

MEJO
The MELOW Journal of World Literature
Volume 1: 01: July 2016

ISSN: Applied For

A peer refereed journal
published annually by

MELOW

(The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World)

Towards Praxis: Literature, Society and Politics

Editor in Chief:

Manju Jaidka

Board of Editors:

Anil Raina

Debarati Bandyopadhyay

Himadri Lahiri

Manpreet Kang

Neela Sarkar

Rimika Singhvi

Roshan Lal Sharma

Editorial Assistants:

Anupam Vatsyayan

Harpreet Bali

Ramanpreet Grewal

Saidul Haque

EDITOR'S NOTE

MEJO, or the MELOW Journal of World Literature, is a peer-refereed journal brought out biannually by **MELOW**, the **Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World**. It is a reincarnation of the previous publications brought out in book or printed form by the Society right since its inception in 1998.

MELOW is an academic organization, one of the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly in World Literatures. The Organization meets almost every year over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages and grooms younger scholars, and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

The essays presented at MELOW conferences are screened, selected, edited and published by a Board of Editors especially appointed for the purpose. Whereas in the initial years the Society favoured a book publication, in subsequent years it was a journal that was published annually. With the changing times, MELOW decided to move on to online publication. The result is MEJO.

Dear readers, this is the first issue of MEJO, the MELOW Journal, but it is the outcome of almost two decades of experience in editing, proofreading and publishing. An e-journal has its own challenges and we, at MELOW, are coping with our challenges the best we can.

For us it is a new beginning and – like all beginnings – it is to be warmly welcomed. There is a lot to be done and many more milestones ahead. With the support of all our readers and members, we shall keep on striving.

This issue, Vol 1: no. 1: July 2016, collects half of the essays selected from presentations made at the 15th MELOW Conference held at GGS Indraprastha University, Dwarka, Delhi, in February 2016. The second issue of MEJO (Volume 1: no. 2) will come out in March 2017. It will bring together the remaining selection from the conference presentations.

EDITOR

About MELOW

MELOW (The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World) was first set up in 1998. It is an academic organization, among the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars and critics interested in literature, particularly in world literatures, and literature across borders of time and space. The organization meets every year over an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourage younger scholars and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.

This is the first volume of the MELOW revamped journal which has existed in hard print for about a decade. The present issue comprises a selection of papers presented at the 2016 MELOW Conference in Delhi. A second issue of this volume is slated for January 2017.

MELOW Office Bearers

President: Prof Anil Raina (Chandigarh)
Vice-President: Dr Vijay Sharma (Delhi)
Secretary: Prof Manju Jaidka (Chandigarh)
Jt. Secretary: Prof Manpreet Kang (Delhi)
Treasurer: Dr Meenu Gupta (Chandigarh)

Executive Members:

Prof Sushila Singh (Varanasi)
Prof Ashis Sengupta (Darjeeling)
Prof Debarati Bandopadhyay (Kolkata)
Prof Ravichandran (Kanpur)
Dr Roshan Sharma (Dharamshala)
Dr Seema Bhupendra (Rajasthan)
Dr RG Kulkarni (Shangli)
Dr Neela Sarkar (Kolkata)
Dr Jyoti Mishra (Chattisgarh)
Dr Vandhana Sharma (Jammu)

International Advisory Board

E. Nageswara Rao, (Osmania University, Hyderabad)
Giorgio Mariani (University of Sapienza, Rome, Italy)
Shirley Geok Lim (University of California, Santa Barbara)
Rajeshwari Pandharipande (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA)
Mukesh Williams (Soka University, Japan)
Pawel Jędrzejko (University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland)

Reach us online

<http://www.melusmelow.blogspot.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100003036474708&fref=ts>

ISAAC SEQUEIRA MEMORIAL FUND



Professor Isaac Sequeira

(5 January 1930—7 September 2006)

Professor Isaac Sequeira from Hyderabad, who worked at the Osmania University and was closely associated with the ASRC, Hyderabad, was a mentor and patron to several generations of academics in India. His sad demise in 2006 created a void hard to fill. We, at MELUS-India/MELOW, wish to keep alive the memory of our Patron and guiding light who played a key role in all the activities of our organization.

We have set up an Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund out of which a cash prize of Rs. 5,000 is awarded for the **best paper presented at our conferences** (see details below).

With effect from the 2010 conference, there is a **Special Invited Lecture** by a person of eminence funded by the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund.

