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2022

Jabberwock 2022

Department of English
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
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About

Jabberwock is the print journal of the Department of English, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi. This year's journal has been put together by our editorial team:

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Editorial

When we took up the mantle of being Editors-in-Chief of *Jabberwock*, we were waiting anxiously to see how the future of the pandemic would shape our lives and our ways of being and thinking. Given that uncertainty was the prevailing mood and ruling sentiment of that moment, we chose a journal theme that best reflected it: 'Uncertainty'. Now, at this final juncture of assembling the journal, we are filled with a sense of fulfilment and delight. In a college life largely spent away from campus, the completion of this journal has been nothing but an assurance of certainty.

As the Academic Journal of the Department of English at LSR, *Jabberwock* is not just a print publication, it is also a platform for learning and generating research and intellectual discourse. This is the direction we hope to have taken.

This edition of *Jabberwock* includes a wide range of pieces on a range of themes and ideas, across media. The general section containing academic papers highlights critical issues relating to gender, culture, politics, and representation. It does so through a study of literature and film, underscoring the need for, and importance of, cross-disciplinary research and collaboration. It includes papers that offer new ways of reading works such as *In Custody*, investigation of themes in James Bond movies, as well as papers that highlight ideas about oppression and politics, in a reading of *Postcolonial Love Poem* as also in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The themed section contains academic papers exploring 'uncertainty' in various forms, such as music (Avicii's lyrics), fiction, and film (the Disney franchise), as well as creative pieces and art that variously interpret our theme.

This journal would not have been in existence if not for the year-long efforts of our fantastic editorial team. Their unwavering enthusiasm and patience, even in the toughest of circumstances, has been commendable, and a source of great help and encouragement to us. A big thank you to them all. We would also like to thank Priyanshi, our Design Editor, for her painstaking efforts in the typesetting of this journal, as also Mehar, Chief Editor of *Jabberwock Online*, for her constant support through the year.

We are grateful for our staff advisors, Dr Madhu Grover and Dr Wafa Hamid, for their steady support throughout the year. We could not have done without their wisdom and advice on the journal, as well as with our extended lecture series. We are also thankful to Dr Arti Minocha for conducting immensely helpful paper editing sessions for the team, and to Dr Maya Joshi, Dr Karuna Rajeev, Dr Swatie, and Dr Jonathan K Varghese for their invaluable contribution to our lecture series. Special thanks also to Dr Shernaz Cama and Ms Mitali Mishra, who were kind enough to judge "Down the Rabbit Hole", this year's edition of the annual student paper presentation conducted by *Jabberwock*. Further, we would like to extend our thanks to the Department of English as well as the Department Union for their continued support. We are grateful to Dr. Suman Sharma and the college administration for their help. Lastly, thanks to all the contributors for trusting us with their work.

We would also like to fondly acknowledge Prof. Rukshana Shroff not just for her brilliant lecture that we pushed her into days before her retirement, but also for being our ever-reliable guardian angel in times of both stress and happiness. Our love and good wishes to her.

"In strange and uncertain times such as those we are living in, sometimes a reasonable person might despair. But hope is unreasonable and love is greater even than this. May we trust the inexpressible benevolence of the creative impulse." — Robert Fripp.

We trusted in the benevolence of the creative impulse, and sure enough, it kept us afloat.

For the last time,

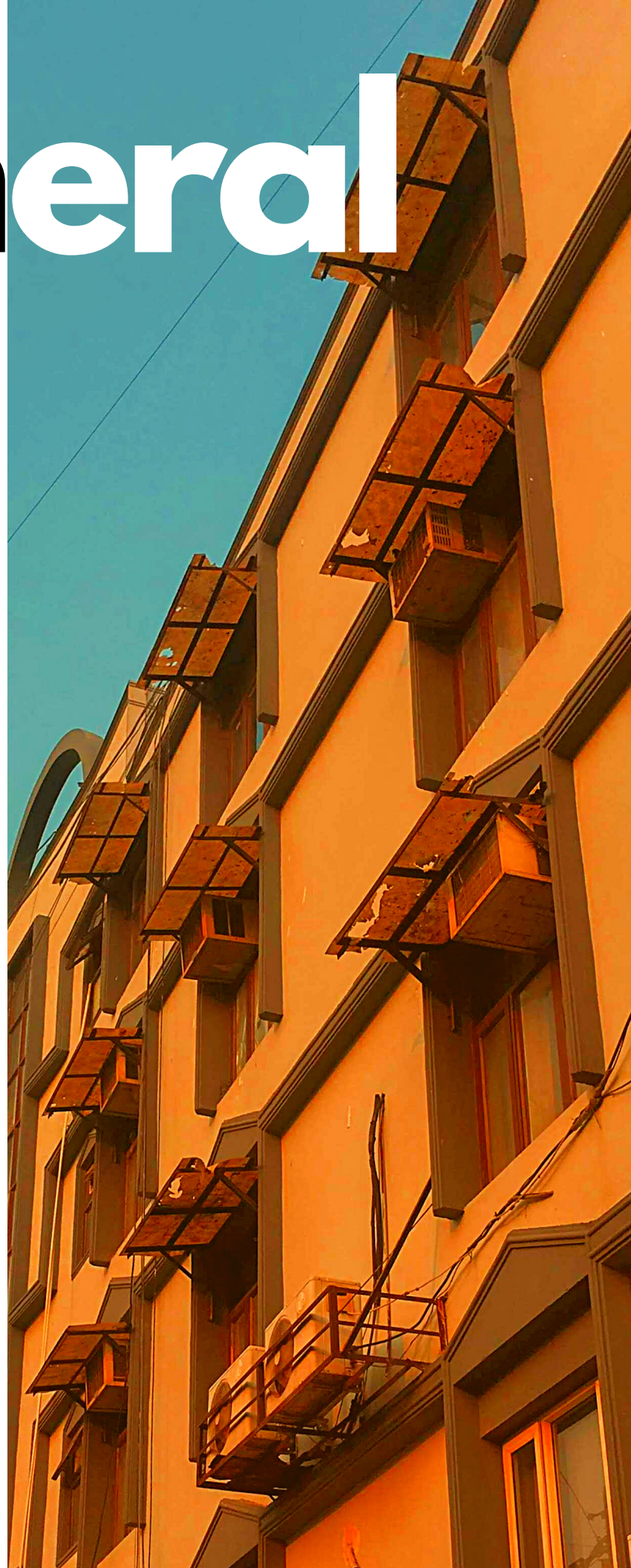All our very best,

Arkopriya and Meher

Contents

General

Poetry and Political Emotion: Radical Possibilities in *Postcolonial Love Poem*

Vibha Swaminathan

Abstract

This paper problematizes the singular narrativity of emotions in political movements, arguing that they lead into the essentializations of emotions and identity as based upon the satisfaction of political end-states. Alternative conceptions of writing political emotion are examined in the philosophy and works of Natalie Diaz, primarily *Postcolonial Love Poem*. The paper argues that Diaz explores the uncertainty of emotion and reconstructs meaning in terms of how Diaz blurs binaries that characterise bodily and emotional states, as well as the linguistic conceptions with which we refer to them — opposing categories of 'love' and 'hurt' need not be opposed to each other at all. This presents a possibility for the claiming of emotional complexity in progressive movements, particularly for the marginalized — emancipatory in itself, and providing new forms of understanding plural experiences to political poetry.

Keywords: complexity, Diaz, emotion, identity, possibility

1. Introduction

Language, being a formative part of the human experience, has always been preoccupied with exploring emotion: poetry being a potent example. The poetic expression of emotion has been inevitably political, inviting one to ask: what can poetry imbue politics with? Adrienne Rich gives us some answers — "Poetry can break open locked chambers of possibility, restore numbed zones to feeling, recharge desire." (Rich qtd. in Popova)

This paper is an attempt at realizing Rich's vision — it analyses the disruptive potential of writing emotionality, not only in challenging hegemony and oppression but also in resisting instrumentalization of identity within progressive movements for social justice. Tracing the evolution of public expressions of emotion within political discourse, this paper seeks to problematize the teleological narratives of emotionality. For an alternative, it turns to the philosophy and works of poet Natalie Diaz to explore conceptualisations of emotions and identity as plural, and imagine radical possibilities of justice. This paper focuses on *Postcolonial Love Poem*, the latest of her two published collections.

2. The Politics of Public Emotions

Within the politics of progressive movements, the constitution of public emotion has been fiercely contested. These contestations have evolved into moral and pragmatic binaries, with each ideological approach enjoying popularity at specific historical moments. For instance, Mohandas Gandhi rejected violence and anger as legitimate protest against imperialism, seeking instead moral principles of non-violence, truth, compassion, and love. To Gandhi, these principles embodied the moral superiority of the colonised populations in resisting hegemony, making them the ideals upon which mass mobilisation ought to be organised. The politics of civil disobedience and passive resistance contributed to the creation of a national identity centred on the moral legitimacy of non-violence.[1] Philosopher Martha Nussbaum also makes a case against anger as a political emotion, arguing that it is alluring but ultimately illusory. In *Anger and Forgiveness*, she writes that anger is futile, promising agency and control when reality does not offer that control. (Nussbaum p)

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[1]   This claim is not an indication of the historical occurrence and impact of violence within the Indian nationalist movement; rather, it points to the force of legitimacy acquired by Gandhian ahimsa, arguably illusory as it was in practice.

In *Political Emotions*, Nussbaum pitches the case for justice underpinned by love:

> All of the core emotions that sustain a decent society have their roots in, or are forms of, love — by which I mean intense attachments to things outside the control of our will… If love is needed even in [a] well-ordered society … it is needed all the more urgently in real, imperfect societies that aspire to justice. (15)

Malcolm X had remarkably different views on anger as a political force, despite being similarly bolstered by the power of emotional rhetoric. His fiery speeches call for the outpouring of rage of Black people against structural racism in the United States. "...today our people are disillusioned … disenchanted … dissatisfied. And in their frustrations they want action. And in 1964 you'll see this young black man, this new generation, asking for the ballot or the bullet." (Malcolm X)Malcolm X saw anger not only as morally justified against structural oppression, but extremely essential in challenging the moderate, gradualist approach of other Black activists.

Regardless of which specific emotion they advocate for, these activists and philosophers foreground the power of emotionality in mass mobilization. Emotions are hence construed as instruments towards justice; they channel the oppression of a specific community towards a particular end-state. They seek to cultivate a deep public investment through a politically productive ethos whether of love, or rage, compassion, or violence — and they have been remarkably effective in doing so.

3. Reclaiming the Uncertainty of Emotions

While writing emotions into politics constitutes a laudable effort of progressive movements, it is also a project that is doomed to fail in its task of emancipation. While emotions that emerge in public expression can and have changed with time and differed with context, they have been restricted to a framework of exclusive instrumentality. This is at odds with the inherent plurality of emotions, leading to reductive perceptions at best and essentialization of communities into inherent attributes at worst.

Consider how the trope of the 'angry Black man'[2] in the imagination of the American public is weaponized against the Black community — in instances of police brutality as well as in violent state responses to protests for racial justice (ironically, against police brutality). While the production and dissemination of Black tropes through culture, popular media, and education have been analysed, an important corollary of these perceptions is the inability of Black joy, love, and celebration to occupy legitimate space within discourse. Even within the racial justice movement, having a complex conception of Black personhood is not desirable. A suffering, crippled, angry Black man is a simpler object of pity and moral outrage than a complex Black subject who at once embodies anger and joy, rage and love, cynicism and hope[3]. Hence, the legitimacy imputed to one emotion inevitably delegitimizes others. Consider another context: protests against the Indian state. In a nation that enforces compassion and love as the minimum moral threshold for speaking truth to power, almost all radical protests can be demonized. This ascription of legitimacy even extends to progressive politics — despite his many failures, Anna Hazare was a popular leader in a way that Charu Majumdar could never be[4]. That emotionality which cannot be shaped into one coherent moral narrative used in mobilisation is eschewed.

Emotions are much broader than mere instruments. The capacity to feel multiple emotions — to love and hurt, rejoice and mourn, seethe and be soothed — is inherent to our experience and identity as complex beings. By using the expression of emotion as mere instruments towards a singular end-state, the political approaches discussed

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2   For a more detailed explanation of this trope, refer to the works of Laurie Cassidy and Emmanuel Acho on the construction of the myth of the angry Black man, within white imagination.

3   While there have been important attempts to reclaim Black culture and rewrite Black narratives (such as jazz, hip-hop, rap music, and Afrofuturism), their success has been quickly co-opted by capitalist political economies that individualize rewards, eventually causing these narratives to lapse into essentialisations themselves.

4   For an analysis of the legitimacy of non-violence within protest politics, see works of Allen and Howard, on the value of Gandhian philosophy in the 21st century, in offering an alternative to violent protest politics employed by Naxalite movements in Central and Eastern India.

above base collective identity on the satisfaction of that end-state. Effectively, instrumental conceptions of emotions mandate that all positive feelings of hope, love, joy can only be felt after we reach the desired political goal. Until then, we are chained to one-dimensional emotional existences of suffering, sorrow, and rage. Rejecting this reduction opens up radical possibilities for emancipation.

Identities are emotionally charged before they are politically rendered, and emotions have no inherently fixed ends. This uncertainty is destabilising. If identities are understood this way, politically sanctioned binaries crumble. Instead of engaging in the same framework of debates about which emotional expressions are most representative, most appropriate, and most morally justified, this uncertainty opens up the possibility of plurality[5]. How, then, do we go about writing complexity into political emotions? Through her poetry, Natalie Diaz offers us one possible way.

4. Natalie Diaz and her Philosophy in *Postcolonial Love Poem*

Natalie Diaz was born and raised in the Fort Mojave Indian Village, on the banks of the Colorado River. She is Mojave and an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Tribe. *Postcolonial Love Poem* embodies her philosophy of poetry as being driven by momentum, which she describes as a "moving" object in conversation with the reader ("A Chat With Natalie Diaz"). Answers are not to be found within her poems, merely questions. This uncertainty is what draws her to writing poetry. "I am free from having to know something," she says ("This Life is Supposed to Hurt"). To Diaz, reading and writing poetry is not merely an aesthetic experience. She talks about "the risk of feeling on the page" ("Back to the Body"), referring to the emotional work involved in reading and writing poetry. What we ask of ourselves in poetry is perhaps impossible, but because we attempt to ask, we are slightly closer to the impossible itself. *Postcolonial Love Poem*, then, is an invitation to take part in the emotional labour of poetry, to seek complexity as we strive for justice. The following sub-sections examine how it does so.

A line from *Postcolonial Love Poem*'s titular poem reads: "We pleasure to hurt, leave marks/ the size of stones" (1). Love is deeply painful — involving yearning and vulnerability, emotional labour, pain, and fear. To think of love as not saccharine but intensely bound with the realities we experience and to view pleasure as symbiotic to pain has more than mere aesthetic repercussions. Love exists not in opposition to or despite grief, loss, hatred, and hurt — but along with them. This coexistence rejects dichotomies; each emotion requires the other. To love the beloved, to love a family, a community, a homeland, a nation — is also to hurt deeply.

Diaz upends the meanings of other familiar concepts as well, such as anxiety. In 'From the Desire Field', she says "Let me call my anxiety, desire, then. / Let me call it, *a garden*" (13). In "That Which Cannot Be Stilled", she extends this idea further. "The doctor asked, *Do you feel a sense of doom?* / Instead of replying, I wrote: What do you call a group of worms / if not a *worry*, if not a *wonder*?" (47). Viewing anxiety as neither inherent nor pathological opens up the possibility of deeper conversations, a new lexicon to talk about the (dis)comfort of being. Elsewhere, Diaz talks about her experience with anxiety, wondering if anxiety in some ways is just her body in the wrong place. "Suddenly, I am no longer shrinking," she says. "Now I am taking up space, and I realize that space doesn't want me there, or wasn't meant for me, and the energy of that is very palpable." ("Back to the Body"). Diaz reveals how all meanings are constructed and proceeds to construct new fields of meanings.

In 'The First Water is the Body', she writes: "I carry a river. It is who I am: 'Aha Makav. This is not metaphor" (49). The last four words are radical — a dismissal of the aesthetic distancing that poetry has often valued, a refusal to dilute that which is not poetic into abstraction, a denial of the expectation to whitewash fantastic truths into comprehensible lies. Meaning perhaps lies outside poetic devices, as much as within them.

4.2 On Body and Being

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5   This uncertainty of emotions refers not to the state of not knowing what one is feeling, but rather the ability to feel multiple emotions simultaneously, and thereby realise multiple meanings of identity.

Postcolonial Love Poem begins with a dedication toward 'our many bodies of flesh, language, land and water; toward all we have been born for, and carry, and have yet to become of love.' Writing the body into poetry is not only a philosophical act, it is a political one. Diaz has multiple identities; many bodies, so to speak — Indigenous, Latina, activist, athlete, queer, sister, daughter, lover. She explains how returning to the body needs to be understood as the reclaiming of autonomy of marginalised bodies, for whom pleasure and ecstasy simply are not allowed. Diaz asks "How can I constantly return to the body, even when it's uncomfortable, so that I have the possibility of those things?" ("Back to the Body") She recognises that this is a generous space to be in, and simultaneously a deeply uncomfortable one — fraught with the uncertainties of intimacy, identity, and love.

4.3 On Love

Diaz writes about love not only as revolutionary — but as inevitable, as overflowing, as thirst and satiation at once. "A dangerous way of thinking lately is that we love as resistance. I understand that, but I refuse to let my love be only that. I am not loving against America or even in spite of it. I am loving because I was made to love, love was made for me" ("A Chat With Natalie Diaz"). Diaz doesn't see love as easy. There is work involved in loving people, and yet, love we do.

In 'Manhattan is a Lenape Word', Diaz writes: "If you are where you are, then where/ are those who are not here? Not here. / Which is why in this city I have / many lovers. All my loves/
are reparations loves" (15). Diaz slips between the body politic and body ecstatic as easily as flowing water. In "Like Church", she says "They think / brown people fuck better when we are sad" (31). She asks a few lines later, "But it's hard, isn't it? Not to perform / what they say about our sadness, when we are/ always so sad" (32). This is not a revelatory attempt at an absolute truth. There is no reconciliation of this experience with a metanarrative of subaltern sexuality, demonised or valorised. These are our stories, Diaz says, and we are at once author and character. *Postcolonial Love Poem* tells us that it is time to leave behind the dichotomy of agent and victim in how we think about ourselves, our desires, and our pain.

The body of the beloved, for Diaz, is the body of her lover, the body of her suffering brother, the body of a mother, the body of a friend, the body of a nation, the body of land, the body of language. Each body demands to be touched and held, to be seen and loved and mourned.

Postcolonial Love Poem is alive. Diaz says of it, "...it doesn't stand still, it asks me questions, it demands things of me, it is its own thing, and I am now outside of it, experiencing it, chasing it, or being chased by it or running alongside it" ("A Chat With Natalie Diaz"). To dip our toes in the complexity that it offers us is the same as submerging in it.

5. Conclusion

Politics has always involved the de-contestation of meaning. Every political decision is an attempt at an unequivocal choice, superimposed on an indeterminate field where many paths are always possible. While the rhetoric of certainty within politics is indispensable in some regards; it has damaging consequences when it aligns with normative expectations of expression and identity. *Postcolonial Love Poem* offers us a way of reclaiming complexity within the politics of justice, by urging us to explore the scope of our identities in the wilderness of human emotion, rather than within instrumental politics. Delinking emotionality from the rhetoric of normative end-states is a process fraught with uncertainty. However, in some ways, locating our identities beyond the framework of legitimate-illegitimate expression is emancipation in itself — by eschewing the search for a singular, "best" conception of representing identity, we begin undermining the binaries that police the processes of meaning-making.

Marginalised identities cannot be understood only through their erasure — they do not occupy a merely negative

space. Diaz shows us the potential of identities to be abundant, plural, pre-verbally emotional; to occupy positive space. It is this conceptualisation that can inform progressive politics. It is crucial to note that complexity within progressive politics does not pre-empt the capacity to conceptualise and mobilise towards a singular end. Perhaps the best way to strengthen claims to normative ends is to base our conceptions of self and identity on more than one emotional expression of the same — refusing to be caged into one linear process of meaning-making while demanding visibility and dignity. There is the capacity for love and rage, celebration and mourning, pleasure and pain within the same movement if we see the movement itself as a body. If we accept this understanding, the public expression of an emotion becomes one part of identity, not of the normative core of it.

In 'The First Water is the Body', Diaz writes, "Pre-verbal was when the body was more than a body and possible" (53). If one thing is to be taken back from Diaz and *Postcolonial Love Poem*, it is to resist simplification of meanings — or at least, to identify when we are simplifying and being simplified — and embrace plurality, which we could also call possibility.

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"I wouldn't even know him if I saw him"[1]: Anonymous Authorities in Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

Sukriti Lakhtakia

Abstract

Drawing upon Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism, which in turn takes off from the system of control designed by theorist Jeremy Bentham, this paper engages in a comparative study of two Modernist literary texts, Franz Kafka's unfinished novel *The Trial* and Samuel Beckett's two-act play *Waiting for Godot*. Both works, written nearly three decades apart, echo questions of authority, power, and discipline that are relevant till date. Behind each of these concepts that find expression in the texts, there rests the menacing yet extremely pertinent idea of the anonymity of authority figures. Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century model of the panopticon prison, founded on the successful supervision by a prison inspector who remains invisible to the inmates, finds refined articulation in the twentieth century in the form of untraceable and opaque extensions of state machinery. The paper discusses the restricted nature of knowledge and information in bureaucratic functioning, the patriarchal aspect of authority, and the ontological insecurity which sustains it, while shedding light on the similarity of the two texts in question.

Keywords: anonymity, authority, discipline, knowledge, Modernism

1. Introduction

Both Kafka's unfinished novel *The Trial* (1925) and Beckett's two-act play *Waiting for Godot* (1952) open with an allusion to the presence of unknown, hostile forces. Kafka's protagonist Junior Bank Manager Joseph K.'s morning is violently disrupted by two strangers who have come to arrest him. They claim not to know the reasons for their actions, possibly motivated by the accusation of a "someone [who] must have been telling lies" (Kafka 1). The tramps Vladimir and Estragon's evening proceeds with an affirmation of their impregnable routine — "Nothing to be done" (Beckett 1) — part of which is Estragon being beaten by an unnamed group of individuals. In this manner, unanswered questions punctuate both the texts, and lurk beneath all events (and non-events) that occur in the lives of K., Vladimir, and Estragon. Most of these, if not all, are characterised by the involvement and influence of phantom figures of authority, whose operations remain entirely covert — Who has sent out the order for K.'s arrest? Who are the representatives of the court? Who beat Estragon frequently enough for him to expect the assault? Who is Godot? Given that the novel and play are each marked by equally inexplicable events, critical scholarship has made much meaning out of both the works, which are arguably Kafka and Beckett's most popular. This paper seeks to understand *The Trial* and *Waiting for Godot* in light of each other, and draw out the remarkable similarities in their engagement with the idea of the unidentifiable yet indisputable presence and numerous manifestations of authority which, though nebulous, exert a great and lasting influence on the subjects of their power.

1.1 The Theory of the Panopticon

One of the most well-established conceptualisations of authority which prospers on account of its anonymity is Jeremy Bentham's eighteenth-century design of the panopticon prison. Perceived to be an ideal system that enforces self-governance, the panopticon's efficacy is founded on an invisible disciplinary power that is awarded to the security guard of the prison. The structure of the building, a single tower at the centre of a rotunda, enables the inspector to observe every inmate without being perceived. Perpetually condemned to the state of

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1   Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, p. 16.

paranoia, the prisoner is constantly on edge, wary of being observed at any given time and being caught for doing anything that might be deemed wrong by a figure of authority who is at once omnipresent yet untraceable. Michel Foucault, building on Bentham's conception of the panopticon, dwells deeper on the threat of being under surveillance at any time of day, thus coercing the prisoner to monitor his own behaviour, and so he "becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 203). The panopticon is thus designed in such a way so as to make entirely sufficient only an apparent exercise of power, while "render[ing] its actual exercise unnecessary" (201). The physical nature of power is no longer central to this kind of modern system of subjugation; instead, it assumes a non-corporal and therefore "more constant, profound and permanent" form (203). This intangible and persistent presence of authority is operative in both *The Trial* and *Waiting for Godot*. It is felt in the penetrating and oppressive atmosphere of the Court which lingers heavily over K. as he squirms and struggles against the legal system, and similarly in Vladimir and Estragon's protracted present, imposed by an unidentified Godot, haunting the country road which they can never get away from.

