods were used to investigate and examine the problems related to secondary school English literature instruction's decline.

### **Qualitative Method**

The researcher first conducted interviews as part of the process of gathering and analyzing the data. It covered data collection and interpretation. The researcher put the interview transcripts on a laptop using modern writing techniques so that the research might be considered standard. Before the researcher was permitted to enter the field to collect data, the supervisor of the researcher approved the four-page interview paper. "Themes and categories are not predetermined but emerge from the data itself," asserts Maykut and Morehouse (127). The quantitative research was conducted concurrently with the qualitative data analysis, with the latter component focusing on the study's progress. To acquire a qualitative or descriptive, in-depth study of the data collected from respondents, the researcher simultaneously conducted the data analysis using a qualitative method.

## Quantitative Approach

To achieve Houser's (15) idea of the quantitative method, Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (109) contended that the quantitative approach is bolstered by quantitative study. Data quantification served as its foundation. According to Henning, et al. (3), quantitative inquiry focuses on the amount of understanding. According to Mouton et al. (155), the emphasis is on numerical value. It is possible to undertake quantitative methods using a quantitative methodology. Although a researcher did not introduce the questionnaire, Vockell and Asher (131) argue that it is essential in quantitative research. Mixed methods can yield high-quality research that balances qualitative and quantitative approaches; this type of research is known as balanced research, according to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2). According to Scheerens (1990), the literature examined tested research that was put to the test using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

## Construction and Content Validation of the Interview

According to Gay and Airasian (280), a questionnaire or interview is a tool used to try and get comparable information from every member of a sample because all study participants were asked the same questions. Put another way, the data collected from respondents' information is transformed into information that enables the measurement of respondents' opinions. Interviews served as the basis. The researcher conducted interviews with representatives from the Ministry of General Education and Instruction as well as University of Juba instructors, students, and professors. The State Ministry of General Education and Instruction's Examinations section was the centre of attention. Both organised and unstructured interviews were used in this study

to collect data from the chosen sample population. Because all respondents received the same set of questions and data scoring was straightforward, the researcher preferred a closed-ended questionnaire with brief response requirements. One of the drawbacks of a structured interview is that participants are limited to using only one sentence. To counteract these drawbacks, the researcher used standardised interviews.

To measure the intended outcomes, the interview questions were those that were relevant to the subject as described in the preceding sections. The term 'validity questions' is used to describe this kind of measurement by Keeves and Lamonski (125). As a result, the inquiry pieces ought to gauge the precise variables being studied. Ary, et al. (357) provides support for this when they state that 'in order to ensure the validity of the interview,' The interview must address the theoretical presumptions found in the literature. To address the study topics posed in the first chapter, three sets of interviews were created. The topics and assertions in these interviews were similar, with the exception that they focused on distinct respondents, based on these concepts. The researcher personally conducted the interviews with the goal of eliciting the greatest response and asserted that they were valid in terms of substance.

## Statistical Procedure Applied in the Investigation

The Juba Day Secondary Schools, Juba Diocesan Secondary School, Juba Girls Secondary School, and St. Daniel Comboni Secondary Schools were the study's application sites for student and instructor performance. The four-year run of the performances was from 2018 to 2021. The English language and literature are its main subjects. It was found that the students performed

better in literature than in the English language, which raised doubts about why they did so given that literature is thought to be more difficult than language. The study also examined student opinions from four chosen schools, with a quantitative analysis of their opinions. To assess the study's research questions, the instructors' opinions were also recorded and statistically examined.

### **Application of the Interviews**

Interviewing is characterised by MacMillan and Schumacher as "flexible, adoptable, and involves direct interaction between individuals" (267). The best research approach is generally agreed to be conducting interviews. This method is thought to be effective in producing a narrative and sufficient results, and it saves time for both the researcher and the respondents by allowing face-to-face interactions. The respondent can speak up with confidence and state thanks to it. The researcher intended to speak with members of the South Sudan National Legislative Assembly (SSNLA) and Upper House, also known as the South Sudan Council of States (SSCS), but they all rejected it. Not all ten members of each house were interviewed by the researcher. Only those who work for the Ministry of Instruction and General Education. Senior Ministry of General Education and Instruction officials, who formulate educational policies, as well as instructors, students, and associate professors at the University of Juba, were interviewed by the researcher.