Several individuals have come forward to offer contributions towards the corpus and donated generously to the ISM fund. Donations of Rs. 1,000 or more may be sent in cash/by draft **payable to MELOW at Chandigarh**. Contributions may be mailed by registered post/courier to Prof Anil Raina, Dept of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh - 160014.

THE ISM AWARD

- In the memory of Prof Isaac Sequeira, MELUS-India / MELOW annually awards a prize for the best paper presented at its conference. The award comprises a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5,000.
- The competition is open to Indian citizens who are members of MELUS-India or MELOW. The participant/delegate should be less than forty years of age at the time of the conference. The abstract and complete paper should be submitted by the stipulated deadlines before it is presented at the conference.
- A panel of Judges is appointed by the Office Bearers of MELUS-India/MELOW.
- If required, these rules may be amended by a simple majority of members present and voting at the Conference.

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION IN THE MELUS-MELOW JOURNAL

An article submitted for publication in our journal should be actually presented at the MELUS-MELOW Conference. It should be an original scholarly work, not presented or published elsewhere.

The final selection will be done by the editorial board constituted for each volume/issue of the journal and its decision will be final. The article should also comply with the theme of the conference.

The guidelines for documentation are as follow:

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically typed in Microsoft Word (Times New Roman 12 font) in double spacing with 1" margin on both sides of the page. E-mail id for submission of manuscripts is melusmelow@gmail.com

The article should follow the *MLA Handbook* format (7th edition) wherein all references are placed in the body of the text (e.g. Hassan 15 or Toffler xi) with an alphabetically arranged "Works Cited" list at the end. Kindly note, reference footnotes/endnotes are not permissible. Articles not following this format of documentation will be summarily rejected. Some sample entries:

Handlin, Oscar. *The Uprooted*. Boston: Little Brown Co., 1973.

Vance, Carole. "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality." *Feminisms*. Eds. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires. New York: Oxford UP, 1997. 327-35.

"Chandigarh." Map. Google Maps. Google, 15 May 2012. Web. 18 May 2012.

CONTENTS

1. **Cartooning the Colony, Empowering the Empire: A Study of *Punch* Cartoons**(ISM Award-Winning paper)
Saidul Haque 8
2. **Consciousness-Raising in the Postcolonial Novel**
Tej Nath Dhar 42
3. **Post-Catastrophe Futuristic Scenarios: A Perspective upon Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948)**
K.B. Razdan 53
4. **From Silence to Speech: Women Warriors in In-between Worlds**
Nandini Bhadra 59
5. **“Being Violent”: Critiquing Masculinity and Capitalism in Joyce Carol Oates's *Zombie***
Payel Pal 66
6. **Sam Shepard's “Curse of the Starving Class”: The Contemporary Family and the “Curse” of the American Dream**
Galawezh I. Muhiadeen 74
7. **Many Stories, Many Lessons: The Plurality of Draupadi, Sita and Ahalya**
Benu Verma 81
8. **Gendering the Genre: Interrogating the Fairytales of Colonial Bengal**
Sarani Roy 91
9. **The Kashmiri *Ramayana*: Voices and Silences**
Aartee Kaul Dhar 99
10. **“ I find thy cunning seeds, O million murdering Death”: Western Science, Indian Climes in Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome***
Sakoon N Singh 106
11. **Literature as Social Agenda: The Poetry of Temsula Ao**
Neeraj Sankhyan and Suman 113
12. **The Cyborg Prophecy: Reading between Isaac Asimov's Lines**
Rudrani Gangopadhyay 122

- 13. Sexual Innuendoes in *Little Red Riding Hood***
Harpreet Kaur Vohra 130
- 14. Book Review**
T. S. Eliot: Poems. Eds. Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue
Hugh Foley 136