2. The Question of Authority in *The Trial* and *Waiting for Godot*

In *The Trial*, the limited information that K. learns about the courts and the law has been gathered from secondary sources. Most of the people he comes in contact with — the policemen, the inspector, the advocate (one would assume they're familiar with the workings of the legal institution they are agents of) — seem to be equally unaware of the proceedings of his case. Initially of the firm belief that he lives in a just country with an enforceable constitution and that he has certain rights which he is entitled to, K. realises over the course of his arrest that he is unable to invoke any of them. Despite being a respectable, working professional and a fairly wealthy man, K. finds it impossible to access the severely abstracted law, or any of its representatives who never materialise in any form except as the subjects of absurd paintings. There exist no archives of previous court cases, no reliable testimonials or agents, no predictable avenues that can be approached for assistance, and so for K., it seems as though "the only sensible thing was to adapt oneself to existing conditions" (Kafka 121).

The more the details abound in the novel, the wider the distance becomes between K. and the obscure source of authority. K. is well aware of the existence of the superior judges and the higher court which have the power to acquit him, but they are always beyond his reach. In Kafka's work, then, it is a ruthless bureaucratic irrationality that occupies the central tower of the panopticon, and K., trapped in one of its cells, is "alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (Foucault 200). W. G. Sebald significantly notes, "in Kafka's *Trial*, verbs such as to glance, see, be seen, look up, behold, look around, observe abound with astonishing frequency" (qtd. in Shah 704).

At the end of the one year that spans K.'s ordeals with the court, without having had an encounter with a single judge, he has himself learned to control his behaviour in accordance with the desires of the anonymous figures of authority. He thinks to himself in defiance, "the only thing for me to go on doing is to keep my intelligence calm and analytical to the end" (Kafka 225). K. perceives his execution to be the definite end of his trial and finds comfort in this certitude. On his way to the location of his execution, he "suddenly realized the futility of resistance. There would be nothing heroic in it were he to resist...to snatch at the last appearance of life by struggling" (Kafka 225). By now utterly worn out and weary, K. is also convinced of the rationality of his chosen path, and fails to see it as the self-inflicted punishment that it very much is, performed directly under the disquieting gaze of the courts.

2.1. The Bureaucratic Nature of Authority

Beckett's Godot, whoever they may be, seems to exercise influence within multiple institutions that traditionally serve as extensions of state machinery: religion, politics, business, and administration, "a modern version of the distant and the powerful" (Smith 892). Unsurprisingly, the unseen, unknown authoritative figure in *Waiting for Godot* is not too far off from the impenetrable bureaucracy depicted in Kafka. Upon discussing the status of their demands which they had posed to Godot in the past during their first (and presumably, last) meeting,

Vladimir and Estragon are unconsciously insightful in their divulsion of the interminable bureaucratic process:

> ESTRAGON. And what did [Godot] reply?
> VLADIMIR. That he'd see.
> ESTRAGON. That he couldn't promise anything.
> VLADIMIR. That he'd have to think it over.
> ESTRAGON. In the quiet of his home.
> VLADIMIR. Consult his family.
> ESTRAGON. His friends.
> VLADIMIR. His agents.
> ESTRAGON. His correspondents.
> VLADIMIR. His books.
> ESTRAGON. His bank account.
> VLADIMIR. Before taking a decision.
> ESTRAGON. It's the normal thing. (Beckett 11)

In their conversation, Vladimir and Estragon use the same register of arbitrary and indifferent language that administrative officials and institutions at large use to address the concerns of the masses. Later in the play, Pozzo refers to the "appointment" that Vladimir and Estragon have with Godot, "who has [their] future in his hands… [Pause]…at least [their] immediate future" (Beckett 22). While in *The Trial*, we witness that K., is greatly disturbed by a never-ending and consuming bureaucratic process, in *Waiting for Godot*, we encounter Beckett's pair of tramps at a stage in their lives when they are either oblivious to its irrationality, or have accepted the immutable nature of their status quo. Perhaps it is even that they are so deeply steeped in procedure that they can find it in themselves to be ironic. The play's progression confirms that Vladimir and Estragon's self-governance comprises only the (non)action of waiting for Godot. It is an echo of the accused man's exhausted confession, "I'm waiting —" (Kafka 64), whom K. encounters when he visits the law office for the first time and sees a row of accused men standing along the benches. He observes that they "did not stand quite erect, their backs remained bowed, their knees bent, they stood like street beggars" (Kafka 63). The similarity here is striking — one can picture Vladimir and Estragon having themselves visited the law offices once upon a time, perhaps the origin story of their waiting. There seems to be a lot at stake for these two old men whose lives have been wholly and frighteningly subsumed into obedience to an evasive and invasive authority, so much so that their life is put on hold forever. Their immobility (which is more of an inability rather than a personal decision) and perpetual stagnation, the only markers of time for them, become refrains within a theatre of punishment wherein Vladimir and Estragon are simultaneously actors and prisoners. Every now and then in the course of the play, there arrives a moment when the autocratic present of Vladimir and Estragon reasserts itself and they are thrown further back from where they began. These moments are almost always linked to Godot, the person whom they are waiting for but who never comes. He is quite literally holding the two men back in time. Near the end of the second act, Vladimir comes frighteningly close to confronting the reality of their situation:

> VLADIMIR. Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will be there? (Beckett 83)

Before he is able to fully process the weight of his words, Godot's boy-messenger arrives and pulls him back into the illusion within which their hope unconsciously festers: that Mr. Godot will come, but tomorrow.

The only saving grace in their bleak world is that Vladimir and Estragon have each other. Indeed, they cling to each other because they know that the presence of the other is the only factor that decelerates the stagnation of their lives. As time passes by, their friendship, marked by incessant banter and name-calling, is the singular

character-related progression that we observe. They may know very little, and understand even less, but they are reassured of their existence in the unchanging and consistent presence of the other. On the other hand, Kafka's K. is utterly alone and perhaps this is why he must absolutely submit to the conclusion he arrives at. It is because his isolation is far more profound and oppressive, and thus ultimately proves fatal. Indeed, the legal trap that K. falls deeper and deeper into thrives on an enfeebling individuality and a lack of community, "bureaucracy isolates each individual to their own specific course of juridical process so that 'combined action against the Court is impossible'" (Jing 33). This is a striking parallel to one of the objectives of the panopticon: "the crowd…a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities…a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised" (Foucault 201).

2.2. The Paternal Nature of Authority

In the original French version of *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon dreamily envision the peace that awaits them once Godot arrives: "Tonight perhaps we shall sleep in his place, in the warmth, dry, our bellies full, on the straw. It is worth waiting for that, is it not?" (qtd. in Esslin 47). We gather that the pair also perceives in Godot a father-figure who will provide them with food, care, and shelter, giving them a chance to have a peaceful night. But as a figure of patriarchal and divine authority, it is equally probable that Godot may punish them instead, and "man with his undeserved punishment and unanswered question always sees himself as a child before the almighty omniscient" (Smith 892). With respect to the vast scholarship on Kafka, the subject of the father has been a recurring theme in the work of most, if not all, critics who have engaged with his literature, replete with characters who are understood to be personifications of aggressive paternal authority. Deleuze and Guattari have resisted the psychoanalytic approach while reading Kafka and instead they insist that:

The judges, commissioners, bureaucrats, and so on, are not substitutes for the father; rather, it is the father who is a condensation of all these forces that he submits to and that he tries to get his son to submit to…What Kafka immediately anguishes or rejoices in is not the father or the superego or some sort of signifier but the American technocratic apparatus or the Russian bureaucracy or the machinery of Fascism. (12)

Walter Benjamin, in his notes on Kafka, has a similar insight: "There is much to indicate that the world of the officials and the world of the fathers are the same to Kafka…it consists of dullness, decay, and dirt" ("Franz Kafka" 113). This atmosphere of dreariness and degeneration is pervasive in *Waiting for Godot*, and Beckett ensures that we know the arbitrary nature of this mysterious, paternal, and institutional dominance when we learn that Godot abuses one of his boy-messengers and nobody knows why.

3. Knowledge and Control

The question of knowledge requires greater contemplation because it is an inextricably important element of the clandestine functioning of such judicial, legal, paternal, transcendental authorities. In the world of *The Trial*, knowledge (and any kind of information) is a privilege which K. and all the other accused individuals are denied. Legal records, charge-sheets, court proceedings, anything that might prove relevant to K.'s case, is sequestered and inaccessible. Law books are not allowed to be glanced at (the single occasion when K. looks at a book being read in court, it is full of pornographic images), judges don't appear in public, the constitution that K. had relied on earlier is never mentioned again, and the defence is "condemned not only in innocence but also in ignorance" (Kafka 50). By extension, the matter of law itself is rendered uncertain, hollow, and inscrutable. It becomes "exclusively the domain of an absolute practical necessity" (Deleuze and Guttari 45), outside of truth and drenched in deceptive bureaucracy.

In *Waiting for Godot*, knowledge is even more scarce, so much so that it threatens existence: "VLADIMIR. [*With sudden violence*.] You're sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me!" (Beckett 85) . Estragon doesn't know whether it is always the same group that beats him (1), Vladimir doesn't

know what to think any longer (83), and whatever they do know is quickly forgotten; Pozzo doesn't know how to sit down without being asked to (29), and Lucky's unintelligible speech repeats "for reasons unknown" ten times (36-38). All of these instances are indicative of the feeling of ontological insecurity created and maintained in part by authority figures. Needless to say, at the heart of this crippling lack of knowledge is Godot himself — superior, authoritative, always present, and yet, always invisible.

Furthermore, much like the subordinates in *The Trial* who are kept in the dark about case proceedings, who are whipped at the command of their superiors, Godot's young messengers seem to share an equally submissive and violent relationship with their master. Their frequent gestures of "recoiling" and "trembling" (43), their fear of Pozzo's whip and loud noises, and their hesitation in answering nearly every question posed to them —"VLAD-IMIR. Does he give you enough to eat? [The BOY *hesitates*.] You're not unhappy? [The BOY *hesitates*.]" (45) — suggests the oppressive nature of their work environments. Yet Godot's authority remains unopposed and undisputed by virtue of his opacity — "it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance" (Foucault 203).

4. Parallels between *The Trial* and *Waiting for Godot*

In *The Trial*, the Court appears to lurk in dusty attics, in dark closets, and behind every closed door. In the scene of the Whipper, the punishment of the policemen, Franz and Willem, takes place in a lumber-room at the offices of K.'s bank where obsolete instruments of a retired bureaucracy are stored, "bundles of useless old papers and empty earthenware ink-bottles lay in a tumbled heap" (Kafka 83). The location of this flogging is significant because it exposes the contiguous nature of these inconspicuous power structures — "the offices and paperwork that stand behind state and corporate violence" (Hankins 116). Here too, Kafka highlights the ambiguity that envelopes these administrative bodies for the whipper only claims to be obeying the commands of a higher official, flouting which will in turn cause his own whipping. Gabriel Hankins delves deeper into the language of this scene to investigate this very absence of personal action:

> …the grammar of the final sentence moves agency and subjecthood explicitly to the "birch-rod" which "found [Franz] where he was lying," removing the Whipper from any sense of control: the function of power is the subject here, not its supposed human agents." (116)

In other words, even while the whipper is a physical manifestation of the authority of those on the higher rungs of the hierarchy, he is reduced to being only a receptacle, a shadow of the great, elusive organisation which is the true manipulator of the whip. The most productive model of authority is the kind that cannot be held accountable. K. is deeply unsettled not only at having witnessed the whipping, but more importantly because of Franz's blood-curdling shriek, "it did not seem to come from a human being but from some martyred instrument" (Kafka 87). Horrified that his colleagues might hear, K. slams the door shut. Returning the next day, desperately hoping things would have sorted themselves out, K. is alarmed to find that "everything was still the same, exactly as he had found it on opening the door the previous evening" (Kafka 89). The scene is a bleak echo of the future in which Lucky's disjointed speech, shouted out in a "single and irrevocable" (Kafka 87) breath, is exactly like Franz's scream, and it is paralyzing. Lucky, utterly debased and abysmally downtrodden, is the tortured instrument of Kafka's world. Beckett's play has only two acts, and the second act is a cruel repetition of the first, with few significant changes. The play seems to be stuck in a miserable refrain of one step forward and two steps back, and comes to mean less and less as it is acted out. The door of Kafka's lumber-room might as well be opening onto Beckett's country road where Vladimir and Estragon are trapped in an eternal recurrence of their day, engaged in recalling a bare account of a yesterday that is instantly forgotten and waiting for a tomorrow that never arrives — an "indefinite postponement" (Kafka 152) of their trial with Godot. Above all, their performance is littered with numerous references to violence, abuse, ailments, humiliation — "punishment enfolds the tramps" (Diamond 38) — the kind K. himself is surrounded by.

The world of *Waiting for Godot* is riddled with the kind of exhausted passivity that we get a glimpse of in Kafka; all four characters — even Pozzo, the most dominating of the lot — have been stripped of personal agency, and the sharpest image of this is Lucky who thinks on command. What in Kafka is an inexorable and gradual erosion of rights progresses into complete surrender on the part of the subjects of the insidious authorities:

>   VLADIMIR. Your Worship wishes to assert his prerogatives?
>   ESTRAGON. We've no rights any more?
>   *[Laugh of* VLADIMIR*, stifled as before, less the smile.]*
>   VLADIMIR. You'd make me laugh, if it wasn't prohibited.
>   ESTRAGON. We've lost our rights?
>   VLADIMIR. *[Distinctly.]* We got rid of them.
>   *[Silence. They remain motionless, arms dangling, heads sunk, sagging at the knees.]* (Beckett 11)

5. Conclusion

In the cathedral scene of *The Trial*, the prison chaplain advises K. that "it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept it as necessary" (175). K. recognises the consequences of this opaque dictum which replaces the truth with false principle and, weary though he may be, he resigns to it. Vladimir and Estragon, completely arrested in their unchanging lives, are advocates of such a resigned acceptance:

>   ESTRAGON. No use wriggling.
>   VLADIMIR. The essential doesn't change.
>   ESTRAGON. Nothing to be done. (Beckett 14)

In their respective works *The Trial* and *Waiting for Godot*, both Kafka and Beckett concern themselves directly and indirectly with "the modern citizen who knows that he is at the mercy of a vast machinery of officialdom" (Benjamin "Some Reflections on Kafka" 150). While in *The Trial* it assumes parasitic function, "[living] off the life it oppresses" (Adorno 255), in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon are eternally "tied" to it (Beckett 13). Thus, Kafka and Beckett's characters are left defenceless against a hierarchy which proliferates endlessly and, in turn, incessantly fortifies its institutional anonymity.

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Roles of Sidekicks in Detective Fiction: A Comparative Study

Aaheli Jana and Khushi Rolania

Abstract

The figure of the assistant-cum-narrator has been a popular device in detective fiction. Some assistant-detective duos have become so well recognised that it is almost impossible for readers to imagine them as separate. This paper analyses the role of sidekicks in detective fiction in terms of their narratorial authority, and their relationship with the detective and the readers; all of these are explored textually. The detective-assistant duos taken into account are Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson, Christie's Hercule Poirot and Captain Arthur Hastings, Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhyay, and Ray's Feluda and Topshe. The paper explores the commonalities and differences among these sidekicks who have been created across cultures and periods, thereby arriving at their roles as they stand for the referred texts.

Keywords: Ajit, Hastings, sidekick, Topshe, Watson

1. Introduction

The figure of the sidekick, one who is closely attached with the protagonist, has existed in various literary genres across time periods. The term 'sidekick' is used for a close associate who professionally assumes the role of assistant to the protagonist. The 'sidekick' has been closely linked with the genre of detective fiction. Edgar Allan Poe, who pioneered this genre (Acocella) with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", makes an anonymous narrator describe the cases solved by his famous detective Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin. The narrator, though anonymous, appears[1] to be a close associate of the detective and can be understood as a sidekick.Writers of detective fiction across time and continents have created sidekicks who have gone on to gain popularity comparable to the detectives themselves among the readers of the genre. Some famous detective-assistant duos include Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Captain Hastings, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh Bakshi and Ajit Bandyopadhay, and Satyajit Ray's Feluda and Topshe. Despite belonging to different time periods and cultures, these sidekicks share some characteristics.

2. Sidekicks as Narrators and Chroniclers

Detective fiction as a genre primarily revolves around the larger-than-life figure of the detective. The sidekicks in the story act primarily as the narrators, to vividly describe the exploits of the detective. They set the tone of the story, introduce the readers to the important characters or alleged suspects, and bring forth the various sub-plots that circumscribe the main plot. In the process, they reveal a number of important details surrounding the case that the detective solves. All of the sidekicks cited in this paper, barring Topshe[2], become the chroniclers of the cases solved by the detective, ensuring that the detective gets his due. For instance, in "The Adventure of he Retired Colourman", even though the case is solved by Sherlock Holmes and his rival Mr. Barker, the local bi-weekly gives credit for the solve to Inspector MacKinnon of Scotland Yard. It is through Holmes' sidekick Dr. Watson's chronicles that the reader knows the truth. Similarly, in the Hercule Poirot series, the sidekick, Hastings, is almost always the narrator, as is Ajit the narrator and chronicler for most of the cases of Byomkesh Bakshi.

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1   In their book Detective Duos, Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini (1997) note that the cases of the master detective are chronicled by a close friend or relative who is either present during the investigation or receives details about the case later. The anonymous narrator of Poe's detective fiction displays some traits of the sidekick figure.

2   Ray uses Topshe as the narratorial voice who brings forth the adventures of Feluda to the readers, who, just like Topshe, are mostly teenagers. However, unlike the other assistants, Topshe does not formally record or publish the happenings that take place.

All the four sidekicks in question appear to be ordinary people who present an astounding and sometimes eulogising view of the detective and his observational power. The four sidekicks' narrative styles vary. Ajit is a law graduate who becomes an author. His descriptions, particularly of characters, are poetic and vested with metaphors and other figures of speech. For instance, he describes the town visited by Byomkesh, Satyaboti, and himself in "Picture Imperfect" ("Chitrachor") as follows: "the charming landscape of the Santhal District had me completely in its thrall. Here was a unique marriage of lushness and aridity, of abundance and dearth; human presence had not succeeded in reducing the rocky soil of the place into molten sludge" (Bandyopadhyay 196). Watson, an English physician, who served as an army surgeon in India, was a keen and sensitive observer who often provided detailed[3] descriptions. In "The Adventure of The Retired Colourman", Watson says:

> You know that particular quarter, the monotonous brick streets, the weary suburban highways. Right in the middle of them, a little island of ancient colour and comfort, lies this old home, surrounded by a high sun baked wall mottled with lichens and topped with moss, the sort of world. . . (Doyle 723)

He is interrupted by Sherlock who asks him to "cut out the poetry" (Doyle 724). However, Sherlock laments Watson's absence in "The Adventure of The Lion's Mane", and tells his tale in his own "plain way" (Doyle 674).

Topshe is a school-going teenager who accompanies his elder brother Feluda on adventures around the country. His narration is very lucid but full of vibrant descriptions of the places they visit, from the sand dunes in Rajasthan to the hills in Darjeeling. In "The Golden Fortress", Topshe provides the readers with a detailed description of the landscape and locales of the different cities of Rajasthan that they visit — Bikaner, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer. In Jodhpur, Topshe notices " As we drove through the streets, I noticed a huge wall — visible through the gaps between houses — that seemed as high as a two-storeyed house" (Ray 220). In ``Trouble In Gangtok", Topshe describes the view from their plane journey to Gangtok: "yellow earth, criss-crossed with rivers that looked like silk ribbons and sweet little villages with tiny little houses in them" (Ray 143).

3. Sidekicks as Assistants

All four of the sidekicks — Watson, Hastings, Ajit and Topshe — function mainly in the role of assistant to the detective. They accompany the detectives in their cases and remain observers of the entire investigative process. However, there are times when the sidekick is left out of the investigation and is completely unaware of the detective's work, thus also losing control of their narrative of the investigation because the detective begins to keep his deductions to himself. They are therefore marginalised to the position of sidekick-assistant. Byomkesh leaving Ajit midway and continuing with his investigation forms a major part of the story "Picture Imperfect". It is only after the case is solved that the sidekick gets to know the conclusions that the detective drew. Sherlock Holmes himself emphasises this in "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier": "A confederate…to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, in indeed an ideal helpmate." (Doyle 539)

In some cases, the sidekicks occupy the position of co-detective, so they work on a case on behalf of the detective[4]. However, in the end, these sidekicks are still baffled by the mystery of the solve and end up seeking help from the detective.

The sidekicks sometimes serve as the detective's means of communication with other characters. For instance, in *The Mysterious Affair At Styles*, Hastings passes on Poirot's cryptic message "Find the extra coffee-cup, and you can rest in peace!" (Christie 107) to Lawrence Cavendish, a potential suspect. The sidekicks often try to hone their observation and deduction skills in the company of the detective, but seldom outwit him. Most of the discoveries made by the sidekicks are rather accidental. Poirot remarks about Hastings in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*: "… yes, often he has helped me. For he had a knack, that one, of stumbling over the truth unawares… At times he has said something particularly foolish, and behold that foolish remark has revealed the truth to me!" (Christie 326). In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Hastings reminds Poirot of his towering rage which had

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3   Sherlock reprimands Watson: "[Y]ou have erred, perhaps, in attempting to put colour and life into each of your statements, instead of confining yourself to the task of placing upon record that severe reasoning from cause to effect which is really the only notable feature [...] You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales" (Doyle Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories 114).

4   Hastings becomes a proxy detective in the short story "The Mystery of Hunter's Lodge", and Ajit does in "The Venom Of Tarantula" ("Makorshar Rosh"). In "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman", Watson meets Josiah Amberley, Sherlock's client, to gain evidence.

led him to arrange things on the mantelpiece in his usual fashion. This leads Poirot to discover the last link in the case and prove that Alfred Inglethorp was the murderer[5]. Meanwhile, Ajit's casual statement "One sound masks the other" forms a crucial clue to the murderer in "The Gramophone Pin Mystery"[6] (Bandhopadhyay 43).

4. Sidekicks as Companions

The relationship between detectives and sidekicks is not restricted to professional terms only. They also share a great camaraderie. Watson and Sherlock meet while searching for rooms on rent, and the two then become both flatmates and companions for a long time. A similar relationship is shared between Ajit and Byomkesh. Ajit joins Byomkesh in his quest for truth right from the first novel T*he Inquisitor (Satyanweshi)* and grows old with him, staying until some of his last cases. Though Ajit marvels at Byomkesh's detective skills, he never worships him as a hero.. He often comically describes Byomkesh and his wife Satyaboti's quarrels and reconciliations. For instance, in the story "Picture Imperfect" he says:

> The secret mystery of the origins and decline of marital discord was beyond my understanding …I had witnessed it several times in three years that Byomkesh and Satyaboti had been married. Without fail, it would commence with the frills and fuss of a regular ceremony; then it would disappear just as suddenly as the morning mist upon hills. (Bandyopadhyay 215)

The relationship between Feluda and Topshe is slightly different in that Topshe is more of a learner than an experienced assistant. He says in the story "The Golden Fortress": "I quite enjoy thinking of myself as Feluda's satellite" (Ray 202). Their relationship extends the professional ambit of a detective assistant as they share a great rapport as brothers. Feluda also becomes somewhat of a guide for Topshe, bringing his attention to the important points in any case and also chiding him for making silly statements. Topshe, much like Ajit, not only highlights the detective's above average intelligence but also humanizes him in his narrative. He presents a detective who is sociable, empathetic and even has a love for good food. His simple narrative style is what makes Topshe distinct from his counterparts. Topshe does not depict Feluda as a superhuman, rather he presents him as any other tough yet caring older sibling. He narrates the stories in a way that brings readers closer to the detective rather than making him stand as a solitary heroic figure.

Watson balances Holmes' strength of observations with his poor violin playing and his addiction to cocaine. Hastings calls Poirot foolishly pig-headed and high handed. In *The Mysterious Affair At Styles*, Hastings describes Poirot as a "quaint, dandified little man" (Christie 18) and believes that "a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound" (Christie 18).

5. Sidekicks and Readers

What comes across in all the four narrative styles of the sidekicks is their ability to bridge the gap between the reader and an all-encompassing figure of the detective. The sidekicks, with their ordinary appearance and personality, connect with the readers and help also to build a connection with the detective who is otherwise cold, distant, or aloof. The sidekick figures make the detectives likeable to the readers in spite of all their eccentricities.

The sidekicks are often characters that can be identified with. The sidekick's representation as a foil to the detective, and as a foil to the detective, and as a confused, impressionable individual, is what makes these characters so relatable to the reader. They have culturally reminiscent morals, unlike the detective who works on a complex set of moral or ethical codes. Their viewpoints on certain characters are largely subjected to and painted by their own feelings. Much like the reader, their sympathies are often attached to one character – a possible suspect.