### **Summary of Data Analysis**

It took the researcher five attempts to interview fifty one students from the four Juba Day Secondary School-designated schools. Of the ten pupils interviewed, five were girls, and the other five were guys. Ten girls attended Juba Girls

Secondary School; the researcher spoke with twenty one students at Juba Girls and Juba Diocesan Model Secondary School, which was chosen as a top-performing school by Juba City Council. At the Department of English Language and Literature in the School of Education at the University of Juba, there are ten representatives from the Ministry of General Education and Instruction, ten professors, associate professors, assistant professors, lectures, and senior lectures.

### **Result and Discussion**

For the survey, four selected secondary Schools were selected. While 90% of respondents claimed that teachers have experience, 10% reported that teachers lacked the necessary background to instruct English literature. While 30% of respondents claimed that teachers lacked the necessary credentials to teach English literature, 70% of respondents believed that teachers were qualified to teach the subject. Of the respondents, 20% claimed that teachers possessed motivation, while the remaining 80% claimed that teachers lacked motivation. 30% of respondents claimed that teachers had received enough training, while 70% claimed that teachers had not received enough training. While 20% of respondents claimed that English literature is easy to understand, 80% felt that it is too challenging. While 30% of respondents claimed that schools had enough English literature textbooks, 70% of respondents claimed that there were not enough in the classroom. While 60% of respondents claimed that schools have a positive atmosphere, 40% claimed that there aren't enough English literature textbooks in the classroom. Twenty percent of respondents reported that students had a fundamental understanding of English literature, while eighty percent of respondents claimed that students lacked basic knowledge and abilities in the subject. Eighty percent of respondents sup-



ported the notion of reintroducing English literature at the elementary school level, while twenty percent opposed the proposal.

### **The Importance of the English Literature in English Teaching and Learning at Secondary Schools**

According to Chandran (2016), "Literature produces and identifies collections of texts." A collection of stories, poems, and plays that are mostly centred around a specific book is referred to as literature (Deng 15–17).

It helps the society understand how communication takes place in a particular community or society and helps the learners become acquainted with the socio-political backgrounds of the target language.

It deepens our grasp of human nature as well. Literature deals with universal themes that creative writers develop to spark discussion among readers and aid in their understanding of the different linguistic structures and functions that literary texts provide. (15–17)

"Literature is part and parcel of language learning; it teaches or instills language's skills" (15–17). "Stories in particular can be used to help learners develop a variety of sub-skills in addition to their major skills" (15–17).

"A reader can develop language skills unconsciously and with little effort through literature" (15–17). It deepens our grasp of what makes people human. The use of literature in English instruction has drawn criticism or objections from some linguists, educationalists, and education policymakers (15–17). However, in response, the researchers stated that teaching literature is cru-

cial and necessary since it enhances and promotes language proficiency. Researchers claim that literature "exposes students to meaningful and contextual descriptions and introduces a variety of vocabulary, dialogues, and prose that can be used in language learning and communication." It was suggested that reading literature helps students increase their ability to interpret language, as demonstrated by Deng (15–17).

Literature will extend linguistic understanding, such as wide and subtle vocabulary usage and complicated and correct grammar, according to Povey's (1972) observation, which is cited in McKay (529). "Literature is more focused on the conscious, reflective, and creative nature of the language," claims Littlewood (1986).

Authentic material, language in use, artistic representation of the spoken language, as well as language and cultural enrichment, are elements that literature enhances ELT through.

Literature opens the door to a deeper and more comprehensive examination of the culture (or cultures) in which the target language is spoken with this final component.