ISM AWARD-WINNING PAPER*

Cartooning the Colony, Empowering the Empire: A Study of *Punch* Cartoons

Saidul Haque

Research Scholar
University of Hyderabad

Abstract: This paper addresses the larger politics of the machination of the British Empire in order to preserve its overseas colonies like India, the precious jewel in the crown. It examines a significant aesthetic apparatus of colonial domination, in the form of political cartoons, on the colony published in the British weekly magazine, *Punch* or *The London Charivari* (1841-1992 and 1992-1996). While both literature and politics are “serious” affairs, the cartoons, for one thing, treated them as “casual” or “non-serious” perhaps only to charge them with an alternative seriousness. This politics of deception is central to the functioning of the cartoon. Cartoons triggered humor not merely for their aesthetic purpose but with the larger aim of disseminating and validating the operations of empire in the colony. While this paper does not aim at reaching the simplified conclusion that these visual cartoons actually symbolize the political gaze of the British Empire at the colony producing a self-other/master-slave binary, these visuals surely exploited the porous boundaries between literal and the figural, between meaning and non-meaning. These cartoons, by means of distortion and exaggeration, produce a colonial subject which needs to be tutored by the benign hands of the British. Interestingly, the cartoon was the easiest medium for reaching out to the larger mass within the empire and the colony, thereby solidifying the ground for control and containment. This paper would argue that this textualization of colonial subjects validates colonization both at home and the colony. This paper will critically examine several cartoons on the “Sepoy mutiny,” the Indian Maharaja, Indian everyday life, the political issues of the empire and so on. This analysis would foreground the role of literary forms as the “mask of conquest”.

Keywords: *Punch*, Cartoon, Colonialism, British Empire

I would like to begin my paper with a reference to the famous scene in J.G. Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur* where the giant marble heads of Plato and Socrates served as shelters for the British gunners and when conventional ammunition had run out, the “electro-metal figures” of English poets like Shakespeare and Keats replaced the cannon shot in order to attack the Indian mutineers. Shooting people dead with the cultural icons of the colonizers is not merely a metaphor of the “ennobling powers of literature” (Farrell 6), but also an allegory of the complex nature of colonization. Culture here crosses the boundary of acting as minimal agent of Ideological State Apparatuses aiding only in consent building but it becomes enmeshed with the violent side of Repressive State Apparatuses. This scene in a way unearths the political nature of aesthetics in the colonial contact zone. This politicization of aesthetics is central to my paper as this would argue that the cartoons related to colonies published in the British weekly magazine, *Punch* or *The London Charivari* (1841-1992 and 1992-1996; Mark Lemon was the first editor followed by others) were important tools of colonial domination. The literary and artistic form of cartoons published in the *Punch*

*This paper was awarded the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Prize for the best paper presented by a young scholar at the annual MELOW Conference held in February 2016.

actually disseminated, validated and strengthened colonial ideology. This paper would then examine political cartooning in the long nineteenth century as one significant aesthetic apparatus of colonial domination. These cartoons triggered humor not merely for their aesthetic purpose, but with the larger aim of validating the operations of empire in the colony. While this paper does not aim at reaching the simplified conclusion that these visual cartoons actually symbolize the political gaze of the British Empire at the colony producing a self-other/master-slave binary, these visuals surely exploited the porous boundaries between the literal and the figural, between meaning and non-meaning.

While both literature and politics are “serious” affairs, the cartoons are treated as “low”, “casual” or “non-serious” perhaps only to mask an alternative seriousness. This politics of deception is central to the functioning of cartoons. The Empire’s growing prominence in the colonies was transmitted to the British public through a variety of images shaped by emerging visual technologies. Political cartoons remained the most powerful and consistent medium for representing overseas politics, even as painting, engraving, and later photography and filming gained ground with newer visual experiences. As opposed to the other visual media, the cartoon has the inherent quality of representing through distortion or caricature and this technical exercise was crucial for representing the “other”. The art historian Ernst H. Gombrich pointed out the core technique of caricature: “the cartoonist can mythologize the world of politics by physiognomizing it” (Gombrich 139). Caricature is fond of violent disproportion and exaggeration of defects. The body is the caricaturist’s primary target and place of operation, his physiognomic laboratory, because it is a spectacle of semiotic compression and *Punch* cartoons portrayed the “savage”, “native” and “uncivilized” body with full sadistic pleasure leading to a symbolic epistemic violence on the body of the subjects. If art strived to represent the essence of the subject, then the cartoonist was similar to the artist: “The caricaturist has a corresponding aim. He does not seek the perfect form but the perfect deformity, thus penetrating through the mere outward appearance to the inner being in all its littleness or ugliness” (Gombrich and Kris 320).