In the novel *The Golden Fortress*, Topshe finds it hard, in fact utterly hilarious, to imagine Lalmohan Babu as the villain[7]. Similarly, in the story "When There's A Will", Ajit has his sympathies for Satyaboti and cannot think of her as a criminal.

5   Poirot realizes that Alfred Inglethrop hid the letter, which could be used as proof against him, among spills in the vase on the mantelpiece.

6   In "The Gramophone Mystery", Ajit's casual statement makes Byomkesh realise the common pattern that was hidden behind the murders.

7   In *The Golden Fortress*, Topshe mentions: " I tried a couple of times to imagine Lalmohan Babu as a ferocious foe, but the mere idea was so laughable that I had to wipe it from my mind" (Ray 239).

This subjective judgement also highlights the need for the detective to examine things objectively.

The sidekicks thus form a link between the detective and the readers. They bring to light the musings of the detective and give the readers insight into the workings of the detective's mind, coloured by their own restraints. In *The Golden Fortress*, Topshe attempts to read Feluda's mind and infers: "…I could not figure out anything and I felt neither could Feluda – had it been otherwise, his face would have had a totally different expression – that was one thing I could sense well – after all this time in his company." (Ray 230)

The sidekick dually voices out the workings of the detective's mind and the reader's possibly anticipated reactions. He becomes a surrogate reader, expressing the doubts, opinions and feelings of the reader in response to the deductions of the detective.

6. Conclusion

Though subordinate to the detective, the sidekick is an essential figure in the genre of detective fiction. There are certain commonalities among the four sidekicks — Ajit, Topshe, Watson, and Hastings — despite their cultural and chronological differences, as well as other variations. The narratives may present different dynamics between the sidekick and the detective, but the intermediary formed between the reader and the detective is undeniable for all the four duos, in terms of both action and dialogue. Their simple and tactful narrations break down the complex workings of the detective's mind, whereas their own relatability to the reader often results in the reader's opinions validated through their speech.

The creation of the sidekick as an ordinary human being with strong feelings and average intellect along with their admiration and understanding of the "great" detective makes the target readers empathise with them. This then encapsulates the role of the ordinary sidekick in preserving the grandeur of detective fiction through humanizing the detective, as well as the story itself.

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The State of Violence and the Violent State: Understanding the Structures of Oppression and Resistance in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract

In her novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Arundhati Roy explores the socio-political realities of our current times, and investigates the structures of violence that are produced, reproduced, and maintained by those in power. At the same time, the novel also imagines an alternative to the hierarchical, oppressive, majoritarian structures of the capitalist state. This paper analyses these forms of violence that are represented and critiqued in the novel, and the alternatives sought to the violence inherent in mainstream society. The paper seeks to understand the nature of the violent state and the possibilities of resistance from within the communities that have been marginalised and dispossessed.

Keywords: capitalism, communalism, identities, state, violence

1. Introduction

> Now the conception of the state as an equilibrium between coercive and hegemonic institutions (or if you prefer, a unity of both) is not in itself novel… It is obvious that a ruling class relies not only on coercive power and authority but on consent deriving from hegemony — what Gramsci calls 'the intellectual and moral leadership' exercised by the ruling group and 'the general direction imposed upon the social life by the dominant fundamental group'. What is new in Gramsci is the observation that even bourgeois hegemony is not automatic but achieved through conscious political action and organisation. (Hobsbawm 324)

The history of any society has been the history of power and subordination, dominance and resistance, violence and oppression. The ostensible 'social order', on grounds of which hierarchies are legitimised, hides the violence of the hierarchies underneath. Sometimes, this covert violence transforms into an overt form through those systems and collectives which seek to uphold order and hegemony at all costs. Often, state machinery itself becomes a perpetrator of violence by siding with hegemonic forces, and therefore becomes complicit in the maintenance and reproduction of these hierarchies. Resistance to hegemony and oppression is usually met with violence on the part of those in power. The state, therefore, asserts its power and reproduces hierarchies through the functioning of what Althusser calls the ideological and repressive state apparatuses. He notes:

> The role of the repressive State apparatus, insofar as it is a repressive apparatus, consists essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production, which are, in fact, relations of *exploitation*. Not only does the State apparatus contribute generously to its own reproduction (the capitalist State contains political dynasties, military dynasties, etc.) but also and above all, the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses. (101)

In the context of contemporary India, the overt use of repressive, physical and linguistic violence by the state and its institutions as well as by certain groups backed by the state has become the new normal. In this context, Neera Chandhoke writes in the article "The Trail of Violence in India":

> The biography of our nation is scarred by indescribable acts of individual and collective violence. Headlines of

morning newspapers regularly disburse news about the latest incident of, often, incredible brutality etched onto the bodies of women, of children, of the so-called lower castes, of minority groups, and of vulnerable others. Violence is executed with deadly precision... Sadly institutions, procedures and agents which are supposed to protect citizens, such as tribunals, committees and courts, are compromised. All governments are arbitrary and heedless of the interest of their citizens, particularly the most vulnerable sections of society. Such arbitrary exercise of power has to be kept in check in a democracy by institutions, laws, processes, and civil society organisations. When the capacity of civil society organisations to mount protest against violence is neutralised by state power, and when institutions and laws that possess the capacity to protect citizens are subordinated to problematic ideologies, the rights of citizens are violated with a degree of impunity, often by the police, often by mobs dispensing vigilante justice. But the state is silent.

In such times, the function of literature is to hold a mirror up to society and prevent the normalisation of state violence. Literature becomes a means of questioning structural violence and hegemony, and also serves as an alternative space for the healing of society. Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is one such example of literature that investigates and comments on recent political developments in India, dissecting the functioning of the state machinery and the violence through which it operates. This paper looks at the forms of structural state violence that the novel investigates, and at the alternative spaces that it imagines as counter.

2. Violence, Identities, and the State: Investigating the Politics of Power and Hate

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, set in the current political climate of twenty-first century India, follows the stories of multiple characters, including Anjum, S. Tillotama and others, who traverse and subvert the faultlines and fissures of the Indian state. The novel takes up multiple socio-political issues from communalism and Gujarat riots to the atrocities of state forces in Kashmir. The book makes use of the third-person narrative not just to narrate incidents in the lives of its characters but also to provide an account of events in the contemporary nation. The personal and the political thus come together in the novel. The individual lives of the characters are enmeshed in larger political happenings, drawing from the idea that identities are not just personal but also political. In the words of Anita Felicelli, as put forth in her article "Outside Language and Power: The Mastery of Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*": "Identity is at the heart of *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Not only India's identity, or Kashmir's identity, but also the identities of individual people, often those considered marginalized". The politicisation and polarisation of personal identities to maintain or expand political power is portrayed in the novel in great detail to comment on the current state of political affairs. Communal violence, mob lynching of minorities, violence of the capitalist state against its own people, and the militarisation of Kashmir are the forms of state violence that the novel explores. It is these aspects of the novel that are taken up below.

2.1 Communalism and Violence — The Case of Gujarat Riots

Anjum, one of the protagonists in the novel, transwoman and survivor of the Gujarat riots of 2002[1], embodies the experience of violence unleashed as an outcome of the polarisation of identities. On her visit to Gujarat, Anjum finds herself caught in the heat of ruthless violence against Muslims. The death of her own Muslim friend Zakir Mian at the hands of a mob leaves her traumatised. Her subsequent need to repress the memory of the violence suffered and witnessed, yet her inability to forget shows how violence affects individuals psychologically. The psychological manifestations of her experience of violence are put into words by the narrator:

She tried to dismiss the cortege of saffron men with saffron smiles who pursued her with infants impaled on

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1   Brook Larmer, in the essay "The Chilling Message" in *Lest We Forget*: Gujarat 2002, writes: "The... spasm of violence began when a train full of Hindu zealots returning from Ayodhya arrived at the station in Godhra. The kar sevaks reportedly refused to pay a Muslim tea vendor, forced Muslims to sing praises to Ram and then allegedly brought a Muslim girl into their car, The enraged repsonse –– young Muslim men killed 59 Hindus, mostly women and children, when they set two train cars ablaze –– succeeded only in turning every Muslim in Gujarat into a target. The Hindu mobs that swarmed into Muslim communities over the next three days were exacting more than just an eye for an eye. As they killed hundreds of Muslim men, women and children, they were carrying out a more sinister policy, one that is embraced by a wing of the ruling BJP: the purification of a Hindu State".

their saffron tridents, but they would not be dismissed. She tried to shut the door on Zakir Mian, lying neatly folded in the middle of the street, like one of his crisp cash-birds. But he followed her through closed doors on his flying carpet. She tried to forget the way he had looked at her just before the light went out of his eyes. But he wouldn't let her. (Roy 61)

This violence experienced in the Gujarat riots is physical, but also symbolic. It is a violence that targets not just bodies, but bodies of certain identities. As Harsh Mander notes:

> ... unlike other forms of public anger, communal violence targets almost invariably people most vulnerable and defenceless; it is fuelled by perilous and explosive mass sentiments of irrationality, unreason, prejudice and hatred, and its poison spreads incrementally over space and time. Its wounds do not heal across generations. (103)

The camouflaging of identities in order to protect the self in an increasingly vicious social milieu further depicts that identity and polarisation are central to violence. Here, Zakir Mian's eldest son, Mansoor, may be cited as example. Two months after the death of his father, when the murdering had grown sporadic and was more or less tailing off, Zakir Mian's eldest son, Mansoor, went on his third trip to Ahmedabad to look for his father. As a precaution he shaved off his beard and wore red puja threads on his wrist, hoping to pass off as a Hindu (Roy 46). As stated by K.N. Panikkar:

> The religious symbols and sentiments are invoked for political mobilisation and democratic principles are shrouded in majoritarianism. The secular territorial concept of nationalism is also under siege; it is sought to be replaced by an exclusivist notion of religious-cultural nationalism. (46)

Thus, Anjum is forced to chant *'Bharat Mata ki Jai! Vande Matram'* ('Long Live Mother India! I bow to thee Mother') during the riots. The violence unleashed in the name of the glory of the nation depicts how violence also lies in the way a nation and nationalism is defined. Exclusivist definitions of a nation are in itself a form of violence, to the claimed 'inclusive' idea of India. The polarisation of identities and the unleashing of communal violence is then linked to the problematics of nation and nationalism.

2.2 Mob Lynching — Democracy or Mobocracy?

The Hindu exclusivism is constructed around this spiritual fascism that institutionalizes itself within the ideological sphere of spiritualism. The SC, ST, OBCs are victims of the spiritual fascism… A civil society which upholds spiritual hierarchization imposes all kinds of restrictions on human development. The Indian state remains totally disintegrated because of the anti-people ideology of Brahminism. (Ilaiah 60)

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness tells the story of not just Anjum but also of a number of other characters who have been victims of violence. The lives of these characters intersect in crucial ways in the novel. Dayachand, aka Saddam Hussain, a skinner by occupation, carries the memory of caste and mob violence with him throughout the book. The ruthless killing of his father by a mob on the false allegation of 'cow slaughter' continues to haunt him. "He described how once the mob had finished its business the car switched their headlights on, all together, like an army convoy. How they splashed through puddles of his father's blood as if it were rainwater… Everybody watched. Nobody stopped them" (Roy 89). The passive witnessing of bystanders who do not stop the violence, and the complicity of the police in that violence, shows how inertness on the part of the common people and the complicity of state machinery acts to perpetrate violence against minorities, further marginalising the already oppressed. As expressed by Deepali Aparajita and Twinkle Siwach in their article "The Reign of Mobocracy, Not Democracy Plagues India":

> Mobocracy is becoming the new norm in India. It can be crudely defined as the act of violence or attack by a mob on an individual without any adherence to the law of the land or principles of natural justice. The reliance of the public on the law has turned into the public taking the law in their hands. The people who turn into a 'mob' every other second are fearless, emotionless, robots in the shape of hate-mongers who do not consider the other as human, rather seizes to think, and targets upon them as the 'enemy'. The capacity to think and reason out takes a backseat leading to irrational human emotions.

The violence inherent in hate-mongering is thus lamented and critiqued in the novel through the character of Saddam Hussain.

2.3 State — The Enemy of the People? The Narrative of the Adivasi

The violence perpetrated on certain castes and religious identities through the state machinery as well as through the process of polarisation of identities by the state for purposes of power and hegemony is accompanied by violence, of a neoliberal capitalist state,[1] unleashed against its own people. The forceful take-over of the tribal lands, the violent repression of tribal resistance movement and the killing of the tribal people in fake encounters is part of the state's agenda of capitalist development.[2] David Harvey views this as "the politics of accumulation by dispossession", which "takes over as a primary means for the extraction of income and wealth from vulnerable populations" (67). Revathi is a tribal woman hailing from East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, who is forced to abandon her child, the latter being adopted by S. Tilotamma and Anjum. In her letter, in the novel, she narrates in detail this form of violence committed by the state as part of the 'politics of accumulation by dispossession'. Azad Bhartiya's rough translation of her letter states:

> In 2008 the situation much worst inside the forest. Operation Green Hunt is announced by the Government. War against People. Thousands of police and paramilitary are in the forest. Killing adivasis, burning village. They sleep in the forest outside at night because at night police come, hundred, two hundred, sometimes five hundred police. They take everything, burn everything, steal everything. Chickens, goats, money. They want adivasi people to vacate forest so they can make a steel township and mining. Thousands are in jail. (Roy 421)

Working for the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, Revathi is captured by the state forces and gruesomely assaulted by the policemen. The gruesomeness of the violence done to Revathi by police officials is a testimony to how violence is gendered and that the female body is subjected to physical and sexual violence in any form of political violence.

2.4 Azad Bhartiya — Critiquing Structural State Violence

The contemporary Indian political state of 'un-freedom', oppression, and violence is further critiqued by Roy through the character of Azad Bhartiya. The character of Azad Bhartiya is more symbolic than real. Azad has been on an eleven year fast as a protest against the violence inflicted by the capitalist state on its people as well as on the environment. The role played by Azad in the novel is that he poses questions to the very foundations of a state that is structurally violent in nature. Azad is given space in the novel to lament the state of affairs in the country by means of a first-person narrative. The state of un-freedom is then a state of violence, as expressed by Azad. The idea of a 'Democracy Zoo'[3], put forward by Azad in the novel, further underscores the idea of state oppression and the state of un-freedom.

2.5 Azadi — The Case of Kashmir

In her book, *Azadi: Freedom, Fascism, Fiction*, Roy writes:

2   Neoliberalism as a project and ideology holds, in David Harvey's words, "that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market". (3)

3   Amit Bhaduri, in his book *The Face You Were Afraid to See*, notes: "Although dalits and adivasis, the poorest and most oppressed, constitute about one-fourth of the population, they are estimated to be close to forty percent of those whom industrialization in its various forms has dispossessed of land, livelihood and habitat... Resistance is met with brutality. When, recently, the gram sabha in Kathikund, Jharkhand, refused to hand over land in the name of development, two adivasis were killed in police firing. Others were wounded and jailed. Systematic violence and threat of violence at times direct, at other times silent and indirect but no less vicious is being used by the state under the guise of liberalization, privatization and globalization to dispossess millions who live traditionally on a natural resource base..." (182).

4   In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, talking about the idea of 'Democracy Zoo', Azad Bhartiya writes, "We sit here like caged animals, and the government feeds us useless little pieces of hope through the bars of this iron railing. Not enough to live on but enough to prevent us from dying" (132). The idea of the 'Democracy Zoo' can be read as embodying the critique of the illusion of freedom that the so-called democracy creates and how it controls and regulates its citizens through its institutional machinery.

Today Kashmir is one of the most, or perhaps the most densely militarised zone in the world. More than half-million soldiers have been deployed to counter what the army itself admits is now just a handful of 'terrorists'… What India has done in Kashmir over the last thirty years is unforgivable. An estimated 70,000 people — civilians, militants, and security forces — have been killed in the conflict. Thousands have been 'disappeared', and tens of thousands have passed through torture chambers that dot the valley. (98)

The story of Musa, a Kashmiri man who later becomes a militant and fights for the Azadi of Kashmir in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represents the story of the people of Kashmir, the story of loss, torture, and violence. The harrowing deaths of Musa's child and wife and the life that Musa lives underground depict the brutality of army/police violence and the arbitrariness of it. The experiences of the people of Kashmir have been marked by routine state violence and oppression . As the narrator writes in the novel, "Death was everywhere. Death was everything. Career. Desire. Dream. Poetry. Love. Youth itself. Dying became just another way of living" (314). Roy also weaves stories of love set in the atmosphere of violence. The love story of Musa and Tilo, who is Musa's architecture classmate, becomes one such story of love marred by violence and death itself. Tilo, a woman with no sense of belonging intersects paths with a Kashmiri man and develops a relationship that can never be easily defined in the backdrop of violence and identity-crisis.

3. Characters or Caricatures? Subjectivity and Individual Identity in the Face of Violence

Through the experiences of multiple characters that are presented, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* investigates different forms of political state violence, but fails to register subjective experiences of violence in terms of the psychological, material conditions of those who were victims of violence. Though the novel shows awareness about the cultural dynamics of caste, gender, religion, and region involved in the experiences of violence, the trauma that people have had to undergo is largely glossed over in an attempt to depict all the spheres and dimensions of violence. The personal experiences of the characters are often overshadowed by Roy's commentary on the political situation. Though characters, such as Azad Bhartiya, Revathi, and Tilo, are given spaces to articulate their first-hand accounts of violence, the larger scheme of the narrative continues to be a distanced third-person narrative which fails to grasp the depths of psychological trauma as well as marginalisation of people and identities who have suffered at the hands of a violent state. The characters, on the whole, become mere ideas that facilitate a commentary on the contemporary state of violence in India rather than being alive, real characters with a traumatic past and a thinking, feeling present.

4. Literature: Building Alternative Political Spaces

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, after having witnessed violence in the Gujarat riots, Anjum leaves her home and moves to a graveyard with her belongings. By the end of the novel, the victims of violence come together to live in the graveyard which has become the 'Jannat Guest House'. The graveyard then becomes an alternative space imagined by the author that acts as a foil to the divisive, violent, bourgeois society outside it. It becomes a space where rigid boundaries are transcended and love devoid of hate and prejudice reigns, where animals co-exist with humans[1], the dead with the living. It is a community space in its truest sense and yet it remains a place of passive resistance that embraces the victims of the society but continues to remain in the margins of that society. Anjum herself becomes an embodiment of the alternative space in a way. As Roy writes in her book *Azadi*: "Anjum softens the borders between men and women, between animals and humans, and between life and death. I go to her when I need shelter from the tyranny of hard borders in this increasingly hardening world" (90).

Just as the graveyard becomes an alternative space that embodies the possibility of resistance, the novel too by critiquing the structural violence and by imagining such alternatives to the hegemonic social order becomes an alternative space where subversion and reimagination blend together with possibilities of resistance.

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5   In the novel, the narrator writes, "... they had turned the graveyard into a zoo - a Noah's Ark of injured animals. There was a young peacock who could not fly, and a peahen, perhaps his mother who could not leave him. There were three old cows that slept all day" (399).

5. Conclusion

The novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* documents the violence pervasive in society that emerges from institutional structures and ideological frameworks of a hegemonic, capitalist state. The militarisation of Kashmir, the alienation of the people of Kashmir speaks loud and clear about the overt forms in which the state violates the dignity and freedom of its own people. The invasion into the lives and livelihoods of the tribal people by the state for its own profits is further testimony to the violent nature of the state. The complicity of the state and its machinery in the polarisation of identities and in the communal, caste violence shows how the contemporary state is far from egalitarian. In each of these forms of injustices meted out to the people, resistance comes from the community of people. These injustices are then furthered by using violence to intimidate people who dare to resist. The novel explores how these forms of violence intersect and how certain identities are central targets of these forms of violence. Yet, while literature can imagine alternative spaces to violent societies, there is still a need to bring in subjectivity and psychological depth in the representation of the impacts of violence on individuals and communities.

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Tragedy and The Common Man in Anita Desai's *In Custody*

Anwesh Banerjee

Abstract

Anita Desai's *In Custody* follows its protagonist, Deven, a middle-class temporary professor of Hindi who is dissatisfied in his personal and professional life, as he meets his idol, renowned Urdu poet Nur Shahjahanabadi, and the subsequent series of events. This essay, with specific reference to the seminal essay by Arthur Miller on the nature of tragedy in the 20th Century, seeks to examine Deven as a prototype of the middle-class common man of Miller and thereby locate his tragedy within the same spatial matrix. The essay also reveals the workings of language and gender politics in the novel, which are reflective of those in post-Partition Indian society on the brink of modernity, that lead to tragedy in the lives of Deven as well as the other characters of the novel—Sarala, Deven's wife, Nur, the once-renowned artist now fading into oblivion as Urdu loses its cultural currency in Indian society, and Nur's wives, Imtiaz and Safiya Begum, who find themselves circumscribed within the homosocial sphere of Urdu poetry. In this way, the essay seeks to analyse *In Custody* as Modern tragedy.

Keywords: Gender, language, middle-class, post-partition, tragedy

1. Introduction

Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and turned into a film following publication, Anita Desai's novel, *In Custody*, is a canvas of many hues. At the outset, it is the story of Deven Sharma, a man disillusioned with his life and profession, who meets his idol of many years, Nur Shahjahanabadi, and the series of events which follow—some hilarious and some tragic. But underneath the garb of the same, the novel is a meditation on the role of the poet and the audience in preserving the art that one produces and the other consumes. It is a commentary on the tug of war between two languages of the subcontinent, Hindi and Urdu, a navigation of the spaces we inhabit (the aridity of Mirpore[1] and the bustle of Chandni Chowk[2]), the mundanity of middle-class existence, and the role occupied by women (here Imtiaz Begum[3], Safiya Begum[4] and Sarala[5]) in the homosocial bonds of friendship between men.

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1   Allegedly based on the city of Meerut Mirpore, a "formless, shapeless town on the plain that had not even a river or hill to give it any reason for its existence" (*In Custody* 15), is the residence of Deven. A semi-rural city, its arid conditions come to symbolise over the course of the novel the barren nature of the situation the protagonist finds himself in repeatedly. The mostly-peaceful city also has a rich history of Sultanate patronage alongside demonstrative instances of communal violence, which are extensively detailed in Chapter 2 of the novel

2   The location where a major part of the action of the novel takes place, Chandni Chowk, a "pullulating honeycomb of commerce" (*IC* 33), is situated in the heart of northern Delhi. Amidst bustling commerce and dingy squalour it becomes a paean to past glory, now fallen to complete decadence. In many ways, it comes, through its decadence, to symbolise the fall of Nur himself— a life of glorious talent spent in the arms of alcohol and excess

3   Nur's second wife and a poet in her own right (though her skill is completely subjective). Deven finds her to be a shrill, meddlesome virago who is mooching off of Nur and he has no sympathy for her even when she falls ill (he believes her illness is made up) or speaks frankly of the difficulties of being a woman poet. He does admit she is clever, as she seems to know how to whip up her audience and to display her charisma on stage, but he otherwise sneers at her lower-class background (she may have been a dancing girl or a prostitute before she met Nur, though she claims that she was not and that Nur fell in love with her for her poetic skills).

4   Nur's first wife. She is old and uneducated, but her status as the first wife gives her power in the household. She despises Imtiaz and fervently believes in Nur's singular genius. It is Safiya who helps Deven secure a private space for the recording and encourages him to do the interview despite the difficulties, but she is also smart enough to demand payment for Nur's time and effort— "make sure you send a message about the payment that will be made for his labour as well. If I find it is insufficient, you will not find him at the door when you come to fetch him" (*IC* 140).

5   Sarla is Deven's overburdened and unhappy wife, who was chosen for him by his family members and in Chapter 4 is introduced by Desai as "the picture of an abandoned wife" (*IC* 67). She was full of her own dreams of what marriage might be like but life with Deven rapidly quashed them. She is a woman of many disappointments, "tacit accusations" (*IC* 70) and regrets, prone to a sullen disposition and passive-aggressiveness when it comes to her relationship with her husband.

Breaking away from the Aristotelian principle of defining tragedy as the experience of the members of the nobility possessing a singular *hamartia*, Arthur Miller, in his seminal post-World War II essay, redefined the genre as the fallacy of the experience of the common man who finds himself not just with an unresolved moral crisis but also facing defeat at the hands of the society around him. In light of Miller's essay, Deven, in many ways a spiritual successor of Willy Loman himself, can be seen as a tragic hero who is disillusioned not just by the mundanity of his own life but also by the decadence of the man he had idolised for years and by extension, the post-Independence Indian milieu that would allow such decadence. This essay demonstrates how Deven's tragedy is not just a result of the void created in the face of professional and marital failure as well as his disillusionment with the image of Nur, but also the unexpected defeat he faces in his contestation as the sole custodian of Nur and his poetry which is further emblematic of the novel's larger language and gender politics.