Literature is comprised of authentic materials, language in use, and aesthetic representation of the spoken language as well as culture and language enrichment. (Deng 15-17)

Philip Henslowe once said, "Literature is the soul of human beings; it is the transmitter of habits, traditions, routines, or customs, as well as the social, political, historical, and economic context." "A thought's internal structure is determined by its language, not just its surface layer"

(Deng 15-17). It assists in the process of forming the notion as well as conveying it after it has been produced. In Durkheim (1947), "Authentic material that conveys two features in its written text" is what is meant to be found in abundance in literature, according to Cruz (2010). Two explanations are possible for it. The person has mastered the language and is speaking it as a native speaker, first and foremost (2010).

The language used in the classroom is artificially structured according to a textbook's statistical nature, (Deng 15-17). Furthermore, "it is an artistic portrayal of the spoken language within a specific cultural setting" (Deng 15-17). "Any student or learner is free to ask this question" (Deng 15-17). From where do the English originate? The solution is quite easy to understand.

Textbooks with their structures, vocabulary, and formulas give the impression that English is a British and American language, but in reality, English originated in the United Kingdom and then spread to the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It then spread to India and Africa before reaching other Asian countries. (Deng 15-17)

According to a researcher, the idea of teaching English literature exclusively at the secondary school level hinders students' ability to understand both the language and literature because the curriculum is inadequate and does not provide a solid basis for learning the subject. It is beneficial to teach in elementary and primary schools, and the 8 x 3 educational system is destroying English, according to Deng. (Deng 15-17)

### **The Challenges Faced By Teachers and Learners of English Literature and English Language**

The English language has been recognised as the official language of South Sudan since its independence in 2011, according to the ERA Case Report, 2013 (14). Students learning Arabic, it was said, were not able to do well in English Language 'ERA' classes (14). There was a noticeable lack of infrastructure, funding, and human resources in South Sudan, which prevented teachers and students from using the English language at a level appropriate for academic discourse both locally and globally (ERA 14).

Some institutions have not undergone rehabilitation; there are insufficient facilities to handle the increasing demand; and there is a dearth of teaching facilities. (14)

According to reports, there is an issue with inadequate teacher development and management. Institutional fragility or instability existed in the education sector, according to 'ERA' (15). In South Sudan, paying teachers inadequately and irregularly was a frequent practice. Absence of civic education nationwide (15). Three questions were brought up by the attendees during the workshop: (15). What difficulties do using English as the language of instruction present? Was the first query? (15). Participants brought out issues with teacher preparation, quality control, curriculum, learning environment, attitudes towards English, the use of Arabic and other languages in the classroom, and school administration in South Sudan's secondary schools. Second, how might these obstacles be turned into possibilities by the educational system? (15). And lastly, how important is the English language to South Sudan's efforts to develop its nation? (20).

A sequential approach would be necessary for the post-conflict reconstruction of the education sector, according to the participants in the 2013 ERA workshop. (20)

They claimed that the question of English literature's calibre has emerged as a critical one that requires attention. Quality was seen as the most important factor right away (20). "It ought to be coming to an end, or it will evolve into the phases of the future (20)." The participants contended that the curriculum was viewed as an essential teaching tool in forming the nation's identity, particularly in light of its political and social environment (20).

...usually, of the curriculum design...we design it according to the needs of our country." According to what we need to teach, how we are going to shape our country. If we are teaching a foreign curriculum, we are teaching the ideas of others that will not meet our policy needs: foreign policy that will not meet our needs, something that won't even be relevant to our environment. Our curriculum must fit our environment. If we teach some- one else's curriculum it will have a negative effect on nation-building. (21)

### **The Deterioration of Knowledge and Skills of English Language and English Literature Teachers**

"The word literature means the three elements namely plays, poems, fiction, or non-fiction. These literature courses were reading lessons" (Ali 7-10). "Previously, readers at this level could only read up to Reader VI" (7-10). "Some schools begin Reader VII and the corresponding supplemental Readers with the first-year second-

ary students" (7-10). Instead of reading, some schools introduce simplified works. (7-10): "Primary and intermediate schools were the first places where literature appeared" (7-10). "Literature courses were reading lessons; the students used to read as far as Reader VI," the argument went (7-10). In addition to learning V11 at the secondary school level, students also received supplemental reading instruction. Readers were substituted with simplified literary works in other schools (7-10).