Punch was published weekly right through the nineteenth century from its first issue of 17 July 1841, and remains one of the key sources for elucidating the opinions of nineteenth century middle England. The 12-page double column issues, each costing 3 dollars in the first instance, comprised visual and textual profusion. The popularity and circulation of the *Punch* outnumbered many satirical journals of the time and achieved a circulation of approximately 165,000 in 1850. *Punch* assembled a number of requisite elements for success: the tradition of wood-engraved illustrations, its early backing by a financially stable printer/publisher like Bradbury and Evans, its appointment and retention of a succession of brilliant illustrators and cartoonists like John Leech, Richard Doyle, John Tenniel and Charles Keene, and its development of Mr. Punch as its chosen collective editorial voice.

As a satirical periodical *Punch* was a huge brand in the nineteenth century. But apart from the material reason for its success, I would like to disclose the ideological ground upon which it operated. Interestingly, the first article in the first issue of *Punch* promised two things: that the periodical’s satire would be harmless and never at the expense of others, and it would serve a moral purpose. *Punch*’s respectable humor was constructed against existing popular satirical papers like the *Age*, the *Town* and

the *Satirist* which *Punch* competed with in the 1840s. These periodicals were characterized by vituperative attacks on political opponents, personal abuse, and manipulation of scandalous affairs. *Punch* completely followed what Thackeray wrote of satire that it has washed, combed, clothed, and taught the rogue good manners. But the agenda of propagating respectable humor was not always commercially very demanding. *Punch* was an anxiogenic site for the clash between two modes of satire in two British historical periods. The conflict between the sober, soft and respectable humor and more bitter and vituperative humor was easily transformed into the body of the racial and ethnic “others” of Britain’s occupied territory. *Punch* became politically correct and popular by producing soft humor towards its own Victorian society and by outsourcing its roguish and bitter aspect to its “others”. It became imbricated into the imperial ideology of validating a binary division between the perfect self and the grotesque other. Tapati Guha-Thakurta has pointed out that “the colonial encounter brought into being a new social entity – the artist – with heightened self-awareness about individual identity and nationality”. She further states that “this encounter produced a special discursive and institutional space for art within middle-class society. Together, both art and artist – in their new privileged status and modernized conception – became important agents in the articulation of national sovereignty and middle-class cultural hegemony” (Guha-Thakurta 7-8). Though Guha-Thakurta argues her point in the context of nationalist uprisings in the colony, this is similarly applicable for the artists in the metropolitan centre because the large British Empire also needed a strong nationalistic solidarity at home in order to control its overseas colonies. *Punch* cartoons became a reflection of the Victorian artist’s tribute to the nation.

R. D. Altick in his study of *Punch* has claimed that the magazine remains, along with the *Illustrated London News*, a frequently cited illustrative resource for thinking about Victorian politics, manners and public events. Satirical journals generally belong to a superposed textual order in which they base their oblique presentation presupposing prior acquaintances with the news already covered by the daily newspapers. This mutual intertextuality solidifies the formation of public opinion. If newspapers are dry and factual, and in a sense “official” spokespersons of imperial agenda, satirical periodicals are “unofficial”, flexible, playful and hence more appealing. We can consider *Punch* cartoons as palimpsest which actually resurfaces the already circulated news in a playful manner doubly validating the imperial agenda. Images often added an emotional dimension and reinforced stereotypes. While official discourses of ruling the colonies operated along a vertical axis-bottom within the centre of the empire, political satires operated, almost rhizomatically, on a horizontal axis, in its reach and targets, with the aim to coalesce a public supportive of the agenda of the British Empire. The re-circulation of back *Punch* volumes is also a case in point where it is possible to influence and mould public opinion by reasserting the caricatured savage bodies of the colonized. *Punch* cartoons then became the easiest medium for reaching to larger mass within the empire and the colony and thereby solidifying the ground for control and containment.

This paper would now closely look at some of the cartoons published in *Punch* in the heyday of the empire.

Territorialization: This first set of cartoons represents the mighty power of empire and its hold over an imagined geography. The image titled “The Rhodes Colossus”