2. The Difference between Aristotle and Miller's Conception of Tragedy

Aristotle was one of the first people to define tragedy in his *Poetics*, where he outlined the need for a tragic hero to be a person of high social standing or noble birth. He emphasised narrative coherence by explaining the three Unities of Time, Place and Action which requires the play to have a beginning, middle and end thereby making it evident "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened but what may happen- what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity"(Adams 54). For a tragedy to unfold, he outlined the tragic hero's need to have a fatal tragic flaw, a quality whose presence in excess results in his eventual downfall. This flaw is called *hamartia*. Two other important components of tragedy, according to him, include the moment of revelation when the central character realises the truth about their circumstances, resulting in a complete reversal of fortune for the tragic figure. These two are called *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* and, in many ways, both these devices signify a point of no return for the central tragic figure of the story. Finally, Aristotle explains how the purpose of any tragic plot is to result in *catharsis*, which is a purgation of the emotions and conflicts of the tragic character resulting in the evocation of pity and fear in the hearts of the audience.

Miller in his 1949 essay, "Tragedy and the Common Man," however, argues for the idea of the common man as being a fitting subject for tragedy. Miller starts by pointing out that the modern post-WWII world has grown increasingly sceptical and is less inclined to believe in the idea of heroes. Miller argues that despite this the world is full of heroes. A hero is anybody who is willing to lay down his life in order to secure his sense of personal dignity irrespective of social status or background. According to Miller, the age-old perception of the hero as being someone like Oedipus or Odysseus is a narrowing of the idea of heroism. For Miller, tragedy is driven by "Man's total compunction to evaluate himself justly". In the process of doing this and attaining his dignity at the same time, the tragic hero often loses his life to society. But there is something affirmative about this for Miller, because, through the tragedy, the audience will be driven to evaluate what is wrong with a society that could so unjustly destroy a man. Miller sees tragedy as inherently optimistic because it is about what he calls man's thrust for freedom. The hero will be destroyed at the end of the play, but there always remains the possibility that he could have succeeded and won against society. If there exists a fine balance between what is possible and impossible in this battle of man, then tragedy can teach its audience about the "perfectibility of man".

For Miller, the tragic flaw, what Aristotle had called the *hamartia*, is redefined in modern terms as the hero's inherent unwillingness to remain passive in the face of what he conceives to be a challenge to his dignity and rightful status in society. According to Dr. Oliver Teale, Miller shifts the *hamartia* onto society and makes the individual a victim of this tragic flaw— "a largely liberal conception of the individual and his/her relation to the social order". According to Teale, the end or culmination of modern tragedy is a man's destruction that results from his challenge to the status quo, which demonstrates that evil resides not in the individual but in his society, in the conditions which suppress man, pervert his creative instinct, and stifle his freedom. Resonating with this, Raymond Williams in his documentation of the evolution of the genre of tragedy goes further and talks about the tragedy of experience, placing it among the most common of all experiences. It might be the loss of a beloved or a language but it is loss that decides the tragic nature of the situation in question. In light of both these conceptions, one can attempt to view the multifarious nature of the tragedy that becomes Deven.

3. The Tragic Lives of Deven and Nur

Personally, Deven reels from the childhood loss of his father. Desai offers her readers snippets from which they learn that his father, who too was a teacher, died very early from an illness and Deven was raised single-handedly by his mother. The image of Deven's father in his sickbed reciting Urdu poetry to his son is poignant and the readers are told that Deven's love for the dying language is largely due to his father's inculcation of the same in him. This puts into perspective Deven's fascination with the language as Urdu is the only remaining link that he bears with his father; the death of the language from public memory would surreptitiously amount to the erasure of the final tie between father and son as well. The accumulated hurt of an absentee father is seen in Deven's own fractured relationship with his son, Manu. He struggles to maintain a relationship with him and is no more than a mere ghostly presence in the life of the child. He occasionally takes interest in his school coursework and attempts to forge a bond with him, an example of which is seen in the walk the two of them take down the road following Deven's first return from Delhi. But one can feel the effort Deven has to put into the conversation and his palpable struggle to gain respect in the eyes of his own son. The mere sight of the clothes his son wears, gifts from his maternal relations, is proof enough to Deven of his inability to provide economic satisfaction to his family.

The burgeoning frustrations of professional failure accumulate and get thrust into the spatial matrix of Deven's marriage with Sarala. Theirs is not just a strained but also very much a failing marriage and the middle-class anxieties of Deven finally betray his garb of gentility and education in the form of the patriarchy that gets projected in his interactions with Sarala. He is abusive in his behaviour and does nothing to disguise his hatred for her single-mindedness. Sarala, on the other hand, is dissatisfied because the marriage has turned out to be the opposite of what she expected out of marriages from years of reading magazines. The lack of romance is hardly supplemented by economic prosperity and the quasi-rural setting makes the option of using the exit door of divorce even more difficult than it would have been in an urban space. A failing marriage is not the tragedy of a single partner. Instead, Desai makes the readers question the tragedy of the situation which both husband and wife find themselves in. They are both victims of the failure of their own desires and despite being bound by the yoke of victimhood, neither wishes to acknowledge the situation of the other. Desai seems to hint that perhaps it is easier to continue under the garb of victimhood for the act of breaking and walking away requires courage, a courage that neither of the two have in the face of the convenience of blaming their position upon forces supposedly beyond either of their ambit of control, largely failing to realise that they are both trapped in prisons of their own making. Sarala stays defiantly in the marriage; she is the wronged woman but she takes the tragedy of her situation in stride and fights back in small instances of resistance with her husband who is a victim of a fellow, albeit larger, tragedy. Her resistance is in lieu of the limitations her marriage imposes upon her and hence, she fights back along lines that hurt Deven the most. Repeatedly, she questions his economic stability, and, owing to the life of unfulfilled dreams and desires he has subjected her to, her biting malice seems to follow Deven everywhere he goes. A scathing instance is when Deven chooses a shirt gifted by his in-laws for his first visit to Delhi, the same shirt he had earlier dismissed rudely before Sarala and the author describes how the act of wearing the shirt gave him the feeling of wearing on his body the very malice Sarala bore him.

Deven's failures as a husband and a father are not helped by the absolute position of subservience he assumes in his relationship with his childhood friend, Murad. Murad bullies Deven amply, forcing him to go beyond his means, like in the opening chapter when Murad embarrasses Deven about being a "two cigarette man" (*In Custody* 2) and eventually bullies him into buying him lunch, fully aware of Deven's stringent financial status. Deven realises and personally acknowledges the unfairness of the treatment as well but finds himself in no position to stand up to Murad and every time Murad puts before him a new request which bears the possibility of professional advancement for Deven, he succumbs to it immediately. Even when the reader wants to feel angry with Deven for not being able to take a stand for himself, Desai thrusts pieces of information, like how Murad would borrow Deven's notes and score better than him while luring him into leaving his studies and playing cricket matches in their childhood, that forces the reader to realise that Deven indeed belongs to that order of men and women whose personality thrives upon succumbing to infernal manifestations of power. Instead of using the connections of Murad to his benefit, he succumbs to his bullying and does his work without any reparations. Despite his association and cordial relationship with Siddiqui[6], he never takes help from him for his professional advancement. As for Nur, he hardly manages to get from him the proper vestiges of an interview, the same interview that was supposed to propel him into overnight success. Deven is not even spared failure in his professional life. He is a temporary professor teaching Hindi, a language which

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6   The head of the Urdu department at the college where Deven teaches, Siddiqui is a slim, refined bachelor who lives in his family's ancestral home, a sprawling but decrepit manor. He loves songs, dance, drink, and gambling; at one point, Deven marvels that off-campus, he is a "sybarite" (*In Custody* 136). He is initially supportive of Deven's project, but he grows impatient with Deven's problems and failures and tries to extricate himself from the project.

in no way evokes in his heart the passion similar to the kind evoked by Urdu. However, he continues with his job for the sake of sustaining his family. Deven is not even very widely respected by his students who do not just disrupt his classes but also harass him outside the classroom. He yearns to spend his life writing Urdu shayari and although promises of the same come along his way through Murad, betrayal on that front prevents his dreams from materialising into reality. Murad, like a parasite, keeps extracting poetry and work from Deven, without ever actually publishing them or paying Deven for the same.

The other big tragedy lies in Deven's inability to come to terms with the image he has of Nur in his head and the reality of the poet-persona that he is forced to confront. When Deven finally meets Nur, he is not an enigmatic poet in the autumn of his life. Instead, Nur lives in a decrepit mansion which is darkly lit and dingy, and is in the shadow of a hospital, suggesting, perhaps, the multifarious ailments plaguing the establishment which need immediate diagnosis. He is a man plagued by ulcers, drowning in alcohol and leading an exhibitionist and decadent lifestyle that threatens to tear him apart. He is surrounded by crooks who feed off the random, yet lavish, feasts he throws and provide words of praise his way although he has not written anything substantial in many years. His income is almost nil and his *mushairas* are a reflection not of him partaking in quality literature but basking in the talent of the bygone eras during which he was in his prime and wallowing in the decline in regard for the same.

None of the people in Nur's life seem to lend any substance or purpose to it and when the opportunity to do something of meaning comes in the form of the interview by Deven, Nur manipulates the situation to his own benefit. He seeks monetary benefits from Deven to run his own household, designates Deven as his secretary without his consent and writes him repeated letters requesting money to pay for his hospital expenses and Haj trip. In return, however, he provides Deven with not a shred of insight into his own poetic oeuvre, causing him to return to his home, his college and to Murad empty-handed in the face of possible humiliation and embarrassment. Deven, on multiple occasions, is frustrated with Nur and comes close to giving up, projecting his anxieties upon the recording boy[7], signifying his incapability of reconciling himself with the reality of Nur (a now drunken and abusive poet engaging in self-destructive pleasuring with an erstwhile genius to cash upon), and by larger extension, the reality of the current social milieu where Urdu is no longer a language of exotic court poetry but one relegated to the pockets of a city, almost threatened with extinction and barely being kept alive through the lyrics of mainstream Bollywood cinema (which despite its good intentions, come nowhere near the panache of the pre-colonial poetry Deven associates it with). This heightens the tragedy of his situation along with the imbalanced emotional dynamic it brings to light. Deven's forceful reckoning of reality would mean not only admitting the failure of Nur as the epitome of greatness but also coming to terms with the reality of a language which not only reminds him of his own lost childhood, the moments of grace that saw him through his professional and marital failure.

4. Comparison between Deven Sharma and Willy Loman

At this point one can draw a point of comparison between Deven and Miller's own tragic hero, Willy Loman. With his trauma of an absentee father in childhood, failing marriage to Linda (who unlike Sarala accepts and bows down to the many cruelties of Willy), delusional professional life and encounter with a tape recorder, Willy's experiences are uncannily similar to those of Deven. Just like Murad insensitively refuses to pay for the recorder, Howard, Willy's boss, uses the tape recorder to symbolically oppress his employee, Willy, who will never earn enough to afford the luxury of purchasing a tape recorder in his lifetime. Deven's pursuit of the enigma that he believes Nur to be is in many ways similar to Willy's pursuit of the American Dream[8]. Both are so rooted in their lust for the pursuit that they fail to recognise the many limitations of their ultimately illusory goal. Willy Loman eventually becomes a victim of the web of lies he conjures for his own self, to the extent that the choice

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7   Mr. Jain, Murad's electronic dealer friend, offers his nephew, Chiku, to assist Deven in recording Nur's interview. However, despite Mr. Jain's proclamations, Chiku turns out to be grossly inexperienced when it comes to recording and his fumbles and laziness—"only when a glass was passed to Chiku was it discovered that he was fast asleep, the tape recorder still on" (*IC* 174)—cause multiple hurdles in the recording process which are further accentuated by Deven holding him longer than agreed upon—"what sort of a job goes on for twelve hours a day" (*IC* 174)—and channelling his frustration and anger against him because of the deeply erratic and unprofessional manner in which Nur proceeds to behave over the course of the interview.

8   According to the 4th Edition of *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, the American Dream is best defined as the American idea according to which equality of opportunity permits any American to aspire to high attainment and material success. Willy Loman's pursuit of the same and refusal to admit his own position in the military-industrial complex of the American capitalist structure, ultimately leads to him constructing a life based on abject delusions; one that ultimately ends in the tragedy of his own death. Similarly Deven's pursuit of Nur and the intellectual superiority he stands for is not as much the chasing of a model of reality but rather a perception of reality that exists in Deven's mind; his perception of Nur and his supposed brilliance which is now a thing of the past.

of ending his own life becomes an easier path to take as opposed to confessing his disillusionment with the American Dream before his own family and thereby to his own self. Deven's illusion of Nur breaks the moment he encounters the man for the first time and the remainder of the novel is a tracing of his journey as he tries to prove to the world a reality he feels acutely aware of, failing to realise that Nur's loss of poetic genius is a larger blow to his own perceptions of the man and the language he venerates than Nur's position in society. His arrogance in refusing to admit the same causes him to go against the most vile of road-blocks to obtain an interview, for in proving Nur's excellence and relevance lies his one redeeming chance to prove to his long abusive friend Murad the gravity of his own character as well as finding a semblance of comfort and success in the face of his professional and marital failure. In his pursuit of a project, bound to fail from the start, he is no different from Willy Loman who chooses to lie to his family rather than accept the failure of the mythical American Dream. This arrogant refusal to admit self-defeat against the insurmountable odds of their strenuous socio-cultural and familial circumstances brings out the true tragedy of their stories.

5. The Nature of Tragedy and Intersection of Language and Gender Politics in *In Custody*

Another major theme that *In Custody* deals with is the intersection of language and gender politics when it comes to the circumscription and exclusion of women from public and intellectual spaces. The conflict between Deven and Imtiaz Begum which brings out this theme comes to a head in the last chapter of the novel. Desai writes:

> But Deven didn't have the courage. He didn't have the time, he didn't have the will or the wherewithal dealing with his new presence, one he had been happy to ignore earlier and relegate to the grotesque world of hysterics, termagents, viragos, the demented and the outcast. It wasn't for the timid and circumspect to enter that world on a mission of mercy or rescue.If he were to venture into it, what he learnt would destroy him as a moment of lucidity can destroy the merciful delusions of a mad man. He couldn't allow that. (225)

Deven's self-introspection takes place right after he receives and reads a letter from Imtiaz Begum which challenges Deven's deeply chauvinist attitude towards her and her work as a poet, thereby exposing the hollowness of the mainstream discourse surrounding Urdu poetry which seeks to exclude female poets. As Imtiaz Begum challenges Deven to read her own compositions, the readers realise that Deven's own devotion to Nur is based on largely insecure grounds, bearing the threat of being desecrated by the possibility of his wife's poetry outshining his own compositions.

The central point of conflict for Deven in the novel, that is the interview of Nur, reaches a point of abject failure in the tenth chapter when Deven realises not just the poor quality of the recordings of Nur's interview but also the lack of substantial material in them. This conflict is further picked up and partially resolved in the eleventh chapter when Deven, prior to the college meeting, heads to Siddiqui's house which is being destroyed in lieu of Siddiqui moving to Delhi. There, Siddiqui asks him why he did not act in the face of the challenges thrown his way.Deven tries to answer but his voice gets drowned out amidst the noise of the construction work. Deven's failure to offer a substantial answer prompts the readers to come up with two distinctive reactions. They feel the anger that they have been feeling on behalf of and against Deven in spurts since the beginning of the novel for being a man who despite being borne down by the burden of his own reality is so overwhelmed by the enormity of the same that he is unable to change anything. But having read about the reality of his experiences up to this point in the novel, one also feels a tinge of pity for the hero because Desai has provided ample proof that Deven, in most situations, was hardly left with a choice. The poor recordings were also the result of the faults of Nur—who insisted on giving the interviews in between bouts of drunkenness and sobriety—and Murad himself—who insisted on purchasing a second-hand tape recorder. In light of these pieces of information, it becomes difficult to place the tragedy of Deven. Do the readers see him as a man who falls prey to his own inability to act or is Desai indicating larger forces at play here—namely fate—which have been the concern of tragedies since the very inception of the genre?

Up until the arrival of the letter from Imtiaz Begum, Deven derived pleasure from knowing that despite the failure of his assignment, in the process of his interactions with Nur he had become the sole custodian of his art and soul, something that will remain in his possession till his own death and which will allow him to carry forward Nur's legacy long after Nur has departed the mortal world. However, even this belief of his is upended upon reading the

letter Imtiaz Begum sends him which proves that she, despite the spite directed at her for trying to overshadow her husband, had been chosen by Nur due to her intellectual prowess. Through their marriage, she had become an intellectual companion to Nur and hence a custodian of his soul and work long before Deven had walked into their lives with the proposal of conducting an interview. This revelation also puts into perspective the role played by Safiya Begum in the life of Nur. She ensures the sustenance of the family by agreeing to the conduct of the interview solely at the cost of monetary payment from Deven's end. It is she who through this tacit arrangement ensured that the house continued running even when Nur whiled away his hours, reminiscing on his earlier glory-days in the midst of his alcoholic stupors with stooges from the streets.

The letter shows that Deven had clearly lost the contest which mattered to him the most. In Urdu, the word custody translates to both *hifazat*[9] and *hiraasat*[10]. Despite wanting to care for Nur like a mother cares for her child, he had been outdone by two women whom he had considered insignificant, two women who had possessed (*hiraasat*) in their safekeeping (*hifazat*) the soul and poetry of Nur long before Deven could even imagine to do the same. However, as his reaction to the letter indicates, Deven is scared to even allow his thoughts to enter that territory of realisation because entertaining the implications of the same would amount to the admission of his own failure at the one battle he had hoped to win at all costs. It is at this point that one can mould Deven into a tragic hero, with his repeated denial shaping up to be his biggest tragic flaw.

The reading of the letter also brings about a meta-element to the *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia*, for it is the reader who at this juncture comes to realise the larger gender and language politics of the novel. What was so far only appearing to be a story about the tussle between two languages, one of the court and the other of the peasants, now opens up to a larger question on the sustenance of art through commerce. Urdu as a language in post-partition India is kept alive by courtesans on the fringes like Imtiaz Begum because the urban world, driven largely by linguistic homogeneity, is now overtaken by Hindi which, despite its canon of aesthete literature, is the language of the common man. While people like Deven harbour hopes of resuscitating poets like Nur and popularising Urdu in the mainstream again, the reality is that a dying language must cling onto even the most banal forms of entertainment (here cinema and music lyrics) to ensure its survival in public memory. Furthermore, this tussle becomes gendered when Deven views the poetry and performance of Imtiaz Begum with disdain. The hallowed poetry of Nur, despite its claimed quality of superiority, can only ensure survival if the Urdu language keeps pace with the times, something that Deven struggles to come to terms with. The discourse around the Urdu tradition, upholded by Deven, is much like the male dominated mainstream discourse around Romantic traditions[11], a comparison that seems appropriate owing to the opening quote from Wordsworth's ode, "Rob Roy's Grave."[12]

6. Conclusion

In the end, the readers see Deven going out for a walk, one that largely resembles the walk he had earlier taken with his son to gain perspective about how he should deal with Nur. This time, his walk is paired with sounds from a neighbouring funeral and images of dead birds. In the tradition of a tragedy, death is written large

9   To safeguard.
10   To possess in custody.
11   Discourse around the Romantic movement has always been largely dominated by the presence of male poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley) and a distinct overshadowing of female public intellectuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley and Charlotte Smith to name a few. Although female figures have featured prominently in the works of the male poet with Wordsworth writing his *Lucy Poems* and Coleridge and Keats writing pieces such as *Cristabel* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* which explored the figure of the seductress, there has been an alarming dearth of engagement with the works of female Romantic intellectuals as pointed out by critics like Ann Mellor (See *Romanticism and Gender*, 1993).
12   "They should take who have the power/And keep who they can"(Wordsworth). The decision to open the novel with a quote by Wordsworth seems a conscious choice since historical documentation of his life and the contexts behind his poems are mostly found from the diary entries of his long-term travel companion and sister, Dorothy Wordsworth. The journals of Dorothy cannot be isolated in an objective analysis of the poetry of William and the mainstream isolation of Dorothy and her influence in the works of, arguably, one of the most celebrated Romantic poets almost appears in tandem with Deven's fear that "I [Imtiaz Begum] might eclipse the verse of Nur Sahib and other male poets whom you revere? Was it not intolerable to you that a woman should match their talent and even outstrip them?"

across the canvas of the final scene of the novel. Yet, there is no death in the novel. The readers fear that despondency might drive Deven to death but that never happens. Despite the tragedy of it all, Deven lives to fight another day. Unlike Oedipus, he doesn't engage in self-inflicted pain[13]. He smiles, removes the thorn that bites into his shoes and proceeds to walk into the face of the rising sun, ready to live another day. The acceptance of his fate is never spelt out by Desai. It is up to the readers to decide whether this final act of walking past into the sun makes Deven fit to be canonised alongside the tragic heroes who came before him.

Deven's status as a tragic hero thus is in perfect accordance with those outlined by Miller in his conception of tragedy in the common everyday life of humans as they strive to live in the face of overwhelming forces beyond their control. The tragedy of his broken marriage and professional disappointment contribute to the crumbling of his image of Nur, whose irrelevance and, by extension, the loss of the Urdu language he is forced to reckon with despite his repeated attempts at upholding and proving the validity of both. In coming to terms with his disillusionment, Deven is forced to accept his own chauvinism leading to the author exposing the intersectional quality of the core politics of the novel which looks at the interlinkage of language and gender as foundational pillars of our society at large. Deven, despite his arrogance and denial, endures beyond the pages of the text through the ability he exhibits in fighting a losing battle against the mundane and everyday forces beyond his control— a quintessential character of tragic heroes of the most common order.

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13   Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* ends with the protagonist, Oedipus, gouging out his own eyes out of the shame and guilt of his own actions which included murdering his fathering and bedding his mother and remaining in denial of the same due to a tragic turn of fate. Even Willy Loman, at the end of *Death of a Salesman* commits suicide. However, unlike these tragic figures, Deven doesn't engage in self-harm of any kind.

Re-voicing, Representation and Socio-political Implications: A Study of the James Bond Franchise in India, Japan, and the West

Anwesha Ganguly

Abstract

Re-voicing, in tandem with the phenomenon of global digitization, has become an essential medium of global cross-cultural propagation. However, scripts undergo a designated procedure of linguistic filtration at a point which this dissertation terms as the "line of cultural control". This paper argues that such a modification is executed with the intention of propagating and thereby, prolonging a dominant socio-political rhetoric exclusive to that particular nation of which the dominant language is utilized in the afore-mentioned procedure.

This paper makes use of the movies of the James Bond franchise, with a particular emphasis on "You Only Live Twice" (1967) and "Skyfall" (2012). Upon a careful scrutiny of the re-voiced scripts of the above three movies in Japan, the UK and India, what is evident is an obvious reconfiguration of the script to suit the hegemonic socio-politico-anthropological framework of the afore-mentioned nations. This paper aims to deconstruct the purpose of such modification with a stringent emphasis on the issues of war, crime, espionage and race. Re-voicing then becomes not a breach but a subtle facilitator of perpetuating rigid national stereotypes, unraveling which is the prime objective of this paper.

Keywords: cultural propagation, linguistic filtration, modification, translation

Introduction

The intangible and unpredictable impact that technology has had on various domains across the globe, especially after the emergence of the dotcom bubble[1], has caused it to become a dominant means of global cross-cultural propagation, including the production of art, which is not exactly a nascent development because art has always been utilized for propaganda. What is unique with the introduction of technology is that cinema, which has always been a popular as well as a populist medium, has become a part of this manipulation because language has never been a uniform medium of communication across the globe and acts largely as a semiotic medium, much like voice (Bloomaert 72). Therefore, it becomes easier to translate a text into the language that is dominant in a particular nation-state. Fairclough, in his work on analysing discourse to understand how language shapes society, lays out an analysis of how background knowledge and reflection in terms of representation of society come together to form perception of an individual as well as a community. This paper locates elements of the same in James Bond Franchise films and seeks to argue that such a move proves to be one of the greatest hindrances in cross-cultural expansion.