### **The Deterioration of Knowledge and Skills of English Language and English Literature Teachers**

"It was stated that the number of the books which were approved were only four books" (Littlewood 178). "The objective of reading was to engage the students in reading habit inside and outside classroom" (Littlewood 178). It stressed that Literature is not diverse from linguistics and language. Literature is used for spoken or written literature such as literary works, poems, fiction, and non-fiction and drama (Brumfit and Carter 179). It claims that literature is expressed through the story of novel or the plot of drama, Literature focus on symbolization that is stated by.

### **The English Literature Syllabus at Secondary Schools**

According to Mahomed Ali (2011),

the public and educational administrators believe that literature is a suitable language and cultural subject that should be taught in schools and universities. (2011)

English literature teachers have long lamented the difficulties they have when learning a foreign or second language. Teachers and students need to think in a second or foreign lan-

guage. Recently, those in charge of language and education policy have pushed for less literature to be taught in secondary schools and higher education in several regions of Asia and Africa (2011).

It was contended by Littlewood (1976: 177) that

there were discussions that the students should be taught more language and linguistics than literature; they assumed that it reduces the focus on language and linguistic studies. (177)

According to Littlewood,

the writers of the literary works oppose the concept, believing that the English language, or any language, is enriched by literature. English literature has faced several challenges, including inadequate English instruction at the secondary school level due to a shortage of qualified teachers and low teacher and student motivation. (177)

English literature students do poorly, partly because of unskilled teachers and a lack of enthusiasm.

According to Littlewood, the so-called unquestioned standing of English literature has been challenged by social and educational conditions, but literature still has aims and is important for teaching English. It was argued that current debates and advanced courses in schools have generally supported a shift away from the emphasis on literature and towards language, as well as a revision of the rules governing text selection to take students' actual aptitude, background, and interests into account more fully (177).

"They oppose the concept of teaching English literature in secondary schools; they believe that it is part of the knowledge and fear that it may include history or sociology," according to George Sampson Newbolt and Sampson's (1921) argument, Sampson and Newbolt (1921). Newbolt and Sampson (1921) noted that "linguists and education policy makers observed that English literature teachers were great writers, philosophers, historians, and politicians who are considered by young leaders as opponents of the state since they are critics and activists." The opponents who pushed for the exclusion of literature did so on the grounds that, since literature deals with language instruction, grammar is more important. According to Newbolt and Sampson (1921), "As a result, they urged linguists and education policymakers to remove English literature from the curriculum." It was also mentioned that English literature is too hard for students to learn. They contended that linguistic and instructional approaches are more significant (Newbolt and Sampson, 1921).

In November of 2013, Inst. Dr. Saffeen Nu'man Arif made the case that language is a tool for communication. It is part of humankind's legacy. What distinguishes the human race from other living classes is its shape or form. Understanding comes from language, which also distinguishes one community from another (2013). However, literature serves as a catalyst for the development and expression of any kind of concept, whether it is social, philosophical, religious, or otherwise (2013). "Any language's history will be powerful through the careful and clever use of literature," asserted Arif (2013). There are two schools of thought: the first supports the use of literature in the classroom due to its wealth of language resources, which can help students acquire high language proficiency; the other

opposes the use of literature in the classroom because they feel it is a waste of time and energy and should discourage the use of the English language (2013).

According to Chan (1999: 15), "Literature is better to be taught because it uses meaningful and rich language; it also contains the skills needed for language learning." It was said that language expands human knowledge and aids in learning and interpretation. Literature gives language legitimacy, but it also enhances and improves language abilities like speaking, writing, and writing (Khatib, et al. 2011: 102). According to Khatib, et al. (102), "literacy is said to have a complicated structure."

According to Lado (1964: 49), "experiences demonstrated that language and literature are interrelated" and "explained that language is a component of expressions and literature." "Literature is founded on language learning; through literature, many different cultures are identified; as mentioned earlier, a language is a source of communication, and literature is a vehicle that transmits the people's cultures from generation to generation," contend Lado (49), Ogunnaike (340), and Labo-Popoola (52).