(Fig. 1) symbolizes the British expansionist agenda of ruling the earth. The man in the image, Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902) was a British-born South African politician who epitomized expansive British colonialism in the 19th century. He founded Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). This *Punch* cartoon links British imperialism with the Colossus of Rhodes (a statue of Apollo on the island of Rhodes which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World until destroyed by an earthquake). According to Paul Kramer, this image is “the archetypal image of British imperial power” (1333). Similarly another image titled “The Expansionist” (Fig. 2) suggests Britain’s hold over the globe as the symbolic frogs are actually dancing on the image of a globe itself. In the third cartoon (Fig. 3) the contrast between an omnipotent God-like figure of the colonizer in the guise of a wise eagle and the tiny figures standing beneath justifies the rule of the colonizers. The cartoonist’s gaze is here synonymous with the gaze of the eagle with microscopic human figures as the disempowered race. In another cartoon (Fig. 4) there is a shift from the land to the body. It signifies not merely a geographical colonization or colonization of physical body, but that colonization also entails a psychological domination and distortion as is evident from the reference to the nightmare. The next picture (Fig. 5) is a clear visual representation of the White Man’s Burden to civilize the “natives” by killing the savage quality in them. The epigraph of the cartoon (Fig. 6) asserts: “He smiles a smile more dreadful/...When he sees the thick black cloud of smoke/ Go up from the conquered town.” The readers of *Punch* magazine will also rejoice like the soldier in the picture because another territory is conquered and the “black” is eliminated from the land.

Encountering the Body of the “Other”: Engagement with the body is also an effective technique of power and *Punch* very strategically manipulated the bodies of the colonial “other” in its cartoons. The picture of the “Asiatic Mystery” (Fig 7) stereotypes the image of a naked and weak Asian body. This is how *Punch* cartoons generalized the particular where one single naked body represents all the Asian people. This homogenization was actually a strategy of otherisation. The erotic body of the African woman (Fig. 8) is compared with the evil serpentine figure and thereby the body becomes synonymous with the beast. Ironically, the evil wooing of the biblical serpent that led to the fall of Eve from God’s grace is metamorphosed into the colonization of Africa. At the same time this erotic body is the site of possible libidinous vent and a source of anxiety for British middle class. The cartoon demonstrates the colonized body as an object of colonial fear and desire. Similarly, another shy and passive African body (Fig. 9) is a spectacle with one Whiteman with the gun and another gazing at her symbolically measure and colonize the “black” body. The picture of a bound African bent inside the map of Africa (Fig. 10) is interesting for several reasons. It seems that the African bodies are still in the embryonic phase yet to be mature and the body is placed inside an “anachronistic space” as the African map seems to be a distorted and deterritorialized figure. This man’s effort to break his shackle is a source of anxiety for the colonizers and hence the cartoonist mocks the embryo’s premature effort to come out of the womb. The image of the Indian Juggle (Fig. 11) performed at Royal Theatre in Westminster represents a world upside down. All the Indian bodies including an elephant’s body are not in their normal status, rather they are unstable and in a state of crumbling down. This caricature represents the imperial mentality where Britain would only be at the centre and the “others” of the colony are always in a fallen state and the burden of the centre is to rule these unstable “others”.

In the cartoon of Fig 12, the Nizam and other notabilities from Indian colony are portrayed comically. The plump figure of Nizam with his abominous body is contrasted with the one behind him who is too old and too sick to walk. Interestingly the third figure angrily stares at the Nizam, thereby creating an antagonistic atmosphere. The cartoon suggests a larger political implication where the Indian rulers are hostile to each other and are also not “fit” (both physically and psychologically) to run the country. *Punch* caricature of the Great Exhibition of 1851 also brings into focus many racially “other” bodies. *Punch* reflects the general English attitude of superiority and its fear of the foreigner. Figs. 13 & Fig. 14 illustrate the disruption and disorder which the visitors were imagined to have produced in the supposedly clean and peaceful households of the imperial centre. *Punch* concretizes the foreign bodies visiting the exhibition as “mobs” characterized by its uncontrolled and riotous nature.

Violence and Colonial affect: Through caricature and mockery *Punch* cartoons categorized human experience and produced colonial affect. John Tenniel’s famous Cawnpore cartoon attests to this fact. During the volatile period of 1857 “Sepoy Mutiny” Tenniel drew several cartoons that represent the unrest and anxiety. Regarding the picture titled “Justice” (Fig 15), the British newspaper, the *Free Press* noted on September 16, 1857:

The last number of *Punch* presents us with a wonderful cartoon. Justice, in a Greekpeplum, accompanied by British soldiers, mangling Hindu bodies, and with the features of revenge. In the distance there is a row of guns with Sepoys about to be blown from them. In the rear, disconsolate women and children of Hindus. The title of it is Justice. Leaving to the imagination of the reader to fill in the words “of English CHRISTIANS IN THE YEAR 1857.” Was the drawing designed to horrify Britons with the sight of themselves, or to brand upon them their new demon? (qtd. in Khanduri 4)