Who is the target audience for a dubbed movie? Ideally, the people who are unfamiliar with a certain language, such as a large section of the natives as well as toddlers with an under-developed sense of linguistics. There also exists a diaspora in foreign lands familiar with the language, which is natural because no work of art can aim to have a universal and absolute effect on all sections of the population. "*The fact is that functions per-*

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1 The Dotcom bubble was an unmarked rise in the valuations of US technology stock equities fuelled by investments in technology-based companies during the bull market in the late 1990s. It happened because of the sudden favourability of technological stocks, again reflective of the tech frenzy that overtook the world. Such an action made the contrasts in the production of art far more evident in terms of comparisons. For more details, refer to *Origins of the Crash: The Great Bubble and its undoing* by Roger Lowenstein. I argue that the impact of technology is visible in the upward scaling rate of releasing movies in local languages.

formed by particular resources in one place can be altered in another place and that in such instances the 'value' of these linguistic tools or skills is changed, often in unpredictable ways" (Bloomaert 72).

This raises the question of whether the nation's diaspora is unaware of the messages being promulgated in the movie. Indeed, the aforesaid generalisation could be held as true. However, what needs to be considered is that the action of re-voicing in a movie is not meant for the demographic section that has been exposed to external cultures but for the locals who are thoroughly acquainted only with their own traditions, mechanisms, and ways of life. In You Only Live Twice (1967), when Kissy refuses Bond's sexual advances (You Only Live Twice 36:20), something that the detective was not used to, she was only reflecting the stereotypical cultural notions that she had picked up from village life, which were clearly misaligned with Bond's British upbringing and the values that he had inherited. That marital intimacy is tied with emotion in Kissy's view is reflected when she consents to conjugal consummation at the base of the volcanic mountain.

The depiction of an Oriental culture, especially Japan, would by no means be sensitive to the inherent realities of the nation in the Cold war era, owing to the relationship that the West and especially America shared[2] after the Second World War. This proves to be a reasonable justification for the choice to depict Japan as a nation trapped in the clutches of a medieval past – a nation with rampant instances of sexism (women telling Bond in the bathhouse that men always rank above women in Japan) and Tiger Tanaka's army of ninjas completely ignoring Japanese socio-economic reality. Japan experienced significant economic prosperity in the 1960s and banned abortion in 1948, leading to a marked decline in its demographic ratio. To analyse the decision to accuse the Japanese of being involved in the Cold war on the side of the communists (the crashing of the aircraft was seen as a Russian tactic to delay a United States operation), albeit fictional, speaks strongly of the bias held against Japan even nearly two decades after the Cold War and is evident of Macarthur's campaign to Christianize Japan in order to prevent the spread of communism in the nation (Matray 2).

The impact of such a historical phenomenon can be better understood with reference to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, where the assertion of hegemony is based on the existence of the equilibrium between consent and coercion. Hegemony, according to him, is the "cultural, moral and ideological" leadership of a group over allied and subaltern groups (Gramsci 240). Although he confines this theory to an economic sphere, it is evident in Macarthur's attempts to control Japan on a theological level to establish control on a political level that this sort of hegemony is asserted primarily through representation (which is a reflection of how the nation is perceived outside of its borders) and discourse (which contributes to an enhancement as well as addition in previously regarded perceptions about society), then perpetrated through the media sphere, thus causing something resembling a vicious cycle of reproduction of socio-political thought. Such a phenomenon is best termed as 'place resources' (Bloomaert 82), resources that are relevant in one place but nullified in another, owing to a mismatch of culture and identification.

To apply the aforementioned concepts to achieve the objective of this paper, it is essential to offer a simplistic view of the medium of cinema. Since this paper is attempting an analysis of a para-textual element[3], the

2   America had a caustic relationship with Japan ever since the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931), which culminated in it placing oil embargoes on Japan (1936). After the attack on Pearl Harbour in America and Japan's further integration into the axis camp in the Second World War, there took place the atomic bombing of Japan. Owing to the Communist frenzy that swept the world in the post second world war phase, America took great care to regulate the political climate of Japan and indoctrinated the Japanese in Christianity, which was seen as a significant move to alter the political as well as social climate in Japan. Such actions permitted and even celebrated Western superiority at the cost of Oriental subjugation, something that seems to be reversed and improvised to a great extent in the Bond Franchise.

3   Para-text is a term coined by Gerard Genette, which refers to the framing devices that authors and publishers use to contextualize works and generate interest (like blurbs, sub-titles, celebrity endorsements, and so on). The purpose of para-text is to formulate and support preconceived notions about a concept to promulgate already established beliefs. It was originally used in literary theory but has been extended to film theory in recent times. The central argument is that para-text becomes the decisive factor in determining the viewership of a certain work of art and the fact that even trailers are translated (and often manipulated to suit a certain narrative) goes on to show the role of a translator and a re-voiced version of a cinematic piece.

focus will be centred on that and not on the primary movie production process. There are three primary agents involved in the proper execution of a cinematic script – the ones operative behind the screen, the ones beholding the screen content, and the translator, when it comes to a revoiced cinematic script. Gramsci, in *Prison Notebooks*, distinguishes between two broad types of intellectuals – traditional intellectuals, who are recognized specialists in their chosen discipline, and organic intellectuals, who are the "thinking and social element of a particular fundamental social class." (3). He clearly illustrates the Marxist component of such a line of thought in the successive portions; however, his recognition of the presence of a gullible mass population capable of being swayed by a certain class of intellectuals, in favourable conditions, is important. This takes place largely due to the device of narrative (Hymes 115). Narrative, though overlooked in terms of its emotive and personalized touch, is structured largely in terms of units, segments, and episodes (Bloomaert 84),aiming to achieve a certain purpose and thus becoming an effective and often disregarded instrument of political socialization.

David Easton talks about political socialization in the sphere of influencing how a person comes to think about society:

> But there is a third kind of theory from which the most general guidance about the relevance of research in socialization might be obtained. This is a political theory of political socialization. Its objective would be to demonstrate the relevance of socializing phenomena for the operations of political systems. Logically, it is prior to the other two kinds of theory (traditional intellectualism and organic intellectualism) just discussed. Unless we have some idea about why it is important or significant to study socialization processes in the first place, there would be little reason even to begin to talk about socialization in relation to political life. We must therefore begin by inquiring into the part that socialization plays in the workings of systems. At the theoretical level, this means that we need to explore the position that we can attribute to socializing processes in a general theory seeking to understand the operation of any and all kinds. (126)

For any form of media to create an effect, its production or dissemination must be one of several in a series of ripples, all of which seemingly generate the same ideas, which is where Easton's characterization of political socialization steps in. This form of interaction forms the most influential instance of para-text in this context, because seeing one's ideas reflected on the big screen in one's language but in a dialogic and cinematic presentation that matches international standards provides the kind of formative structure that translates into a person's understanding of their perspectives on war, love, gender and the like. James Bond was a man transparent about his erotic sentiments and his involvement in international espionage to heal the political imbalance of the world.[4] The James Bond franchise was introduced in an appropriate timeline in global cinema, for it was one of the first franchises to air across the world, thus promoting a similarly depicted message in dissimilar forms and figures, especially in states of linguistic inaccessibility. However, what is also true is that the movies were not apolitical and when transmuted across nations, and were often translated per the preferences of that nation. Regardless of the original trailer title, the Bond movies always had "007" in their movie production titles in Japan, the agent's name. Todd Gitlin[5], in the advancement of Gramsci's message on hegemony stated above, says: "The artifacts are produced by professionals under the supervision of cultural elites themselves interlocked with corporate and, at times, state interests; meanings become encased in artifacts, consciously and not; then the artifacts are consumed." (1980)

It is crucial to clarify what the term 'professional' means in the context of revoicing a cinema. It is mostly a four-step process of revoicing a cinema – translators, who manage the script translation, voice-over actors or foreign performers and specialists on sound engineering, who will work on the configuration of the revoiced clip and the on-screen reel and ultimately, match the exact time of dialogue delivery. The most important agent, in the

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4   The world post the Second World War was divided into the capitalist and the communist camp, which competed against each other for power. While the USA controlled Western Europe, the USSR consolidated its power over Eastern Europe through both financial and political mechanisms. India, however, was part of the non-aligned camp. The purpose for stating this is to illustrate how the two camps would require different propagandist instruments, illustrated in further detail below.

5   Gitlin builds on Gramsci's message by expanding it to the issue of art, where he talks about how artwork is created with a certain purpose in mind, one that is more often an expression of the political than the personal. The essence of it is to substantiate that the Bond movies, which had transparently political themes, were created to produce a certain ripple effect on the international political stage.

context of this paper, will be the translator.

Having discussed the ideological impact and motives of cinema, it is not hard to notice that cinema, especially dubbed cinema ends up becoming what Norman Fairclough would term as an "ideologically-discursive formation" (56), especially if the audience is perceived as an active agent in society with a certain perspective that gets solidified and not dissipated through international cinema. Something else which requires clarification in the above reference is the process of consumption of artefact. An artefact, in this sense, refers to a cinematic medium with relevant themes. What is interesting about societal consumption of this kind of an artefact is that consumption leads to reproduction and individualistic dissemination of content, which goes on to become a part of community socialization. Therefore, there emerges an almost exponential relationship between the imparting of an ideology and the rate of its propagation, which was also true of spreading communist propaganda through cinema in Soviet nations[6], as is highlighted in *Politics, Power and Policy in Translation*:

In 1953, five Soviet films were screened between 15,600 and 37,600 times attracting audiences of between 15 million and 32 million (Chen 2010). Moreover, many audiences admitted that they were inspired by these Soviet films and that these films had influenced their lives. For example, there were teachers who regarded the teacher in the film A Country Teacher (1949) as a role model; and after watching Far from Moscow (1950), many youngsters volunteered to serve in the remote borders of China. (Yang and Fen 2012 p. 204)

Whether revoicing became a subtle means of achieving propagandist hegemony is open for consideration. The inception of it as an activity started when *Konstantin Zaslonov* (1949) was dubbed from Russian into Czech, demonstrating what would happen if the citizens tried to contradict the Soviet government[7]. Besides propagating ideology, they also showcased noble servants of the government and civilians, which had a two-fold purpose – it acted as a deterrent to anti-government activities along with the strict censorship of any other forms of media and secondly, it helped to introduce and subsequently, popularize the concept of the 'ideal citizen', which was essential to sustain the dictatorial regime established by the Soviet Union during the peak of the Cold War era.

Does this linguistic alteration take place under the influence of the nation of linguistic function or the nation of production? It is almost as if there exists a "line of cultural control" that separates nations besides geo-political borders, in defiance of cinematic cross-cultural propagation[8] norms. Such a phenomenon is again explained by orders of indexicality, units for the unequal operation of voice as conceived in one society or community (Bloomaert 84). It is essential to note that the James Bond franchise was one of the first cinematic franchises to air across the world. The induction of a movie script featuring a man transparent about his sexuality and executing the purpose of saving the world from Russian military efforts to conquer the world and its subsequent filtration, even of the parts featuring British social and political ideology, is hardly allowed to serve its purpose. The choice to depict Japan as the first state to provide the West with an introduction to Oriental culture is also intriguing if one looks at the dialogues. Bond, while being undressed by women in a Bathhouse, is instructed: "Never do something yourself if you can have someone else do it for you" (You Only Live Twice 20:16). It is equally interesting and amusing to depict Japan, of the Cold War years, as a nation rampant with blatant sexism, traditions like ninja training, and active volcanoes while completely ignoring the economic prosperity of the Asian state – Japan was

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6   There was a need to spread communist propaganda in Soviet nations, especially the ones conquered by the Russians after the Second World War, to not allow their cultural makeup to dominate the communist ideas being preached.

7   The Soviet government utilized several mechanisms besides propaganda, like the Gulags, which were prison cells meant for torturing inhabitants. The purpose was to retain their control over nations that had different cultural makeups and therefore, had to be coerced into political submission. One of the many methods adopted was cinema, a medium of entertainment that became a state-sponsored machinery and Konstantin Zaslonov was one of the first movies to be aired as a revoiced piece in Czechoslovakia, which was annexed in a violent coup and therefore, required coercion for political and ideological retention.

8   By cinematic cross-cultural propagation, I refer to the idea that the purpose of a work of art is to expose its audience to a liberated way of thinking and thereby, promote a heterogeneous spread of ideas. The argument is that re-voicing a particular movie according to a nation's ideology defeats the purpose of independent expression. The norms talked about are the propagation of Westernized notions of progress and development as shown in the James Bond Movies. Such an ideology of liberation in terms of expression which is quite Western rarely gets viewed in a similar way in Oriental societies.

in a period of an economic boom in the 1960s, owing to its export policy and technological industries. Britain, on the contrary, was faced with a pound deficit of 800 million whilst Harold Wilson's Labour Party held power. There were reports of a coup spearheaded by Lord Mountbatten and Cecil King. Of course, one could always argue that the franchise was produced by an American production company and only showcased a spy of British origins and mannerisms, thus causing the depictions to be American. An essential feature of the series is that it pays homage to one of the oldest bilateral relationships in the world, that of the United States and Britain (Black 106). Surely, one could claim that such an action was directed to inspire patriotic sentiments in Britain and attempt a resuscitation of its previously imperialistic and economic stance. However, what such an evaluation would ignore is that Bond works for the MI6 which is a British Intelligence Agency, having English interests (and ideologies) at heart. Although the movies make significant departures from Fleming's novels, the core plot remains the same and one cannot entirely exclude English influence at the expense of American intervention (Black 108).

For any media to succeed, there needs to be a significant framework already in place, which merely gets ignited or incarcerated by the same. Fairclough terms this as "background knowledge" (Fairclough 1983), which is simply a snippet of knowledge about what is being displayed on the screen. However, for this background knowledge to appeal further to the masses, there needs to be a para-textual element or something mirroring both the favoured ideology of the individual as well as the message transmitted through the medium. Christiane Nord was the first one to apply this conception to media and her theory is an addition to that of Vermeer's theory of *skopos* (p12)[9]. In *Skyfall*, Bond illustrates this more brilliantly than elsewhere by portraying Britain through a nationalist lens and reverting that to suit another nation's narrative, which depicts the ability of translation to penetrate the domain of representational barriers.

If one assumes that a film is poly-semiotic and operates through several channels[10], Gambier (2009, pp. 188-189) says that four main areas need to be analysed in order to obtain a grasp of a film's macro-context – these are the general cultural context, distribution and marketing, target audience and film genre. Analysis of micro and macro contextual elements is important because the viewer, according to Gambier (2009), utilizes context to interpret references, the translator to choose solutions, and the researcher to describe or explain the translator's choice (p.189). James Bond films were undoubtedly poly-semiotic, dealing with stringent depictions of espionage, military might of nations, explicit eroticism, and depictions of sexuality, all depicted in the character of a British hero against the backdrop of the Cold War.

A relevant point that might explain why the franchise was allowed to get away with its drastically misconstrued depictions about Japan is to consider the typical message that these movies wanted to convey – a British super-spy who was capable of conquering the world. It was designed to prove racial superiority. Both the Indian and the Japanese film industry had achieved massive success in their nations, yet failed to defeat the popularity of an American movie starring a British super-spy. This was also the age of Americanization of the world and the "melting pot" of immigrants that America had become, at this stage in history. However, the lasting success of the James Bond franchise is a question left unanswered by statistics.

To explore a movie released at a different stage of time, this paper picks Skyfall, released in 2012, almost twenty years after the Cold War has been over, albeit on paper. The most significant form in which a para-text achieves desirable effects is the trailer of a movie, the first applicability of resonance that the makers of a cinema want to achieve[11]. The decision to choose what appears becomes all the more significant because it might as well

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9   Vermeer notes that one of the primal factors in determining the purpose of a translation is the addressee, who is the purported receiver or "audience of the target text with their culture-specific world knowledge, their expectations and their communicative needs"
10   A film operates through several channels but primarily through primary and secondary or induced knowledge, which form the focus of this paper. Primary knowledge, this paper suggests, forms the basis on which induced knowledge builds itself to further align itself with popular belief in the way of establishing a hegemonic cultural order, largely aligned with the interests of the nation.
11   A trailer would propagate immediate ideas or the obvious themes of a particular movie and thereby, obtain resonance with the audience. The trailer, according to film studies theory, also forms one of the most significant para-texts and goes on to be the deciding factor in whether the audience decides to be a part of the viewership of a particular movie. For more details, refer to *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* by Lisa Kernan.

influence the kind and density of viewership, which is directly related to economic capital. Therefore, the decision to begin the story with Bond's unfortunate assassination upon M's orders poses quite a few questions. The translation of the scene in Hindi[12] involving Bond's death has been represented as if Bond was meant to be shot.

To Silva's precarious questions about Bond's hobbies, the latter replies, "Resurrection" (Skyfall 20:13). The Oxford dictionary defines resurrection as "restoration of life." However, within the context of the film, Skyfall deals with Bond coming face to face with his reality; it is almost like holding up a mirror image up to himself. In a metaphorical sense, it also represented Britain's emergence from the drudgery that it had descended to, especially on the occasion of the Royal Wedding and the London Commonwealth games which allowed the movie to become essential catalysts of a patriotic sentiment lost to London. It was translated in the Hindi version as "defeating death". This is where it gets interesting because it seems to embody a theme and a pattern of dialogue peculiar to a Bollywood script, something which betrays the personality of a sophisticated British spy. To defeat death and to be restored to life have radically different meanings and end up being echoes of the nations of origin themselves.

To understand the impact of revoicing of the source language on the target language, it is essential to reference the model of 'translatorial action', as suggested by Justa Holz-Manttari. This model highlights the limited influence of source text. Manttari reduces the source text analysis to a mere 'analysis of construction and function' and gives no intrinsic value to the source text, except for the realization of its communicative function. Manttari's definition excludes the topic of variation in the linguistic demographic. In any nation, there has to be two categories of people – the ones who know the original language and the ones who do not. The former may or may not get affected by the act of re-voicing.

Translation of any sort, according to Hans Vermeer, always has a purpose. Vermeer in *skopostheorie*, goes on to say that every act of translation has a purpose and is intended to serve the addressees. The level of impartiality that is attributed to every such act, especially in a digitized manner is guided by, amongst other factors, the current socio-political scenario prevailing in the nation at that point, which this paper goes ahead to prove primarily with the example of India. The purpose of translating cinema and preferring it over other forms of para-text like subtitles is to increase outreach through artistic exclusion and manipulative accommodation with very few exceptions as illustrated below.

The pronoun structure in Hindi is structured in a manner that permits unintended respect, as is visible in the first interaction between Bond and Q, something that Fairclough has termed as synthetic personalization[13]. The hostility, which is masked by usage of English humour in the original version is more than apparent in the Hindi version and nearly establishes a father-son relationship between the two. It is a strong reflection of the relationship between a father and son in Indian society, which is perpetuated through the organization of the largely patriarchal institution of the family (Lannoy 101). To have that kind of a distortion offers two points of contrast and comparison about Indian society at large – that an elderly male figure and a young man might inevitably end up establishing an Indian father-son resembling relationship, and an un-erasable generation gap might emerge in that case. Bond and Q talk about age not being an indicator of wisdom and youth not being an indicator of innovation.

The interaction is quite revealing as in translation, the usage of "excuse me" is not translated. Is that an attempt to preserve Bond's British character or is it a lucid acknowledgement of the fact that no phrase like that in Hindi can truly sum up its meaning? It is obviously used in a British sense, implying indirect humour since Bond technically has little faith in his quartermaster, an ineptitude he attributes to the latter's youth as is apparent in

12   Translations are done by the authors themselves and therefore, imbibe subjectivity on an individual (in terms of personal viewpoints) and collective (whatever the belief is on a societal level). Therefore, the representation of Bond's death also involves the translator's personalized interpretation of the said scene with reference to his understanding of language.

13   Synthetic Personalization, as defined by Fairclough, describes the artificial friendliness that powerful institutions use to reinforce their power. He referred to it as a tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people handled en masse as an individual.

him saying immediately after, "You must be joking." This is translated as "Did you not find anyone to fool since morning?" in the Hindi version, strongly reflecting the sense of neighbourhood community that pervades Indian culture. The indication of a moustache being associated with experience or adult wisdom is visible when Bond's observation on how he thinks Q is a young lad – "You still have spots" is translated as "You haven't had a moustache grow on you yet."(Skyfall 16:14). Then, they begin a conversation about safety equipment for Bond.

Upon a cursory glance, it is easy to disregard Bond's additional remark when he says, "Too early for Christmas" but upon a study of the scene's translation in hindi, it is pretty apparent that scripts are conditioned to suit the dominant beliefs of a nation, particularly social and on occasions, political. The script completely avoids the mention of any festival in this particular instance and it becomes a glaring refutation of the above practice of retaining a Western mannerism, because if Bond's character was to be shown as the producers had originally intended, it would not have been filtered to reproduce such a nation-specific social concept. Therefore, this being translated as the quartermaster being "extremely benevolent all of a sudden" in reality serves to prove two points – it is a major discrepancy in Bond's character because England is a huge part of who he is. Secondly, it is also a pathetic portrayal of diversity because it subtracts the essence of the banter without compensating sufficiently for the same. It is almost as if the source culture is being wiped out alongside the source text (Manttari 90).

Re-voicing's communicative function here is to promote the cosmopolitan realization that the Indian audience is part of a larger discourse and an even larger cause – to rid the world of evil. Another instance is the quartermaster's translated comment – "Are you not acquainted with the crowd in a metro?" It makes a lot of sense to incorporate that statement in the movie because it instantly sends the message across, it is difficult to keep track of people amongst the metro crowd in India. Whether that was a sharp comment directed at an exclusively Indian crowd in the Hindi translation or a snarky comment towards Bond being unfamiliar with large crowds in a train station is naturally open to deliberation.

The question of permitting heterogeneity to exist in terms of linguistic and thereby cultural propagation recedes to the background in most instances, especially in a movie that has Westernized depictions of universal themes and political events. How language is used in society becomes a simple mechanism in illustrating how, despite original intentions, it will inevitably retain at least a certain tenor of the dominant elements of a nation's beliefs when a film is re-voiced. More often than not, these versions are meant for people who do not have access to the original versions because of linguistic shortfalls, creating a huge vacuum in society between its diaspora and its natives, besides hampering the process of globalized socialization. The disadvantages of allowing it to persist end up corroding artistic freedom, thus making it a manner of imminent concern. It is essential to balance the acts of translation and retention in accordance with the theme of originality.

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Themed

SILHOUETTE

Manya Aggarwal

CHAIR

Manya Aggarwal

SHADES OF SPLITTING APART/DISSIMILITUDE

Dipali Rana

PRECARITY

Phalguni Bhardwaj

Modernist Uncertainty in Avicii's Music

Navneet Kaur

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the theme of modernist uncertainty in the music of late Swedish DJ Avicii, who rose to prominence in the 2010s and whose fame has continued into the present. The paper considers some prominent songs written by Avicii such as "Hey Brother", "Levels", and "SOS", drawing thematic and stylistic parallels between the uncertainty expressed in his music and lyrics and the uncertainty reflected in works by Modernist writers. The paper is an effort to establish Avicii as a songwriter whose music continues to raise questions about mental health, the aftermath of industrialisation and ambivalence of the modern world, very much on the lines of that done by Modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett, W.B. Yeats, and Virginia Woolf. The paper considers the rise of avant-garde styles of Modernist expression — stream of consciousness, mixing of old epic forms with new ones, Symbolism, Impressionism and more — juxtaposing them with a new fusion genre of music that Avicii produced, which is evocative of the uncertainty of Modernist style. The paper shows Avicii as a song-writer who carried a Modernist consciousness and produced songs that reflected the uncertainty of his life and the world around him. "Wake Me Up", a song that earned him critical acclaim, would be dealt with primarily in this paper. The paper, thus, aims to do an in-depth study of the music of a DJ who continues to influence young minds and has strong contemporary relevance in today's chaotic world.

Keywords: avant-garde, Avicii, Modernism, music, uncertainty

1. Introduction

Avicii's songs are record hits that reflect themes of uncertainty, the most famous being "Wake Me Up". His music is significant to inquire into, given that it continues to inspire successive generations of DJs and music producers. Avicii has a fan base of around twenty million on YouTube alone, and most of the reviews he has from international music journals are regarding his avant-garde style and melancholic depiction of uncertainty. The paper is divided into two parts, that delineate the thematic and stylistic uncertainty of Avicii's music. Throughout the paper, the word 'modern' has been consciously used to signify not only the rise of bourgeois capitalism and mechanisation but also the rise of nation-states, and the gradual identity crisis that various communities had to face, in the face of the confusion caused by modern technology, expansion of cities, and cultural mingling[1].

2. Thematic Uncertainty in Avicii

2.1 Breaking Linearity: A Modernist Thought

Avicii's song "Peace of Mind" is the most precise one for describing the uncertainty of the modern age.