"Literature has been shown to help second - or foreign - language learners since it enhances their knowledge and communicative abilities" (Popoola-Labo; 48). According to Vethamani, et al. (2010), "it exemplifies the relationship between societies and language communication sources." "Literature is a component of language that enhances and improves language proficiency." "It suggests that the simplest method for learning language content may be reading." Oster (1989: 99), Lazar (40), Vethamani (55), Collie, and Slater (27). The researcher disagrees with the idea that educationists, instructors, and linguists should

teach literature at the secondary school level (Deng (2023), Collie and Slater (27), Oster (1989: 99), Lazar (40), and Vethamani (55). Only literature, not language instruction, may foster and advance language development (Collie and Slater, 27; Oster, 1989: 99; Lazar, 40; Vethamani, 55).

The word 'literary' is defined as "one connected with literature," while literature is defined as "written artistic works, particularly those of high and lasting artistic value" (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003, p. 729). Literature is defined as plays, novels, poetry, and short stories that capture the social, political, and historical context of a particular society. At the elementary, middle, and high school levels, literature has been studied for a very long time (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2003, p. 729) and (Takahashi, 2015). "Literature has its ups and downs. For example, during the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) era, literature was essential to teaching; for instance, learners were required to translate literary works into their native tongue, including plays, novels, and poems" Anderson and Larsen-Freeman (2011).

Literature (1980s) effectively helps with language abilities and communication. Scholars such as Erkaya (2005) and Pardede (2011), as well as Collie and Slater (1987), Ghosn (2002), Hall (2015), Hismanoglu (2005), Lazar (1993), McKay (2014), Naji, Subramaniam, and White (2019), and Sage (1987), have attested to the fact that it enhances and expands language and incorporates new vocabularies in speaking and writing. The significance of literature in English instruction at the secondary and advanced levels was emphasised. According to a researcher, South Sudanese literature that reflects the country's cultural heritage, traditions, and norms should be taught in schools (Erkaya, 2005; Pardede, 2011). Some examples of

such literature include Collie and Slater (1987), Ghosn (2002), Hall (2015), Hismanoglu (2005), Lazar (1993), McKay (2014), Naji, Subramaniam, and White (2019), and Sage (1987). "Preparing poems plays and short stories should be taught to primary school pupils." The primary school is where students can study English literature.

### Conclusion

It was stated that the current South Sudanese youth are not dedicated to or interested in studying English language and literature because of unappealing pay, housing, status, demotivation, and economic hardship that have impacted the entire country due to inadequate resource planning and management. It was said that the South Sudanese government lacked a defined policy on education, including the idea that civil servants in other nations, such as Germany, should receive more pay than Teachers at all four levels. If the current generation is given the assurance that they and their offspring have a bright future, perhaps they can be inspired and encouraged to reconsider a career in teaching. South Sudan will never be able to acquire or achieve a bright future unless education is given high emphasis.

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- Syar Meeze Mohd Rashid, Mohd Hanafi Mohd Yasin, Noraidah Sahari @ Ashaari. Undergraduate Students of Special Education's Readiness towards the Use of Information and Technology (ICT) in Teaching and Learning the Sign Language.



### Aims and Scope

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) Ernakulam publishes *Teresian Journal of English Studies (TJES)*. It is a double-blind peer reviewed international journal. It is published as a quarterly. It is designed for the academic and research community all over the world interested in English Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies. The journal expects cooperation from academicians and researchers in the subject areas. The journal looks for papers conceptually sound at once methodologically rigorous. The journal format is reader friendly. The academia and the researchers will have an easy access to the website of the journal.

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I, Principal, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) Ernakulam declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sunday, March 31, 2024.

**Principal**  
**St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam**  
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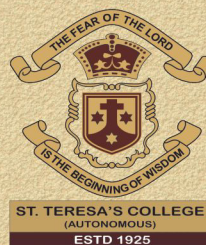
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