This kind of cartoon then not only awakens a sense of anxiety and fear among its readers in the centre of the empire but at the same time it suggests the containment of such violent revolts and hence confirms the mighty power of the colonial masters. The readers in the imperial centre identify emotionally with the British soldier and symbolically act with him while taking revenge. Again the cartoon entitled “The British Lion’s Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger” (Fig. 16) is very significant because of its colonial content. According to Layard, one of the editors of the *Punch*, Tenniel’s India cartoon in general suddenly brought about an upsurge in *Punch*’s circulation rate. This cartoon garnered attention from *The New York Daily Times*:

A recent number of *Punch* has a large picture, in which the state of feeling in England towards India is forcibly represented by a fierce lion springing upon a Bengal tiger, which is crouching upon a woman and her infant child. The lion is England, the tiger is rebel India, and the woman and child the Anglo-Indian subjects who have been sacrificed by the cruel sepoys. The temper of the British nation has been thoroughly aroused, and sooner or later a terrible retribution will be visited upon the heads of the rebel Indians who have shown a disposition to glut their revenge for a century of oppression and

misgovernment....The roar of the British lion will soon strike terror into the heart of the Bengal tiger. (September 9, 1857, qtd in Khanduri 5)

I would like to emphasize here the interconnection between newspapers and satirical periodicals both complementing each other in the larger purpose of the empire by evoking sentimental and effective national bonding among its British readers.

Control and Containment: This set of *Punch* cartoons reveals the picture of a powerful British Empire content with its overseas colonies. These pictures are free from any violent scene. As Satadru Sen pointed out in the different context of Andamanese body in the British colony of India:

One might argue after the “Sepoy Mutiny,” the aboriginal savage serves as a repository of Romantic impulses in British–Indian colonialism. The savage is neither quite the Self nor absolutely the Other; instead, a pleasurable and continuous process of modulation occurs in which savagery can be immersed within, removed from, or repositioned in the various components of the modern Self: history, technological improvement, moral progress, and familiarity. (372)

Representation now becomes infused with the metaphor of improvement and there is a visual transformation of these “savage” and “unruly” natives into contented and docile subjects. These cartoons represent a colonial subject who needs to be tutored by the benign hands of the British. This image (Fig. 17) published just after the successful quench of Sepoy Mutiny indicates stronger British grip on India. Another cartoon (Fig. 18) signifies the forgiving and non-violent nature of British soldiers where forgiving the “violent” Indian sepoy is not mere act of compassion but the display of a more powerful nature of the masters. Again the cartoon depicting Lord Canning, the Governor General of India, trying to pacify an Indian sepoy (Fig. 19) contrasts the large size of Canning with tiny figure of the Indian sepoy. Rather than using coercion, it is the consent building phase of the empire that this cartoon manifests. Sitting on a chair and keeping his hand (almost like a sage) on a standing soldier immediately places himself in the position of a more knowledgeable figure and thereby consolidating knowledge/power nexus. As a corollary effect, both the cartoons of Figs. 20 & 21 signify the tamed subjects who are now ideologically “interpellated” by the colonial masters. Under colonial rule, “the individual is *interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall! (freely) accept his subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’” (Althusser 182). Hence the Indian woman takes shelter under the British patronage. The Indian sepoy seeing the British officers shot down, is no more fighting against the British officer but fighting for him in an act of colonial subservience. Similarly Tenniel’s cartoon titled, “A Lesson” (Fig. 22) represents a Zulu who, despite his uncivilized nature and appearance, has mastered the subtleties of English (completely ignoring his native language) in order to communicate his “lesson” of war to his English listener. Fig. 23 & Fig. 24 are actually a shift from the cartoons of early phase of colonization. These cartoons are abundant with images of sumptuous food, idyllic landscape, and peaceful coexistence of both the colonizer and colonized, celebration of festivals in joyful manners as opposed to earlier cartoons

depicting desolate and violent landscape. *Punch* actually generates these kinds of cartoons to represent a benign empire with its civilizing agenda.