> Dear society
> You are moving way too fast
> Way too fast for me
> I'm just tryna catch my breath
> Can I get a little peace of mind?
> And a bit of silence to unwind? (Avicii, Peace of Mind 0:00-0:43)

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[1]   Raymond Williams describes these processes aptly: "To Williams, the nation-state was fundamentally an organ of cultural and political modernity. He suggested that the development from nation to state is analogous with the whole history of modernity. This draws in all sorts of related histories, from the development of technologies of transport and communication, to the experience of rapid urbanisation; and from the development of political and economic institutions to modernist cultural forms such as the newspaper, the novel, and the cinema. Modernisation is the term by which Williams understands these and a myriad other developments." (Dix 2)

T.S. Eliot wrote a variety of poems that described the moral degeneration of an entire age, due to the world wars and the gradual rise of industrialisation and capitalism. Avicii can also be classified as a songwriter who was distinctly aware of such degeneration in his day and age, but more so, he was a victim of this degeneration which encompassed issues like suicide, pressures posed by glamour industry and stigma around talking about mental health. *The Billboard* very aptly articulated the degeneration I am talking about, immediately after Avicii's death:

> The demanding life of a superstar DJ may seem glamorous on the outside, but it often includes relentless touring and jet lag, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and, in some cases, substance abuse. (Gardiner)

In "Peace of Mind", Avicii also reflects the Modernist consciousness that Eliot portrays in his poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". The poem resonates with the lyrics of "Peace of Mind", and shows a prototypical modern man grappling with the uncertainty of modern life, and its related "indecisions" (Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock). In the poem, J. Alfred Prufrock is indecisive about actions such as eating and drinking, reflecting the state of paralysis characteristic of the modern age in which everyone, in their focus on more 'significant' things like money, has forgotten 'trivial' things such as eating:

> The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the Window-panes,
> The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
> Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
> Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
> Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
> Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
> And seeing that it was a soft October night,
> Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.
> (Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, lines 15-22)

The "yellow fog" represents the smoke of uncertainty which Avicii also dwells on in his popular song "Wake Me Up". He writes:

> I can't tell where the journey will end
> But I know where to start
> They tell me I'm too young to understand
> They say I'm caught up in a dream
> Well life will pass me by if I don't open up my eyes
> Well that's fine by me
> So wake me up when it's all over
> When I'm wiser and I'm older
> All this time I was finding myself, and I
> Didn't know I was lost (Avicii, Wake me Up 0:00-0:54)

Modernism countered the straitjacketed structure of traditional notions of thinking, as also the 'certainties' of eighteenth-century Enlightenment[2] thinking. We can interpret this facet of Modernism in Avicii's "Wake Me Up", in which waking up is a strong metaphor for waking up from the delusion of certainty and idealism that was promised by the Enlightenment and Romanticism[3] respectively. Uncertainty was one of the main tenets of Modernism, so much so that the plethora of literature that Modernist writers like Yeats, Beckett, Woolf and Pound pro-

2   The Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Enlightenment included a range of ideas centred on primacy of reason and brain, pursuit of knowledge and the evidence of the senses. Ideals such as liberty, progress, civil rights, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state were hugely advertised during Enlightenment.
3   Romanticism was a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century. It emphasised the importance of imagination, intuition, subjectivity and idealism of nature and surroundings.

duced, had uncertainty as their most prominent theme. The metaphor of waking up hence can be read to suggest that Modernism was an age that forced one to think differently and hence led to one's waking up. "They say I'm caught up in a dream" (Avicii, Wake Me Up) in this context refers to the illusionary maze in which Romanticism had put people. The mention of "lost" in the last line of the song is significantly interesting, as it directly alludes to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, in which the trope of lost and found is present throughout. In *Waiting for Godot*, the protagonist pair, Didi and Gogo relentlessly wait for Godot to come but Godot remains lost till the end of the play and is never found. Waking up is thus a way to push the people out from the dreamy influences of the past. Thus, Avicii's song displays an ambiguity by stressing the uncertainty of one's identity — whether one finds themselves in the journey of life is uncertain.

The uncertainty displayed in "Wake Me Up" is Modernist uncertainty, wherein no one knows what the future holds, and thus, everyone has to keep moving forward, sometimes without any purpose, with the hope that some-day they would be able to give meaning to their lives. W.B. Yeats, in his poem "The Stolen Child", writes:

> While the world is full of troubles
> And anxious in its sleep.
> Come away, O human child!
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand (Yeats, The Stolen Child lines 23-28)

One sees a stark resemblance between the above poetry lines by Yeats in "The Stolen Child" and Avicii's lyrics in "Wake Me Up", in which he uses the metaphor of the journey to show that the assumed exactitude of modern human life is a mere illusion, and that in reality, people are indecisive and delusional. Avicii shows that coming of age is not a linear process, and one tends to feel lost in the process that is growing up. Yeats expresses this in "The Stolen Child", showing that the modern age has no place for a child's innocence. The linear pattern of a child's growth gets disrupted by the eccentricities of the modern age, to restore which only an escape to the fairy world can do. The "wake me up" in Avicii's song can be read as the escape of a child to "faery" land, which would be the ideal place that would inhabit the lost innocence of a child. However, what W.B. Yeats emphasises in the poem is the inescapable nature of the modern age; despite the options present of going to "faery" land, the tentacles of the uncertain and non-linear growth of the Modern age engulf the child.

2.2 Mental Health, Streams of Consciousness, and Identity

Avicii led a tumultuous life due to his deteriorating mental health and successive depressive episodes. He retired from music touring in 2016, after having suffered from stress and poor mental health. On 20th April 2018, he died by suicide in Muscat, Oman. While there have been many conspiracy theories about his sudden demise, his music shows a cry for help which can be read in the writings of Modernist writers like Virginia Woolf. Avicii's cry for help is one which can be interpreted as a cry for seeking help for deteriorating mental health and it is visible in the song "SOS":

> Can you hear me? S.O.S.
> Help me put my mind to rest
> Two times clean again, I'm actin' low
> A pound of weed and a bag of blow (Avicii, SOS 0:00-0:24)

By the end of 2016, Avicii had quit his lucrative touring career to concentrate on making music in the studio. The New York Times writes that Avicii had filled his songs with metaphors of fading away, just before his death:

> At the same time, the lyrics he was writing in this fertile period had a dark side. They referred repeatedly

to "fading away," being "low down" and "broken." They also angrily dismissed "the party life" — ironically, the very scene for which Avicii created one of recent pop's most rousing soundtracks. For the new single, "SOS," he wrote lines that Aloe Blacc, the vocalist on "Wake Me Up," sings with special urgency: "Can you hear me, S.O.S./help me put my mind to rest." (Farber)

Woolf devised a narrative technique known as streams of consciousness[4] to write her novels which became famous through her work *Mrs Dalloway*. She used an avant-garde[5] style to express the uncertainties of the modern age. The themes that Woolf dealt with are also related to the inner consciousness of her characters, for example, Clarissa Dalloway from *Mrs Dalloway* whose conflicting thoughts about her marriage with Richard are presented by Woolf, through the narrator in *Mrs Dalloway*:

> But to be frank……to be quite frank then, how could Clarissa have done it? — married Richard Dalloway? a sportsman, a man who cared only for dogs. Literally, when he came into the room he smelt of the stables. And then all this? (Woolf 164)

Avicii tended to take this primacy-over-mentality of Woolf and fill his songs with allusions to mental health problems. A documentary made on his life after his death titled "Avicii: True Stories", shows his mental state aptly. *The New York Times* wrote after his death:

> ….the documentary "Avicii: True Stories," which debuted on Netflix in Sweden directly after his death and in the United States this past December. The film, which friends say had the musician's enthusiastic approval, portrayed an artist who seemed to be having a slow-motion nervous breakdown brought on by the relentless pressures of success and a brutal touring schedule. "My life is all about stress," he says at one point in the film. "It will kill me." (Farber)

This strengthens my argument that Avicii's lyrics deal with the workings of the mind of a mentally ill person, especially the lyrics of those songs that he wrote towards his death, almost like Woolf's writings that use metaphors of fading and temporality. In *Mrs Dalloway*, the uncertainty and purposelessness of life are presented through Septimus Warren Smith who says: "It might be possible that the world itself is without meaning" (Woolf 77). This can be paralleled with similar existential[6] uncertainty that gets alluded to in the single "Levels" by Avicii.

> Oh oh sometimes, I get a good feeling
> Yeah
> Get a feeling that I never never never never had before, no no
> I get a good feeling, yeah
> Oh oh sometimes, I get a good feeling
> Yeah
> Get a feeling that I never never never never had before
> I get a good feeling, yeah (Avicii, Levels 1:27-1:29)

The above lyrics are fractured, and seem to be hinting at a feeling which is inexplicable and absurd[7]. The uncertainty in Avicii's lyrics also reflect Beckett's absurdism, which Martin Esslin describes as: "Each of these writers,

4　　Stream of consciousness originated in the late 19th and early 20th century as part of modernist literature. It aimed at expressing in words the flow of characters' thoughts and feelings in their minds. The technique gives readers the impression of being inside the minds of the characters. Virginia Woolf made this technique quite famous.

5　　In literature, the term avant-garde refers to poetry or prose that pushes the boundaries and is experimental. Avant-garde literature rejects the standard practises of other writers. It got famous during Modernism when writers experimented with genres and styles, and practised non-conformism.

6　　Existentialism was the philosophical belief that one was responsible for creating purpose or meaning in their own lives and that individual purpose is not given to us by Gods, governments, or other authorities. Here, it refers to Avicii's song that seems to be engaging itself in the meaning-making process, just like Existentialist thinkers had proposed.

7　　In philosophy, "the Absurd" refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek certainty and meaning in life, and the human inability to find any of the things in life with certainty. Here, it refers to the inherent uncertainty in Avicii's lyrics.

however, has his special type of absurdity: in Beckett it is melancholic, coloured by a feeling of futility born from the disillusionment of old age and chronic homelessness" (Esslin 4).

Avicii's lyrics are also embedded with a sense of melancholy, very much on the lines of absurdist uncertainty of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in which the futility of modern age is presented through the uncertainty of Godot's arrival. Thus, Avicii shares many conjunctions with Beckett and Woolf.

2.3 Uncertainty and Identity

Another facet of uncertainty that pervades Avicii's music overlaps with the uncertainty of identity or identity crisis visible in many of Woolf's writings. In her essay "Street Haunting", published in 1927, Woolf writes:

> Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give the rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves? Circumstances compel unity; for convenience' sake, a man must be a whole. The good citizen when he opens his door in the evening must be banker, golfer, husband, father; not a nomad wandering the desert, a mystic staring at the sky, a debauchee in the slums of San Francisco, a soldier heading a revolution, a pariah howling with scepticism and solitude. (qtd in Bradshaw 182)

This bears striking resemblance with the sense of uncertain identity that is entrenched in Avicii's song "Hey Brother", which narrates the story of two brothers in wartime America. This song can be read as describing the uncertainties of the Vietnam War[8], and the identity crisis that a young man faces after losing his older brother in this war.

> What if I'm far from home?
> Oh, brother, I will hear you call
> What if I lose it all?
> Oh sister, I will help you out
> Oh, if the sky comes falling down
> For you
> There's nothing in this world I wouldn't do (Avicii, Hey Brother 1:09-1:30)

Thus, Avicii overtly deals with the futility of war in "Hey Brother", in sync with the Modernist theme of war, and the gradual moral paralysis caused by it. The music video of "Hey Brother" plays with time, memory, and uncertainty, to show, at the end of it, the young brother, who all the while thought of his older brother as a father. W.B. Yeats was a major Modernist writer and war poet who dealt with similar uncertainty posed by wars as Avicii does. His famous poem "Easter 1916" can be compared to Avicii's "Hey Brother", in which he describes how the uncertainty of war even made a quintessential condition like sleep a privilege for the soldiers:

> As a mother names her child
> When sleep, at last, has come
> On limbs that had run wild. (Yeats, Easter 1916)

Yeats describes the final coming of sleep that would relieve the insomniac soldiers of war, showing that trivial necessities of life become a privilege to avail in wartime situations. Thus, there are striking similarities between Avicii's lyrics and the uncertainty of Modernist writings.

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8   It was the second Indo-China War and was carried from around 1955 till 1975. It was fought in Vietnam and Laos, primarily. It was fought between North Vietnam, which was supported by the Soviet Union and China and North Vietnam, which was supported by the USA and South Korea.

3. Stylistic Uncertainty in Avicii

3.1 Stylistic Mixing, Avant-Garde, and Uncertainty of Style

T.S. Eliot ends his poem "The Wasteland" with the phrase "shantih, shantih, shantih", which is traditionally uttered at the end of the Upanishads[9] and connotes inner peace. Avicii's full name was Tim Bergling, and he once said that his chosen name Avicii meant "the lowest level of Buddhist hell" (Orenstein). His choice of a derivative name of a spiritual monk like Buddha is very similar to T.S. Eliot, who used the spiritual phrase of "shantih, shantih, shantih" in his poem "The Wasteland". Thus, both Avicii and Eliot were interested in spiritual traditions and tried incorporating these beliefs in their personal life [evident in case of the nomenclature of Avicii's name] and their creative works [evident in case of Eliot's "The Wasteland"]. This shows an intermingling of spirituality or old traditional forms of beliefs with contemporary lifestyle or genres, which formed an important facet of Modernism. Modernism experimented a lot with devising new styles of writing; this was often done by appropriating the past with the present or mixing different styles together. While making the album True, Avicii had fused the electronic music genre or EDM[10] with soul[11], funk[12], blues[13], folk and country [all of which are traditional music styles], devising his avant-garde style of EDM progressive house[14] . The first single from the album — "Wake Me Up" "tapped into the market potential of mixing EDM and country, a template many artists have since recreated" (Bain). Thus, Avicii, like Eliot, experimented with intermixing of different genres and traditions of creative works and devised a new form of electronic music style.

Modernism had laid bare the incoherence of human life; thus, one could see that Modernist writers produced an uncertain text that was left to the reader's interpretation. Such a text was sometimes hugely devoid of any overt and certain meaning like *Waiting for Godot*. In *Waiting for Godot*, the protagonist pair, Didi and Gogo engage in seemingly meaningless conversations which do not have any relevant or clear meaning. They wait for a man called Godot to come, and during that waiting period they engage in language games and other conversations. The entire play does not move in any concrete direction and it ends without Godot having arrived. Thus, Beckett's play is full of uncertainties and overtly, completely devoid of exactitude.

Avicii's mixing of styles shows his attitude towards the definite nature of music that preceded him which was produced according to a set of rules, hardly allowing any movement for experimentation in style. On the day of his death, *The Washington Post* published an article citing Avicii as a pioneer artist in the attempt to bridge the gap between country and electronic music (Eltagouri), crediting his 2013 hits "Wake Me Up" and "Hey Brother" as good examples of this movement.

Avicii's style resembles the style of Modernist music composer Arnold Schoenberg who moved away from hierarchical ways of organising music. Avicii's approach towards music is also non-hierarchical in nature in the sense that:

> Avicii was merely making well-crafted pop music that showcased his heartfelt desire to honour timeless sonic styles and traditions while updating them for the modern canon of iconic, era-defining music. (Dowling)

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9 Upanishad is one of the four genres of texts that together constitute each of the Vedas, the sacred scriptures of most Hindu traditions. Each of the four Vedas — the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda, and Atharvaveda — consists of a Samhita (a "collection" of hymns or sacred formulas); a prose exposition called a Brahmana; and two appendices to the Brahmana — an Aranyaka.

10 Electronic music is music that uses electronic musical instruments, digital instruments, or electric circuitry-based music technology. It has origins in the United States of 1896 and Modernism was the movement behind its development.

11 Soul music originated in the African American community of the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s.Genres grouped under the "soul" banner include rhythm and blues (R&B), urban blues, smooth jazz etc.

12 Funk is a music genre that originated in African American communities in the mid-1960s when musicians created a rhythmic, danceable new form of music through a mixture of soul, jazz, and rhythm and blues (R&B).

13 Blues originated in the 1860s, South of the United States of America. It had its origins in the Black slave community's working rituals in the fields. Blues were very famous during the American war of Independence.

14 Progressive house is a new style of music production in which tunes often feature a built-up section, which can last up to four minutes and is usually followed by a breakdown and then a climax. It is very tuneful yet banging and impactful at the same time.

He combined the old music styles with his own newly developed style, to break the hierarchical or superior nature of classical tunes.

3.2 Playing With Dichotomies: Light and Dark

"…Tim always mixed the dark and the light," said Per Sundin, an executive at Universal Music, Nordic, who signed a deal with Avicii when the musician was still recording under the name Tim Berg. Hearing the new lyrics now, however, "You go, 'Oh, is this a metaphor?' You can interpret the songs in different ways. (Farber)

Avicii's style often reflected a kind of vagueness and obscurity that is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In this novel, Impressionism[15] and Symbolism[16] have been reflected in Conrad's usage of the dichotomies of dark and light. Modernism undercut dichotomies and polar-oppositions such as dark and light, to show that there is no one unified reality or truth in the world. This is seen in *Heart of Darkness*, in which there are many such juxtapositions. One such reference is:

The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words— the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness. (Conrad 77)

This stylistic weapon of Conrad can be observed in Avicii's music as well. In the song "Fade into Darkness", the world has been represented as 'Gray' (Avicii, Fade into Darkness) — a mixture of dark and light and darkness has been shown as evil, which the subjects of the song do not want to fade into.

This world can seem
Cold and gray
But you and I
Are here today
And we won't fade into darkness
No, we won't fade into darkness (Avicii, Fade into Darkness 1:47-2:02)

In "Broken Arrows", another song of his, there is an indefinite mingling of 'darkness' and 'light'. The song is about an athlete who fails in his sports journey and is reprimanded by his coach. He gets energised by his daughter who wishes to go for the Summer Olympics of 1968.

I've seen the darkness in the light
The kind of blue that leaves you lost and blind
The only thing that's black and white
Is that you don't have to walk alone this time (Avicii, Broken Arrows 2:15-2:30)

The reference to darkness and light in the song is a strong symbolist technique of the Modernists, indirectly suggesting that darkness and light are not separate; and that sometimes when life does give tremors to one and challenges one's aptitude, there is still a redeeming light. Avicii shows the mutual coexistence of light and darkness and refers to the uncertainty of success and good times, which is universally present in all human lives.

15   Impressionism is a 19th-century art movement characterised by small, thin, yet visible brush strokes which appear like impressions. It focuses on accurate depiction of light in its changing qualities and ordinary subject matter.

16   It was an artistic and poetic movement that used symbolic images and indirect suggestions to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind. It originated in late 19th-century France and Belgium, with important figures including Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, Verlaine, Rimbaud, etc.

4. Conclusion

Avicii's music displays a lot of similarities with Modernist writing of the twentieth century. His songs are entrenched in his uncertain personal life, marred by challenges, and also entrenched in the universal uncertainties that mark contemporary human life; this includes mental health issues, the uncertainty of success, pressures to maintain the social image, aftermath of war, industrialisation and capitalism among others. The angst of Modernist writers is visible in Avicii, in that he fills his songs with a pain that is born out of uncertainty — the uncertainty of death, life, love, and so on. From the general themes he writes on to the way he uses metaphors and symbols in his songs, it all strongly evokes Modernist verse.

Thus, Avicii's music is a strong expression of the inner turmoil in his heart and the universal expression of the turmoil of moral depravity that came out as a by-product of modernity. His music is the testimony of Modernism-like expression of uncertainty, through the invention of a new style.

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Tracing Time on Foreign Terrain: Exploring Uncertainty of Expatriate Journeys through Shoba Narayan's *Return to India*

Aditi Jain

Abstract

With the boom in globalisation of the education sector, literature has witnessed an increase in the surge of not just diasporic, but also expatriate literature. Expatriate journeys are separated from other overseas journeys by a prism which bases itself on the need for uncertainty, and reflects images that serve to enhance life writing. This paper attempts to offer a critical insight into the deconstruction of such prisms, thus exploring and unravelling the multiplicity of the 'uncertainties' that form the primary theme of such literature. Shoba Narayan's acclaimed memoir, *Return to India*, portrays some of the most crucial aspects of the role that uncertainty (of time, as well as memory) plays in a life narrative of the expatriate journey, as the author navigates her way back to her country. In this spectrum of constant movements, the paper draws out these uncertain variables, beginning from a single text, to the larger post-colonial experience.

Keywords: expatriate, life-narratives, memoir, memory, uncertainty

1. Introduction

A certain sense of adventurous 'uncertainty' is associated with academics, professionals, or potential writers moving abroad on call for assignments. However, this sense of newness and enthusiasm is, in a way, eliminated when the journey is self-initiated. This phenomenon of the taming down of the element of uncertainty is simply the product of agency. It thus becomes easy to believe that Self-Initiated Expatriates (SIEs) do not have much to expect in terms of the thrill of uncertainty. In Shoba Narayan's Return to India, a similar exercise of agency is evident. Not only was it the author's own choice to move to the States for her higher education, it was also something that she went to great lengths for — from preparing a huge conditional lunch for a big Indian family, to convincing her parents that she will not fall into the 'evil traps' that her relatives are convinced she will encounter. Eluded as she was by the contentious promises that seem to comprise the 'American Dream', Narayan stepped into this journey with a full heart.

At a similar kind of junction with the readers' expectation to be thrilled by any narrative is the art of 'life writing'[1]. With the growing popularity of non-fiction, life writing in particular seems to have started on an entirely upward course[2]. Paying close attention to details of life has now taken a newer meaning. Not only do writers look for inspiration in their environment, but life-writers now record them, perhaps from a more personalised vision than others, only to later document them in their truest form possible, allowing space only for creative license and memory alterations. However, for a reader who assumes that everything under the title of life writing is bound to be factual in all its senses, it is this very assumption that sows the seeds of uncertainty. This may lead to questions such as 'how much of this is true?', 'has the certainty of the text's tone come only after the uncertainty of its source?' and 'since this narrative eludes breath-taking/painstaking cliff-hangers, does it mean the life must've been so as well?'

The conundrum of uncertainty in life writing are further magnified by questions of reliability of memory, the uncertainty of the writer's choice of mode that inadvertently affects memory expression, and temporal uncertainty

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1   It is the recording of memories and experiences of one's own or another's.
2   Being one of the most popular sub-genres of non-fiction, life writing has been enjoying increasing attention over the years, with other forms of non-fiction contributing to the genre's popularity.

that is put under scrutiny, especially in the case of memoirs such as *Return to India*. The scrutiny of memory thus establishes the life narrative's uncertainty. It is owing to these three characteristics identified in texts like *Return to India*, that uncertainty in life writing surfaces. Even though Shoba Narayan displays extraordinary use of memory in incorporating significantly minute details in her writing, there are moments when a reader can ascertain some creative license dominating an unsullied promise of truth.

This paper serves to analyse the above three perspectives. The lines of uncertainty on three distinct levels in the life narrative of an expatriate author, will be drawn out. First, the paper will look at the impermanence of a seemingly permanent space in the life of SIEs; it will then move on to explore the uncertain conduct of the essentials in life writing that are memory and temporality, and finally streamline our vision to focus for defined uncertainties presented in life writings specifically memoirs. Such an exploration will also be peppered throughout by certainties, the identification of which is significant to recognising uncertainties as well.

2. Navigating Impermanence in a Seemingly Permanent Space

Apart from a set number of styles of writing that are based entirely upon the writer's mobility and constant travelling, most of the other sincere forms of writing take shape through a defined process, disciplined activity and perhaps designated settings. Once this formative idea of writing has been acknowledged, it becomes easy to trace its corollary as well. Without a certain kind of permanence in surroundings, which often silhouette a narrative's infrastructure, a text's ability to come into a rational existence is highly unlikely. A salient appearance of this can be seen in the uncertain tone of the author when she says, "Ram and I had developed a relationship that was somewhere between India and America" (Narayan 139).

In the case of expatriate journeys, the promise of these surroundings is far more fragile than the travellers themselves would like to admit. Jennifer Rabin points out in one of her articles, "The hardest part of a writer's life is the staggering and overwhelming uncertainty of it" (Rabin). For expatriate writers, this uncertainty increases manifolds, owing to the indeterminate nature of their reality. The impermanence of their diasporic experience is equivalent to the uncertainty of life. The author highlights this incessant movement of expatriate life:

> The problem was that we Indians in New York led the kind of life that was ripe for satire… even when we were a part of its populace with little to fight for, we hadn't yet lost our stray dog spirit. In this, we were still immigrants who had something to prove. Yet, our personas were sometimes at odds with our past. (Narayan 145)

A person's identity, or sense of identity in relation to his or her habitat, is looked at as the most sophisticated symbol of permanence (if there ever is one) in life. However, as and when expatriate journeys move forward, they tread through constantly changing identities. Shoba Narayan dutifully observes this endless shifting of sides in search of a 'fixed home' in the prologue of this text:

> America's impenetrable core flummoxes me. I can't escape India, but America sometimes escapes me… the problem with immigrants like us is that we are equally at ease in two disparate cultures and, therefore, fit into neither. Most of us end up in a no-man's land, neither here nor there, in an angst-filled limbo. We remain immigrants forever, unlike our forefathers who swore allegiance to one nation due to political or economic repression. (Narayan ix)

As highlighted by the author in the form of an outpour of the frustration and feelings of homelessness from constant alterations of intimacy and isolation, expatriate journeys, including the self-initiated ones, are always lying on the ambiguous grounds of belonging. In her essay on expatriate lives, Lynn Mastellotto notes that expatriation may be seen "as a deliberate act of displacement and a long-term process of self-transformation centred on the question 'How should I live?'" (Mastellotto, 59). It is the wavering nature of this very question that brings the entire scope of expatriation under the umbrella of uncertainty. This existentialist question also makes its way

into the author's conversation with her husband, where she seeks to conclude the definition of their kids' sense of living and as he proposes, "Why can't we be both (Indian and American), be a cosmopolitan" (Narayan,186), she objects vehemently, "Being a cosmopolitan is a disaster for children. Best of both worlds leads to confused kids" (Narayan, 186). The only permanency one may now attempt to locate is that of this impermanence. As the author rightly pens down, "I am neither a political exile nor an economic refugee. Yet, I believe that my journey is emblematic of countless others. My dilemmas reflect those of many an immigrant today" (Narayan x).

This can be stretched out to another postcolonial text, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*. It talks about "neither an immigrant's cultural displacement, nor a contest of values between the old world and new… but defines the very condition of the American life through an exploration of the impossible prospect of belonging", says Urmila Seshagiri in her eloquent review of the book. These texts that chase the lives of the people who move to foreign lands, with different motivations, establish the idea that these people always exist as visitors who refuse to leave. Though Seshagiri elucidated upon *The Lowland*, her words fit just as well for Shoba Narayan's story, "The novel pinpoints America as a crucible for the elemental impermanence that marks our humanity". The same is commented upon by Narayan, "As cultures went, India and America were so radically different that it was difficult to assemble a composite Indian-American identity" (Narayan, ix). It thus becomes evident that expatriate writing is creatively trammelled (or liberated) by the characteristic uncertainty of it. All such narratives seem to be navigating impermanence in the foreground, with a background of misplaced, illusionary permanence.

3. Memory and Temporality

Memory plays a key role in the construction of any life narrative. In the case of memoirs, most often it is the episodic memory of a specific event or sequence of events that is looked at. Memory in itself is ever under evolution, transforming from one state to another with every retelling. This process of continuous development is facilitated by temporality. It is this unhinged nature of 'temporal memory' that makes the very basis of any form of writing an intense collection of uncertainties. Narayan gives her consent to this in the first few pages of the text, "At its heart, a memoir is a recollection. There are some events that I remember vividly, other incidents are but a feeling" (Narayan 2).

Recollection and remembering are the two derivations of memory that a writer employs while forming a narrative. An important point to note here is that narration is necessarily a social act. Every story typically assumes an audience. We acknowledge that memory is someone's version of the past laid out in the present to purposefully achieve a desired future, it becomes clear that life narratives are inevitably, at least in part, the writer's constructions of what is claimed to be the truth, as opposed to the absolute truth.

Narayan's journey portrays expatriates' attempts at relocation with the aid of remembering and magnifying the role that memory plays in the process. She mentions how she found ways to feel at home in New York:

Despite its charms, it was not the cosmopolitan air of Manhattan that I found fascinating. While I relished the city's vibrant energy that propelled everyone upward, it wasn't the reason why I loved it. I loved New York because it was very much like living in India. It was the sheer numbers on the streets, the Punjabi Socialites, cab driver from Kerala who spoke my tongue

or the Punjabi vendor who welcomed us in Hindi. (Narayan 121)

She then goes on to remember the many ways in which "Indians are always adjusting, just like the New Yorkers" (123). It is through the act of remembering that she reconciles with the uncertainties of living in a new city. Through memoirs, writers tell the story of their life as a single narrative unit, but the main form remains a collection of stories that have already been told repeatedly and are thus, retold stories. As pointed out by Charlotte Linde, "one issue that arises in the relationship of memory and narrative is the nature of retold memories" (4). One must question if these retellings are of memories that the writer remembers experientially, or from previous retellings alone. Similar questions arise when Narayan paints satirical pictures of the parties she used to frequent, "Midnight stood nearby, talking loudly about his trip to India as part of the American India Foundation… and Bill Clinton, a fellow enthusiast. I stood back and enjoyed the scene, as the city lights twinkled in the background" (RTI 138). As evocative as these may be, their authenticity is important for the understanding of the text. Their accountability and that of the text, remains uncertain.

4. Life writing as Product of Uncertainties

What separates the skill that life writing demands from the one that is required in every other kind of writing is the question of what is worthy of being included, how much should be included, and the limits of moderating what is being included. It is in this three-step act of putting together a life narrative that writers not only experience literary uncertainty (of figuring out the necessities of coming up with a compelling read) but also travel down the lanes of uncertain choices about things that have happened, irrevocably exist, and shall remain truly unaltered, unaffected that they are by their reflection on pages. It is what Michael Steinberg calls "the question of lying in creative non-fiction" (7).

This choice of inclusion (or exclusion) can be seen in *Return to India* when the author exempts herself from mentioning the storyline of how she met her husband, because it was already a part of her previous memoir, *Monsoon Diaries*. While this might be okay with readers who have read both of these texts, it may lead to a gap in understanding the well-rounded picture of Narayan's personal life (which is the larger concentric circle that this paper bases its arguments upon) for a reader who looks at *Return to India* as a singular text. Indeed, "memoirs are about selection, shaping, and the skill of distinguishing the relevant from the simply dead past" (Pinsker 311).

As suggested by Michael Steinberg, "the kind of memoir that a writer produces is determined at least in part by the writer's sensibility and how the writer views the art/genre" (16). Since memoirs are focused on one or more primary phases of the writer's life, the problem of a vast context is automatically eliminated. However, the parts of this context that are crucial to the relevant phase are always in the danger of being a victim of oversight. This sensibility that the author exhibits further determines what we will refer to, with the added attempt at coining a new phrase, 'uncertainty in reading life narratives', an extension of uncertainty in writing life narratives. We see an instance of this omission, the kind that a diligent reader can perhaps detect on its own, near the climax of the narrative. When Shoba Narayan and her husband take serious action and actively seek for chances to journey back home, they come across an opportunity for Ram, her husband, to move to Singapore (not India). While it was both culturally and geographically closer to home than America, the question of 'being home' remained the same. The

novel includes a page-long discussion of this prospect, until we read "Later that summer, we finally heard back that the firm had agreed to let Ram move to Singapore" (248). Thanks to the writer's craft, the line doesn't read like an abrupt intervention to save the number of pages. However, thanks to the craft of this genre, it does leave the reader wondering what might've ensued during "that summer" (248). The uncertainty, nervous anxiety and consistent inconsistency of life remains face upside, even as the narrative nears its end.

An important part of life writing is the amount of 'self-exploration' that the writer chooses to indulge in. This particular facet of memoir writing is perhaps the single strongest tool at the disposal of the writer to be yielded for maximum suspense in a text that is otherwise devoid of any. Employing the art of self-exploration creates a temporal and figurative gap between the inception and the end of the said phase. For a moment, the reader is left wondering if this second -thought or moment of introspection is in any way foreshadowing a possible turnover in the narrative. Through her open unravelling of her most intimate fears about returning to India, Narayan weaves self-exploration into the narrative's uncertainty:

> America had given me a taste of what it was like to have personal space and boundaries. I enjoyed spending time alone, by myself, without the constant ringing of the doorbell or friend dropping in on a whim to chat for hours. The thought of putting out for a family, suddenly, no longer seemed appealing to me, even though I preached it to my children. (245)

The solemnity in the voice of this confession triggers pathos, and subsequent inquisitiveness for the reader.

5. Conclusion

Life narratives are a play of uncertain movements, intermingling with familiar memory as also memory unfamiliarized by temporality. Since it is impossible for anyone to remember dialogues from months, or in this text's case, years ago, life narratives become one of the rare instances where the understanding of non-fiction is inadvertently mingled with fiction. "Life imitates art and vice-versa" gets transposed to the perspective of "Memory and Imagination are but two words for the same thing". A narrative implication of the 'climax' is essentially dissolved into a breakdown of the events that would have led up to it. In that sense, life writings, owing to the multiplicity of the fragile factors constituting them, become the richest reserves of uncertainties but remain at the same time, narratives with pre-defined, certain endings.

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"Let[ting] It Go": Tracing Queer Disney's Uncertainty in Audience Perception

Shikha Chandra

Abstract

This essay seeks to analyse the contemporary reading and viewing of Disney's feature-length animated films through a queer lens. It critically engages with the recurring trope of 'queerness' and being 'different' in the movies discussed, and tries to find a stable lens through which the Disney canon of films can be viewed through an LGBTQIA+ perspective. It has always been found that Disney has never been open about establishing and introducing queer characters and themes in its films which have a global viewership. The article tries to trace the audience's uncertainty in viewing and understanding the protagonists, antagonists and side characters in the movies through the ages, and the ambiguities that the makers leave them grappling with, trying to figure out on their own how they would want to perceive the characters. This sort of uncertainty has been tackled in the essay as it has tried to establish some sort of clarity as it tries to establish some semblance of clarity and provide answers for the queer viewers. For this, multiple Disney movies have been taken into consideration like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frozen*, *Luca*, *Onward*, *Zootopia*, *Mulan* and *Pinocchio*.

Keywords: Disney, gender, queer, queer coding, sexuality

1. "A Whole New World": Introduction

Even after such a long time, Disney has managed to stay relevant to its audience. The heteronormative 'Happily Ever After', where the protagonists marry at the end, is what made it a billion-dollar industry, which seemingly produces feature-length animated movies for kids. The simple so-called love stories that children grow up watching give a rather clear image the audience can look up and follow, living in a society where cis-heterosexual marriages are the norm. But Disney has always been a progressive place for the LGBTQIA+ community, however subtle it may or may not seem.

Ever since the early 90s, gay pride events have been hosted at Disney World, while in 1995 gay employees were offered health insurance benefits by the company[1]. A decision that was not welcome then, but times changed for the better. Moreover, the case for Disney can be strengthened by the example of lyricist Howard Ashman[2].

One of the most poignant examples of the company's tolerant atmosphere is the case of lyricist Howard Ashman, who was openly gay and died of AIDS in 1991. Not only did Ashman write songs for *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, he was also closely involved in those films' productions, casting actors and holding story meetings with animators. At the end of *Beauty and the Beast*, Disney acknowledged his contributions with this tribute: "To our friend Howard Ashman who gave a mermaid her voice and a beast his soul, we will be forever grateful." (Nikolas)

The question arises, that however pro-gay Disney might have been when keeping its queer employees in mind, can we expect the same progressive attitude on-screen? Or do the motion pictures which potentially reach millions of people worldwide only capture perfectly gay moments in a blink-and-miss manner? This paper seeks to find answers to these questions and trace how characters, scenes and plots in the Disney animated movies can

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1   In 1995, Walt Disney Co. offered to extend health benefits to "same-sex domestic partners", which became a focus of national debate.
2   Howard Elliott Ashman was an American playwright, lyricist and stage director who was openly gay. He wrote the lyrics of songs for *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992).

be understood as queer on a deeper level, owing to the uncertainty that arises out of looking at the films as normative-presenting on the surface.

2. "Kiss[ing] the Girl": The Question of Sexuality

For the longest time, queer kids have been able to identify themselves with some protagonists from Disney movies, who are usually portrayed as 'trapped' and 'outcasts' from society, which we may perceive as odd and 'queer' in all senses. They are generally different from their peers and are continually "*searching my whole life to find my own place*" (*Frozen*'s (2013) song "*Love is an open door*").

Ariel (*The Little Mermaid*) wanted to be part of another world, the townspeople think Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*) is "a funny girl … different from the rest of us" and Pocahontas (*Pocahontas*) does not want to be steady as the beating drum. (Nikolas)

Enrico Casarosa's *Luca* (2021), one of the most recent feature films by the production giant, set in an Italian seaside town, is a coming-of-age story of a young boy-sea monster of the same name, as he sets on adventures with his newfound best friend Alberto. An innocent tale of pasta, scooter rides and friendships, many viewers believe that it is actually "*a story rich in gay subtext*" (Sarkisian). Although Casarosa quashed the observations, saying that it is purely platonic, the shots in the movie seem to speak otherwise. When Alberto[3] decides to stay behind in Portorosso while Luca gets on a train to leave for school in Genoa with Guilua, their final handshake lingers for more than a few moments, while their eyes are moist with tears of a first, youthful love. The physical and emotional intimacy Luca shared with Alberto was missing in his friendship with Giulia, thus rejecting the heteronormative plotline of Disney, where a boy and a girl fall in love and live happily ever after.

The film was full of metaphors and allegories which quite clearly point towards a homosexual understanding of the film. The sea-monsters turning into humans when they leave the ocean can be understood as 'coming-out', here the closet being the ocean itself. As people of the Italian town wouldn't 'accept' and 'understand' the sea-monsters for who they are, Luca and Alberto were forced to pretend something they were not and always lived in the fear of being discovered. Later in the movie, the real identity of Luca and Alberto was revealed during Luca's attempt to save Alberto[4]. Henceforth, they stand fearlessly in front of the townsfolk, claiming their identity and defying the principles and laws of the town. One of the most ambiguous dialogues of the film was delivered by Luca's grandmother, which get a thumbs-up for both – understanding the movie as just another tale of sea-monsters, and a queer narrative. "Some people, they'll never accept him, but some will. And he seems to know how to find the good ones." (Luca, 2021, 1:20:10-1:20:20).

Frozen's (2013) snow queen Elsa is unarguably the most openly queer Disney protagonist. Closed doors, hidden identity and finally "Let It Go", her song, becoming the queer anthem; she definitely rang a bell among the queer audiences.

The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside[5]
Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I've tried
Don't let them in, don't let them see
Be the good girl you always have to be
Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know
Well, now they know

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3   Alberto is one of the protagonists of the movie *Luca* (2021), also a sea-monster who became best friends with Luca.
4   During the annual children's triathlon in Portorosso, when Alberto's umbrella was knocked over and he began to turn into a sea-monster in the rain, only to be caught in a net by the people, Luca himself abandons his shade and goes to save Alberto, eventually revealing himself as a sea-monster in the rain.
5   The lyrics are from *Frozen*'s (2013) song '*Let It Go*'. The italicized lyric lines emphasize the meaning behind the song, anxieties of a queer person.

Let it go, let it go
Can't hold it back anymore
Let it go, let it go
Turn away and slam the door
I don't care what they're going to say
Let the storm rage on
The cold never bothered me anyway (Let it Go, Frozen, 31:40-32:36)

The character of Elsa can be read as a queer persona, not only because she didn't engage in a romantic relationship, perhaps because of the closet she was forced to live in by her parents, which constantly reminded her to 'conceal' her identity at all costs. The idea of the king and queen isolating Elsa from the world and any human interaction was problematic. She was even tore apart from her sister, probably because she may be a 'bad influence' on Anna as she was once when they were young, which only affected Anna's brain then and not her heart[6]. This is a rather clear allegory to the infamous queer closet in which people are forced to live.

It is important to point out that while on one hand the influential Arendelle family (and possibly abusive parents) decided to keep their princess isolated and suppressed due to her queerness, on the other we encounter an openly gay moment in the feature film. The proprietor of Oaken's Trading Post had a husband and kids, whom he showed off to Kristoff and Anna, exclaiming "*Hello, family!*" (*Frozen*, 2013, 37:46) when advertising the sauna facility of the trade post. However, such 'inclusion' on part of Disney has been heavily criticized for being tokenistic. The film tried to be 'progressive', but the blink-and-you-miss-it technique surely spoke volumes about the representational gap Disney is yet to cover. Something similar was observed in *Onward* (2020) and *Zootopia* (2016). While in *Zootopia* (2016) one may assume the pair of antelopes living next door to Judy Hopps to be a gay couple, we can rest assured that Disney might be on the way of breaking stigma around homosexuality, with *Onward* (2020) leading the way. In one scene, a cyclops cop named Officer Spector while commiserating with her fellow officer centaur cop, Colt Bronco talks about her being a stepmother, breaking all taboos with the line, "*My girlfriend's daughter got me pulling my hair out*" (*Onward*, 2020, 50:41). But the question arises that how many of the viewers actually caught the hints of Oaken's proprietor, the antelope couple and Spector being gay. The indication was so subtle that it was almost invisible. So can we consider these as some radical moves towards the future, or another instance of Disney being hypocritical yet again?

Beauty and the Beast (1991) has one of the most controversial gay antagonists in Disney's queer canon. Gaston, with his overt display of masculinity, which at some point seems to be homoerotic, is considered to be a gay character by many viewers. On the surface Gaston looks like a regular muscular character pursuing Belle and seeking her attention, while the other village girls lust over him. A deeper understanding of the film paints a different picture of him. The desperate attempts at wooing Belle can be seen as his desperate attempt to fit into the societal standards of a heterosexual world. Similarly, his explicitly overflowing masculinity and frantic attempts to kill the beast by provoking the villagers might be his way of coping, by destroying and exposing the other seemingly queer characters such as the beast himself.[7]

3. "An Unusual Prince": A 'Gendered' Issue

While sexuality in Disney can be understood by unveiling various layers of the narrative, gender is yet another aspect that calls for attention owing to the uncertainty and ambiguity the makers leave the audience grappling with. *Mulan* (1998) came with a vast array of characters that can be taken into account while studying gender. The feature film is based in China and has a completely Asian cast. Mulan, the protagonist, struggles to fit into the

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6   In a childhood incident, when Elsa and Anna, the protagonist sisters were playing, Elsa accidentally hit Anna with her magical ice powers, which led to Anna being unconscious and her brain being frozen. Later she was healed, but it was after this incident, both of them were never allowed to meet again.

7   The beast is also queer coded since he is always hidden in a faraway castledue to him being 'different' from others, and his real identity people of the real world not finding comfortable can be seen as queer coding of the Beast as a queer person.

traditional gender roles prescribed by the rigid society she lives in as she doesn't necessarily conform to her pre-scribed gender. The song "Reflections" resonates with transgender and gender non-conforming persons struggling with their identity with lines such as:

…Somehow I cannot hide
Who I am, though I've tried
When will my reflection show who I am inside…[8] (*Reflections*, song from *Mulan*, 1998, 12:54-13:06)

Li Shang, the love interest of Mulan, can be seen as getting attracted to Fa Ping, Mulan's male alter ego, when she was cross-dressed as a man, which can be attributed to Shang being a bisexual. The most interesting aspect of gender in *Mulan* is the queer premise of 'drag'[9] openly being screened in the film. Yao, Ling, and Chien Po[10] dress up as women, or more contemporarily as drag queens and help Mulan in saving China from an inva-sion. The question of gender plays an important role here because all these men go for army training, which is an essentially 'masculine' trait, but then show up in drag clothing which is ultra-feminine. The uncertainty that arises because of the way there is no single point on the gender spectrum to fully accommodate these characters is undeniable and points to gender-fluidity as well.

4. How Far They'll Go: The Queer Coding Controversy

Disney has been, for the longest time the queer multiverse which the LGBTQIA+ community has recog-nized through metaphors that are used to describe the protagonists and antagonists via 'queer coding'. Going by definition, 'queer coding' is coding a character in media sub-textually as queer, generally done using respective tropes, traits and stereotypes of sexuality and gender recognizable by the audience. A considerably long list of characters can be drawn out from the mainstream Disney feature films as being queer coded since queer coding has been the tool the media giant has been using for representation. While on one hand, we may view the list of queer coded characters as a fairly progressive play on part of the makers, one cannot ignore the fact that such hol-low representation is not what the LGBTQIA+ community can approve of. Till the time the characters in animated media are shut in the dark, behind encryptions and ambiguity, change is definitely a long way from now.

As mentioned earlier, the beloved Disney vintage characters are the ones who never fit into society and are constantly on the lookout for an identity and a place for themselves that will accept them for who they are. Think about Pinocchio, the little marionette, who represents queer anxiety by trying to become a 'real boy', which he thinks can be achieved by doing everything masculine such as smoking and swearing, in order to earn his father's love. Ariel, from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) undergoes what can be read as, essentially, sex reassignment surgery to be accepted in the world when she 'comes out' of the sea seeking love. She loses her tail and gains legs, pre-sumably along with female human reproductive organs as she treads the difficult path of acceptance. Losing her voice can be attributed to the voice anxiety, that many transgender people face as they aren't comfortable with their altered pitch along with their new identity.

Queer coding has vastly been extended to portraying the villains of Disney, often negatively stereotyping them.
> The male villains — villains like Sir Hiss and Prince John from Robin Hood; Ratigan from The Great Mouse Detective; Aladdin's Jafar; The Lion King's Scar; Pocahontas's Governor Ratcliffe; Hercules's Ha-des; Dr. Facilier from The Princess and the Frog; the list goes on — are typically variants of campy, overly posh, effeminate men whose effeminacy is a cause for suspicion and concern, a reason to distrust them. (Romano, Abad-Santos, St. James)

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8   The lyrics are taken from *Mulan*'s (1998) song '*Reflections*'.
9   'Drag' here refers to a person who uses ultra-feminine clothing and makeup to imitate and exaggerate female gender signifiers. Nowadays, it is often associated with gay culture, which makes drag canonically queer symbol of gay pride.
10   Yao, Ling, and Chien Po are the supporting characters in the film *Mulan* (1998). They were a trio of best friends enlisted in the Chinese army during the war against Shan Yu. They befriended Mulan, the protagonist too

Ursula, the octopus witch of the underworld from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is also part of the queer antagonist canon that has been queer coded. Viewers often tend to wonder the reason behind Ursula's antagonism and why she wreaked havoc in Ariel's life after helping her find her identity. Maybe because she was lonely or mistrustful. – fearful that the only person who ever came to seek her help would forget her, or was she in love with the queer Ariel? We can never know, but assumptions can abound here.

5. "We See the Light": Conclusion

With changing times and the stigma around queer representation coming to the fore, it seems that the boundaries set by Disney that mark things as 'appropriate' for the larger viewership around the globe are blurring. Disney has, it seems in fact, always been a pioneer in showing queerness, even though in a queer coded fashion, in its mainstream feature films. The uncertainties loom around the minds of the viewers, as they remain in the dilemma of whether or not they should brand or assume a certain character as queer. This perplexity has been there since the early 20th century, since the time Disney was established. The audience is always left to grapple with the ambiguities surrounding the gender and sexuality of the protagonists, antagonists and the sidekicks since only hints are thrown at us. Queerness has always been a part and parcel of Disney, with its characters exploring all forms of sexualities and gender definitions, but we were never taught to root for them. More than often, it seems that the production giant would create content that suggests a sprinkle of queerness as long as it does not have to be 'censored' owing to its conservative image. With techniques such as queer coding and queer baiting[11], Disney has annoyed the queer viewership by trying to attract a progressive audience only under the garb of radicalism. In the near future, the stage might look brighter for such representations in Disney as the uncertainty around queerness vanishes, eventually. We are yet to see a positive representation of the queer population in productions that do not bait the audiences and lift the uncertain curtain of ambiguity.

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11   Queer Baiting: It is a marketing technique used by film and fiction creators in the entertainment industry, where same-sex romance or LGBTQIA+ representation is hinted at but not actually depicted.

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Fanfiction: Navigating Uncertain Endings

Yashica

Abstract

In a world full of anxieties that are often rooted in the new and the uncertain facets of life, fanfiction is one mode of writing that allows the writer to create a branched reality (or realities) based on the familiar and thus provide a sense of security to its consumers. In this paper, the author tries to explore the significance of fanfiction as well as the fandom which creates and consumes fanfiction in helping the consumers of different forms of texts cope with the uncertainties of both the real world and the fictional world. The author does so through the examination of multiple approaches to and aspects of fanfiction such as the multiplicity and fluidity of a text as mediated through fanfiction, the mode of response and feedback in fanfiction, the breakdown of creator-consumer dichotomy, the participatory culture built around fandoms, the possibility of alternatives, the representation of marginalised voices, as well as looking at fanfiction as a coping mechanism that helps the fans deal with complex feelings of loss and trauma.

1. Introduction

Fanfiction is a form of writing that works upon characters, worlds, and settings which already exist. These subjects are usually taken from popular culture but some works of fanfiction (or fanfics, as they are commonly called) may be inspired by literary and other classics as well. Fanfiction is created by the members of what is defined as a fandom which is a subculture made up of fans of a certain text[1]. The nature of fanfiction that separates it from questions of originality enables a more comfortable space that eliminates a certain anxiety of influence. This influence can refer to anything from canon to authorial intent. Fanfiction, then, is a fluid piece of writing that contains within itself a multiplicity of truths. These multiple truths are negotiated, then, by the writer and consumer of fanfiction. Roland Barthes would call this a "writerly text" as opposed to a "readerly text". The reader actively engages with the text to create meaning. Fanfiction gives consumers of a text the right to fill in the gaps and create their own meanings.