This paper then argues that this textualization of colonial subjects in the pages of the *Punch* validates colonization in a very strategically aesthetic manner. The lion, the tiger, the sepoys, the blacks, all offer visual tropes suggesting how cartoons employ gender, animals and objects to contribute to the colonial registers. *Punch* cartoons literally enforces the colonized to acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representations, or objects without history. If colonization is “a cultural process”, “imagined and energized through signs, metaphors and narratives” (Thomas 2), then *Punch* cartoons are one of the important mechanism of this process. As Foucault has argued that power is not wielded by people or groups by way of “episodic” or “sovereign” acts of domination or coercion, instead it is dispersed and “power is everywhere” embodied in discourse and knowledge (63). *Punch*, in a sense, was one of the agents of such discursive power formation in the age of the empire. *Punch* cartoons foreground the role of literary forms as the “mask of conquest”.

I would like to conclude my paper with a contradictory argument about this grand claim and popularity of the *Punch*. These cartoons found their way into the colonies through readers and library subscriptions and these also influenced the “native” subscribers in the colony to bring out Indian *Punches*. According to Ritu Gairola Khanduri, *Punch* failed as a marketable product in the colonies but lingered on as a form for imagining colonial politics. These “upstart Punches” rewrite the colonial caricature. “The *Punch* versions in India thus need to be cast not merely as a derivative form of a colonial modernity but also as a tactical and tactile sensibility for subverting colonial politics” (Khanduri 54). As “native” versions of *Punches* clearly acknowledged the British *Punch* as their model, they also posed a challenge to the British censoring these journals. This whole project of representing the colonial body or colonial landscape can also be questioned following Derrida. Derrida questions the notion of the re-presentation and therefore the very notion of an origin or an original that needs to be re-presented. Derrida would argue that the “origin” is itself dispersed, its “identity” undecidable and unfixed. A hegemonic representation in *Punch* cartoons thus does not re-present an original, fixed “truth”; rather it represents that which is always already represented. *Punch*’s representation is not thus a sacrosanct and “true” representation. This is deeply imbued with the political machination of the empire.

Appendix



Figure 1: "The Rhodes Colossus." *Punch*. Dec. 10, 1892: 266.



Figure 2: "The Expansionists." *Punch*. Feb.12, 1936:183.



ON THE SWOOP!

Figure 3: "On The Swoop!" *Punch*. April 26, 1890:198.



Figure 4: "A Guildhall Nightmare." *Punch*. Nov. 20, 1897: 230.



THE AVENGER!

Figure 5: "The Avenger!" *Punch*. July 25, 1900: 64.



MARS TRIUMPHANT; OR, LAYS OF MODERN ROME.

“HE SMILES A SMILE MORE DREADFUL
THAN HIS OWN DREADFUL FROWN
WHEN HE SEES THE THICK BLACK CLOUD OF SMOKE
GO UP FROM THE CONQUERED TOWN.”

MACAULAY : *Lays of Ancient Rome.*

Figure 6: “Mars Triumphant.” *Punch*. October 16, 1935:435.



Figure 7: "The Asiatic Mystery." *Punch*. August 8, 1857: 55.

WOONG THE AFRICAN VENUS.

(Some way after Homer's Hymn to Aphrodite.)



[A Charter has just been granted to the Imperial British East Africa Company. This Company will now administer and develop a territory with an estimated area of about 50,000 square miles, including some of the most fertile and salubrious regions of Eastern Africa.]

<p>THE force, O Muse, and functions now unfold Of Afrio's Venus, graced with mines of gold; Who e'en in BISMARCK lights love's furious fire, And makes all men woo her with hot desire.</p>	<p>From all earth's nations, Frenchman, Por- tuguese, From Yankee shores and from all Europe's Adventurous patriots crowd to seek and share Love of the Libyan Venus. Three there are</p>	<p>Whose minds are mainly set upon that love: The Briton, proud as Aegis-bearing Jove, Who deems her indevirginate, her eyes Being black and burning, like her own fierce skies.</p>
---	---	--

Figure 8: "Woong the African Venus." *Punch*. Sept. 22, 1888:134.



Figure 9: "Embarrassing!" *Punch*. June 7, 1890: 266.