While mainstream literature, movies and shows often present a dominant discourse that tries to erase any doubts, gaps and irregularities in the texts are inevitable. Fanfiction helps negotiate with the different uncertainties that arise within a text. While the canon of a certain text might appear rigid to its creators, the fans take on the role of secondary authors and create new meanings. These can vary from small peripheral details in world-building or interpreting motives and backstories of characters or simply reimagining the plot of a text without changing its essence.

2. Fanfiction and Reader-Response

According to Bronwen Thomas, fanfiction makes sure that texts are no longer isolated objects. She says that story-worlds are then created and experienced within specific social and cultural contexts that are always changing (6). Thomas's argument provides greater insight into fanfiction as a tool for navigating uncertainties when considered in conjunction with the reader-response theory by Stanley Eugene Fish which claims that a text's true meaning

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1   A fandom is a group of people who share an interest in a particular book, movie, show, etc. These people share camaraderie towards each other because of their common interest.

is attributed to the reader's intention, experience, and context (Fish 479). This kind of criticism is reader-centric, giving more power to the reader than to the text. The text then becomes a malleable substance that can be interpreted according to the changing context of the time it is being read and analysed in.

To understand the significance of fanfiction in creating a space which does not only reduce the primacy of authorial intent but of the author themselves, one can look at the recent transphobic comments[2] made by J. K. Rowling and its impact on the readership of the *Harry Potter* series. After her problematic comments, the fandom collectively took control of the *Harry Potter* series away from Rowling, reclaiming the text as a work owned by its fandom. The meaning of the books changed from its initial conception by the author to what its interpretive community attributed to it. This was done through the involvement of the fandom by creating, publishing, sharing, and reading fanfiction, fanart, and fan theories.

It is this kind of reader-centric criticism that works around the body of the text, allowing the existence of fanfiction to become legitimised. The mutual relationship between the original text and the extended body of fanfiction around it works together to provide a satisfactory experience to the reader. The original text influences the readers to create fanfiction. Fanfiction in turn, provides the author of the original text with newer theories and/or insight into the reading dynamics of the fans. If not with ideas, fanfiction certainly increases the popularity of a text, inviting a new readership. The old and new fans endlessly revisit the original text, finding newer ways to interpret it. These reinterpretations are a result of the readers' own varied ideologies, thought processes, contexts, and experiences. The gaps in the canonised text are filled in and the uncertainties are mulled over by the reader, resulting in the creation of newer fanfics with different angles, ideas, and details.

The different interpretations of the original text often result in the formation of headcanons[3]. Much like fanfiction, headcanons help the consumers of different texts to come up with their own theories regarding the characters, worlds, and plotlines. These headcanons are different from canon as they have no authorial backing but they sometimes help in the filling up of gaps within a text. The original text's creator/author might have failed to canonise tiny details during the process of worldbuilding but these headcanons or fan theories help the fans achieve satisfaction by resolving these uncertainties.

3. Exploring the Fandom

Being a part of a fandom can be an invigorating experience in participatory culture. To be a fan of some show, movie, book, etc., is to be an active participant in the culture around it. Fandoms can be a space to explore one's own likes and dislikes with regard to that particular work's themes and characters. A fandom is a polyvalent site where everyone is allowed to have their own interpretation. The diversity in a fandom sometimes makes it difficult to come to a consensus. While most of the participation comes from Anglo-Western circles, the presence of second and third world country residents cannot be ignored in the world of fandoms. There is a lack of empirical demographic data when it comes to fanfiction statistics but to understand the polyvalence of fanfiction, one can look at the diversity of fanfiction writers. As of 2018, FanFiction.Net[4] supported 44 languages, from Arabic to Ukrainian[5]. This diversity in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, etc. allows different participants in a fandom to interpret texts in their own terms. Fanfiction then does not produce one alternative plotline but a multitude of alternative stories. The members of the fandom come up with their own theories[6]. These theories help the

2   J. K. Rowling has given out some transphobic statements through Twitter and her website. More information can be gathered at: https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/hollywood/jk-rowling-transphobia-controversy-everything-you-need-to-know-6457082/ (Accessed on 30th December 2021)

3   These are ideas or theories that fans come up with that are not explicitly confirmed by the canon.Fans canonise their theories in their own heads. This Tumblr blog has some examples of *Harry Potter* headcannons: https://harry-potter-headcannons.tumblr.com/ (Accessed on 9th February 2022)

4   Founded in 1998, this is a platform where users can publish and read Fanfictions.

5   This information is taken directly from FanFiction.Net. This is visible through logging in to the website.

6   These are called fan theories. Sometimes, texts do not give specific details about their fictional world and characters. Fans then come up with their own ideas and theories regarding the text's storylines.

fans to deal with the uncertainties that exist in a text. There exist a multitude of perspectives and interpretations of a text which are not always aligned with the canon or the author's intention. This is where fanfiction creates a space for everyone to come up with their own voice. Fanfiction is, then, not a room but a mansion where every perspective has its own room. One can believe in the homoerotic relationship between Remus Lupin and Sirius Black[7] or one can see them only as friends. This quality of multivalency helps in establishing inclusivity among different communities.

Fandoms enable a mode of sharing and dialogue. Fanfiction is mostly free and the platforms where one can read it allow every user to have a voice. Most fanfic writers take valuable feedback from their readers and apply them to their works. This kind of feedback and response cannot be enabled in a commercialised setting wherein literature is produced and managed by authors and publishers who are not easily accessible. In this way, the dichotomy between the author and the reader is broken down. This is another way through which the members of a fandom maintain cordial relations with each other and navigate through their own uncertainties of the text

The advent of social media and mass communication allows fans to debate, discuss, analyse, and dig deep into theories and easter eggs[8]. This participation of the fans in the creative process is crucial. As discussed above, the writers and readers of fanfiction have a fluid identity. The readers of fanfiction keep giving their feedback to the writer of that fanfic and the writer does not shy away from accepting the feedback and incorporating those ideas into their work. Not only this, but due to the flourishing participatory culture, the author of the original text also becomes involved in the processes of a fandom.

4. Reclamation and Creation of Alternatives

Fanfiction is a way of subverting existing power hierarchies. Thomas states, "Cornel Sandvoss (2005) claims that the first "wave" of theory was heavily influenced by Marxism and tended to assume a simple dichotomy of power in which the fans were the powerless opposing the might of the franchises and corporations that owned the rights to the characters and storylines fans loved and wrote about" (3). This becomes significant when one talks about fanfiction as a space that helps in coping with the uncertainty around a text due to the creators having hegemony and full creative liberty over movies, shows, and books which are produced in a commercialised setting. The creators of these texts have unchallenged authority over the fate of the world(s) that they have created and can mould them in whichever way they find profitable. Fanfiction creates a space that challenges the hegemony of these creators by asserting the will of the fandom over what is considered canon.

This idea of varying perspectives is not limited to what the consumers of a text interpret but can extend to what they want from that text. Often, a text can pose troubling issues when the expectations of the consumer do not match what actually takes place. Given the diversity within a fandom, it is difficult for the creator of a text to meet the expectation of the audience as a whole. However, many creators forget to take in the feedback that the fandom provides through platforms of social media. The discrepancy between the expectations of the consumers and the final text is a complex subject to navigate through, especially given the large number of people who engage with the text. The larger the number of the fans, the more difficult it is to provide a storyline that pleases everyone. This is where fanfiction becomes an important tool; the creators cannot satisfy everyone's taste but fanfiction allows the fans to deal with their own disappointments.

Queerbaiting[9] is a method through which the creators of a text thwart its fans' expectations. CW's *Supernatural* is one of the many shows where fans have been queer-baited by the creators who, throughout the show, hinted at

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7 Characters from the Harry Potter series.
8 Easter egg is a popular term used to refer to hidden references, allusions, symbols, and inside jokes placed in movies, TV shows, etc.
9 Queerbaiting is a popular marketing technique used by creators to draw in queer audiences. In this technique, the creators keep on hinting at a possible queer representation in the text but do not actually commit to it. Due to this, the fans feel as if they have been tricked into watching/reading something. This is regarded as unethical in fan circles.

a homoerotic relationship between two of its characters, Dean Winchester[10] and Castiel[11]. At the end of the show, Castiel dies and gets sent to the Empty (a worse version of Hell as imagined in the show) and he leaves Dean after saying "I love you" (Kripke 38:19- 38:20). Although this is a pretty explicit confession, the fans have complained that Dean's lack of reciprocation in this scene has rendered the confession platonic rather than romantic[12]. Fanfic writers then have the chance to explore the uncertainty around the confession, interpreting it in their own ways, by writing different fanfics related to their own meanings of said confession[13]. Slash fiction[14] (a genre of fan fiction that is focused on same-sex relationships between characters) is, then, a genre of writing that allows for queer people to put forth their opinions. This is one of the ways that the queer community seeks representation[15].

Fanfiction writers are given the space to explore the uncertainties of endings. The open-endedness gives them a space to create their own meaning out of the absence of a justified and definite ending.

Fanfiction gives space to marginalised voices to put forth their own interpretations of the text. For instance, some popular fan theories on fanfiction blogs and sites like Tumblr[16] carry the idea of Hermione from the *Harry Potter* book series as a woman of colour[17]. Since the racial identity of Hermione is never specified in canon, this uncertainty gives fans a way to reinterpret her character and put forth their own ideas.

5. A Never-Ending Plot

While there are no actual rules of writing fanfic, the most common conventions that writers of fanfiction follow revolves around decorating and improving the canon. Some fans might envision an alternative ending while others want to imagine a world beyond that ending. One very common theme of fanfiction is what the community calls fluff which features the light-hearted setting of a text's character(s) engaging in common domestic activities. Such fanfics feature scenes such as Tony Stark[18] from the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* is adopting a child with[19] Captain America[20] while others show Sirius Black[21] and Remus Lupin[22] from *Harry Potter* on a movie date[23]. These fanfics establish the idea that while the author/creator of the original text might have ended the plot

10   Dean Winchester is one of the two protagonists of the American television show *Supernatural*.
11   Castiel is a character in the American television show *Supernatural*. While he started out as a secondary character, he quickly became a part of the main cast of the show due to the love he received from the fandom. https://www.etonline.com/tv/163280_from_ guest_star_to_fan_favorite_how_misha_collins_eventually_married_supernatural (Accessed on 8th February 2022)
12   On the day the episode that carried the confession was aired, the fandom took to social media to voice their opinions on the same. https://etcanada.com/news/710711/supernatural-shocks-and-upsets-fans-with-big-character-revelation-and-death/ (Accessed on 8th February 2022)
13   Here is one such fanfiction by Ao3 user starrynightdeancas that explores the relationship between Dean and Castiel after the confession: https://archiveofourown.org/works/31832005 (Accessed on 8th February 2022)
14   Examples of slash fiction: https://archiveofourown.org/works/5001364 (Accessed on 8th February 2022).
15   However, sometimes cisgender and heterosexual women read and write slash fiction for the fetishisation of homosexuality. This can misrepresent the community and can be seen as appropriation. Since these writers do not have any experience when it comes to same-sex relationships, their writing turns out inaccurate. Kiri Van Santen talks about it here: https://www.themarysue.com/fetishizing-slash/ (Accessed on 4th October 2021)
16   Tumblr is a microblogging and social media platform that allows its users to post different forms of media. It is a widely used platform for creating, sharing, and reading fanfiction.
17   Many readings and fan theories on fan blogs claim that Hermione Granger is a woman of colour. Sometimes, this reading is held along with the canonisation of a Black Hermione in the theatrical adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. Some Tumblr users have posted about the same idea https://sj-draws00.tumblr.com/post/644042204661350400/i-mean-its-sort-of-exciting-isnt-it-breaking , https://averyskyart.tumblr.com/post/176270483102/cute-lil-hermoine-its-strange-to-me-how-people (Accessed on 8th February 2022)
18   Tony Stark, alias Iron Man, is a character from the published works of Marvel Comics. He is a billionaire and owns a tech industry.
19   Example of fanfiction (Warning: adult content): https://archiveofourown.org/works/36889873/chapters/92035447 (Accessed on 9th February 2022)
20   Captain America is a character from the published works of Marvel Comics. He is a rejected military soldier who gains superpower from a scientific experiment done on him.
21   Sirius Black is a character from the *Harry Potter* series who is the best friend of the protagonist's father.
22   Remus Lupin is a character from the Harry Potter series who is one of the friends of the protagonist's father
23   Example of fanfiction: https://archiveofourown.org/works/35529868 (Accessed 9th Feb 2022)

at one point, it doesn't mean that the lives of these characters have ended. Not only does this kind of idea bring comfort to the fans who care a lot about these characters that they have grown attached to, but it also helps them deal with the trauma in their own lives. While mainstream literature attempts to provide a defamiliarized view of the world, fanfiction tries to bring comfort to the reader in a certain and familiar form. That is why fanfiction readers are ready to read and re-read stories featuring the same characters, plot conventions, themes and tropes from their favourite texts in different settings[24].

Thomas mentions Sheenagh Pugh's claim that fans constantly want "more from" and "more of" (7) their favourite worlds. This is not wrong considering the multitude of fanfiction that revolves around texts of fantasy. The consumers of such texts want to live in its world and participate in its culture. Y/N Fanfiction is a great example of such immersive qualities of Fanfiction. Y/N[25] is an acronym for 'Your Name'. This type of fanfiction invites the reader to participate in the world of a certain text. The other characters of this fanfiction refer to the reader by their name. This is proof enough of the desire of the readers to be a part of fictional worlds. What the producers and consumers of fanfiction, then, want is a continual plot with immersive qualities. As per Bronwen Thomas, Fiske calls it an "infinitely extended middle" (10). This never-ending plot is a way by which fanfiction gives fans a space of comfort and familiarity. The plot, setting, and characters of fanfiction pose no threat of the new.

6. Fanfiction as a Coping Mechanism

Lynn Zubernis talks about the familiarity of fanfiction in a world full of unfamiliar anxieties, " I think we are really drawn to things that feel familiar to us and feel good to us, and anything that we are fannish about feels really familiar. So whether that means going back and rewatching your favorite show or whether it means immersing yourself in fanfiction to get back into that familiar world with those familiar characters, I think those things are really therapeutic right now" (Romano). She points out how fanfiction helps in bringing the readers a sense of comfort in a world which is full of uncertainties. The immersive quality of fanfiction is able to transport the reader from the often scary and unfathomable world in which he/she lives to a world where they intimately know the characters and the setting.

Platforms like Archive of Our Own[26] have tags that allow both the reader and the writer to explore different styles and genres of fanfiction. The tags[27] enable readers and writers of fanfiction to find works including tropes such as enemies- to- lovers[28] and fluff[29] or written from the point of view of a certain character', or featuring ships[30] like Drarry,[31] Destiel[32], Johnlock[33], etc. Such tags make online platforms easy to navigate and the user/reader knows what kind of content they will be consuming, thus eliminating any uncertainty around what to expect from a fanfic. There are content warnings placed in some fanfics which are extremely helpful. Those fans who are trying to cope with the death of a beloved character in their favourite text find such warnings useful as they get to read only the parts of the story they like. Fanfiction helps in dealing with the uncertainty that surrounds trauma, death, and loss. This coping strategy is not limited to fictional characters from a text but it helps users/readers of fanfiction to

24 Some of the common settings are Coffee Shop AUs, Highschool AUs, BDSM, historical or futuristic settings, sharing one bed in a motel, etc. AU refers to Alternate Universe. More about settings here: https://fanlore.org/wiki/List_of_Tropes_in_Fanworks (Accessed 9th Feb 2022)

25 Example of Y/N Fanfiction: https://cryonme.tumblr.com/post/671701084817981440/%F0%9D%90%98%F0%9D%90%A8%F0%9D%90%AE (Accessed 9th Feb 2022)

26 Ao3 is the shortened name of the website 'Archive of Our Own'. This is a functional website used by fanfiction writers and readers regularly. (https://archiveofourown.org/)

27 Tags are keywords or phrases that give information about a particular piece of fanfic.

28 This is a common romantic trope wherein two characters who were each other's enemies and never saw eye to eye slowly start to fall for each other

29 A pleasant, feel-good story. This is usually not centred around a plot but is about displays of affection between the characters.

30 A ship refers to the pairing of two or more characters. The fans of the ship want those characters to get romantically or sexually involved with each other.

31 Refers to the ship of Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy from the *Harry Potter* book series

32 Refers to the ship of Dean Winchester and Castiel from *Supernatural* TV show

33 Refers to the ship of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson from *Sherlock Holmes* (TV show and books)

deal with real-life trauma as well. Fanfiction helps the readers understand the uncharted territory of loss and helps them deal with the traumatic or violent encounters in one's life

The writers of these fanfics let out their feelings in a form of crude catharsis. According to Aristotle in *Poetics*, catharsis is a purgation of fear and pity. Fanfiction allows for a discussion of death and trauma in terms that the creators/consumers of fanfiction are familiar with. This allows for a comfortable conversation of an uncomfortable theme.

7. Conclusion

The widespread usage of the internet has allowed the rapid popularisation of fanfiction. This form of writing allows for a reader-centric criticism of texts and enables creation of new meanings. Marginalized communities also have the space to put forth their perspectives and seek representation. The authority of a text no longer remains confined to the creator but the consumer is able to voice their opinion as well. Different texts are read and criticised through creative fanfics.

Fanfiction provides a space to explore new theories, form relationships with similar people, find familiarity and comfort through interaction with favourite characters and universes in a new but regulated setting, critically analyse texts, fill in the gaps of the canon, and overcome the uncertainties of plot holes or unexplained endings. This participatory culture of fandoms create spaces that allow for a healthy exchange of ideas and constructive feedback which would not be possible in a commercial setting. There is an inversion of control from hegemonic creators to fans.

Fanfiction also helps in creating an immersive experience which becomes a source of comfort, a space where one can deal with trauma and loss. The creators and consumers of fanfiction participate in a communal catharsis by creating their own stories on their own levels.

Fandoms are communities that encourage this multifaceted exploration through fanfiction and the mode of response, feedback, and participation within the fandom transforms the original text into something bigger than what it was at the time of its conception by the author.

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Indentations

Aakanksha Jha

I am thinking

of silences tonight

and how

     yours seems to have this

               quiet reassurance,

                    this understated

confidence

about it.

                    Steadfast security,

       stoic,

like your spine, your

       spirit

        remains unwavering.

And here, my words ooze out into the world,

              unsure

                and

                 unformed,

testing murky,

murky waters

bleeding

     into one another,
     they cower.

My arguments frail

      and

        worldview malleable.

I'm all

   indentations

       all morphed
             all terribly unoriginal.

I am thinking

of silences tonight

and how mine seem to be pregnant–
              with apprehension,
              gasps,
              all parentheses–
taut and heavy,

     weighing rooms and symposiums

             down.

I am thinking
of silences tonight
           and this lull
               we were sucked into–
unending
     like the city's spirit.

We, who could taste the salt of the Arabian in each other's laughter,
conjuring love in places long deprived
like bougainvilleas crawling up concrete walls,
dripping honey and sweat across
this too little, too fast a city,
drawling out all the possible syllables
to say
we're
here
   and in love.

The Waves Are Silent

Pratishtha Jindal

There are a million lives
and infinite lies—
on the shore
where I spy.

Aimless,
I count faces—
and I count their ties.

As this world erupts
and the skies break,
the music fades.
I hear the waves—
yet theirs
are silent cries.

In this tornado of thoughts—
why are there no eyes?

Puzzle

Mehar Bahl

(And why *does no one talk about where all the unknown moments are stored?)*

When I first bought this jigsaw puzzle, the picture on the box was that of a woman, one single woman, standing upright. She was clad in a well-ironed navy pantsuit, hair immaculate, nails sharp, heels high, smile bright, if a little unconvincing. She may or may not have been impressive, I cannot remember, but she certainly took up space — enough to make one pause and stare at the box for a while before opening it. She was enigmatic, or perhaps it was just that she was a whole woman. It was a huge puzzle; it covered the entire dining table. Once, I finished it. Only that one time. But boy was it satisfying. I felt a rush of pleasure. Its completeness was addictive.I stared at it all night long.

And why does no one talk about the part that comes after? After the bright lights, the long nights, the dreams that came true?
Where did it all go?

The jigsaw puzzle is now at our holiday house. It has gathered *one* fine layer of dust, just the one. I wipe it when I drop by. But the visits are growing less frequent.

And why does no one talk about the low lights, the long days, the dreams that were never seen? Why does no one talk about the part that comes after? Bottles rattling with small doses of happiness, pink and blue, and sunny rooms that love the sound of your voice…but what then? Why does no one talk about the part that comes when you finally walk out?
Where does all that go?

The holiday house is welcoming as ever before. Its crooked nooks hug me, the uneven columns meander around my body, like water skirting around stones. It becomes me. On most days, we are one. But today it enchants me. Nothing is where it should be, where it was last summer. And the summer before that. And the summer before that. But maybe….it is where it was four summers ago. Four hundred summers ago. Foreignness and familiarity coalesce. Some part of me knows where I am going. Not my feet. But *some* part. I run my hand along a crooked wall, and it comes back damp, not dusty. I sort through heaps of games to find my jigsaw — the box is lighter, but it is also heavier. There is no layer of dust on it, it sparkles as if brand new.

And what about the foreign familiarity of all lights, of all nights and days, of all dreams. And what about the foreign familiarity of the fall of my hair, and the curve of my wrist and the pace of my heart? What about the foreign familiarity of going back, but not quite, of reaching out but not reaching, not quite? Not quite there yet. Not quite where it all began. The bright lights, the long nights, the dreams that came true. Somewhere in the territory, but not quite. What about the territory that has changed, subtly? Or maybe it is my eyes that see differently. But why does no one talk about this gap? About how the world shifts, then settles, but not quite.
Where does it all go?

The puzzle box has changed. I mean, not really. That is not physically possible. We do not live in a world of miracles. But it has changed. No, wait, the box is the same as ever. Sturdy cardboard, shades of warm ivory — it is the woman on the box who has changed. I mean, not really.
Here is a list of things that appear different:

stacks of books,
sunlight,

**the smell of ice cream,
hand lotion,
the texture of my pink sweater,
the lines on a ruled page,
water,
my mother's smile,
dolls,
the shape of my heart.**

There are too many women on the cover now. Of course, there is only one woman in her navy pantsuit, and her rather unconvincing smile. But when the light falls on it at a particular angle, I see four. Perhaps five. Six hundred? They have Mona Lisa faces in that they smile with downturned lips. She smiles, for there is only one woman. Six hundred? I used to call the woman Lydia. But I do not know if I can call all of them that. Lydia. Six hundred? And here is what I am looking for:

**the wholeness of air,
of nothing.**

(Does it exist? Is it real? Is anything whole? Are you?)
(Am I?)

And what about the incompleteness of what was and of what is and of what will be? What about the in between, if not the after.

I open the box, and the pieces spill out. There are too many, they overflow, taking over the floor, spreading beyond the confines of the dining table. I do not remember them being so numerous. Not even four summers ago. Not even four hundred summers ago. How will I make a woman out of this, especially when I cannot even see the woman on the box. When I cannot get my eyes to focus on Lydia. When Lydia, for all I know, might not even be one. She might be six hundred. But who is she?

And here is what is missing:

**Lydia,
wholes,
self.**

And why does no one talk about the thread that breaks off? About the mirage of last night's image in the mirror that disintegrates every morning, becoming cloudy from the steam? You reach out a hand, you wipe away the fog from the mirror's pristine surface, you get an image. But what if....what if it is not the image you got yesterday. Or the image you got four summers ago. Four hundred summers ago. What if it is that very image, but not quite. Not yet.

*And why does no one talk about the images that never get there,
that are never the same, but slightly off-kilter, on a twisted angle?
Why does no one talk about the image that is not coming back?
Why does no one talk about the jigsaw puzzle that no longer fits together, and the columns of the holiday house that no longer meander around you like water skirting around rocks?*

***Why does no one talk of the impossibility of getting back to yourself.
Is there a yourself?***

Who was I before I was this?
Why does no one talk about the I that was but never will be again?
The puzzle pieces slip beyond my reach. Lydia is no more. She once was, that one time I made the puzzle whole.
But never again.

I want someone to talk about the unknowability of who we were.

I cannot go back.

MAPLE

Disha Verma

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We would love to hear from you! Write to us at
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Your feedback makes us better.
FOR MORE LITERATURE, VISIT
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