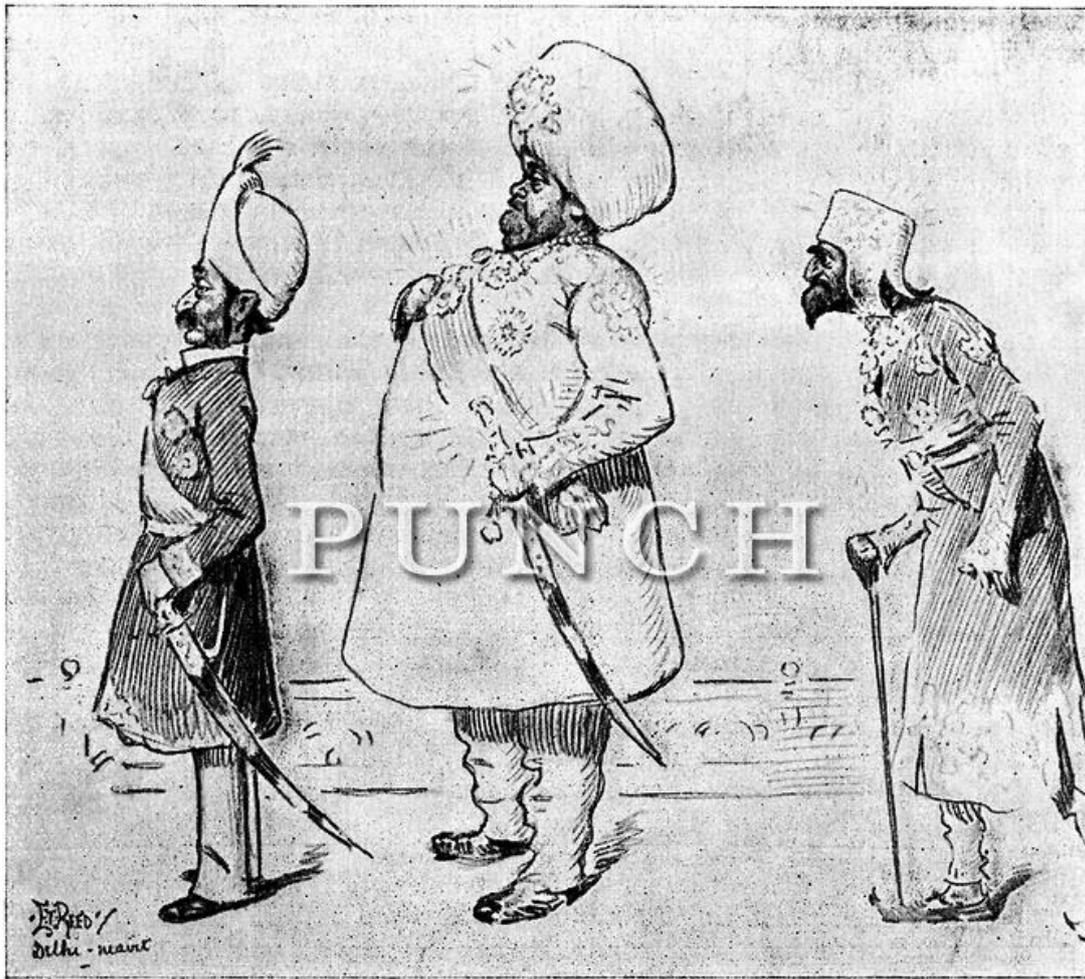
Figure 10: “A bound African bent inside the map of Africa is ready to break his shackles.” *Punch*. March 11, 1959: 339.



THE INDIAN JUGGLE.

(As Performed at the Theatre Royal, Westminster.)

Figure 11: "The Indian Juggle." *Punch*. May 15, 1858: 197.



The Nizam of Hyderabad and other notabilities playing "The Heavy Lead" in the Grand Spectacle entitled "The Delhi Durbar."

Figure 12: "The Delhi Durbar." *Punch*. Feb. 4, 1903: 77.1.



No. XVII.

PERFIDIOUS ALBION LETS HIS DRAWING-ROOM FLOOR TO A DISTINGUISHED FOREIGNER.—
THE RESULT.

Figure 13: "Perfidious Albion..." *Punch*. 1851.



No. XVI.—THE NORTH-AMERICAN LODGERS IN 1851.

Figure 14: "The North American Lodgers." *Punch*. 1851.



JUSTICE.

Figure 15: "Justice." *Punch.*, Sept. 12, 1857: 109.



Figure 16: "The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger." *Punch*. August 22, 1857: 76.



THE NEW YEAR'S GIFT.

PAM (to SIR COLIN). "WELL—UPON MY WORD—EH!—I'M REALLY EXTREMELY OBLIGED TO YOU—BUT—EH!—HOW ABOUT KEEPING THE BRUTE?"

Figure 17: "The New Year's Gift." *Punch*. January 2, 1858: 5.



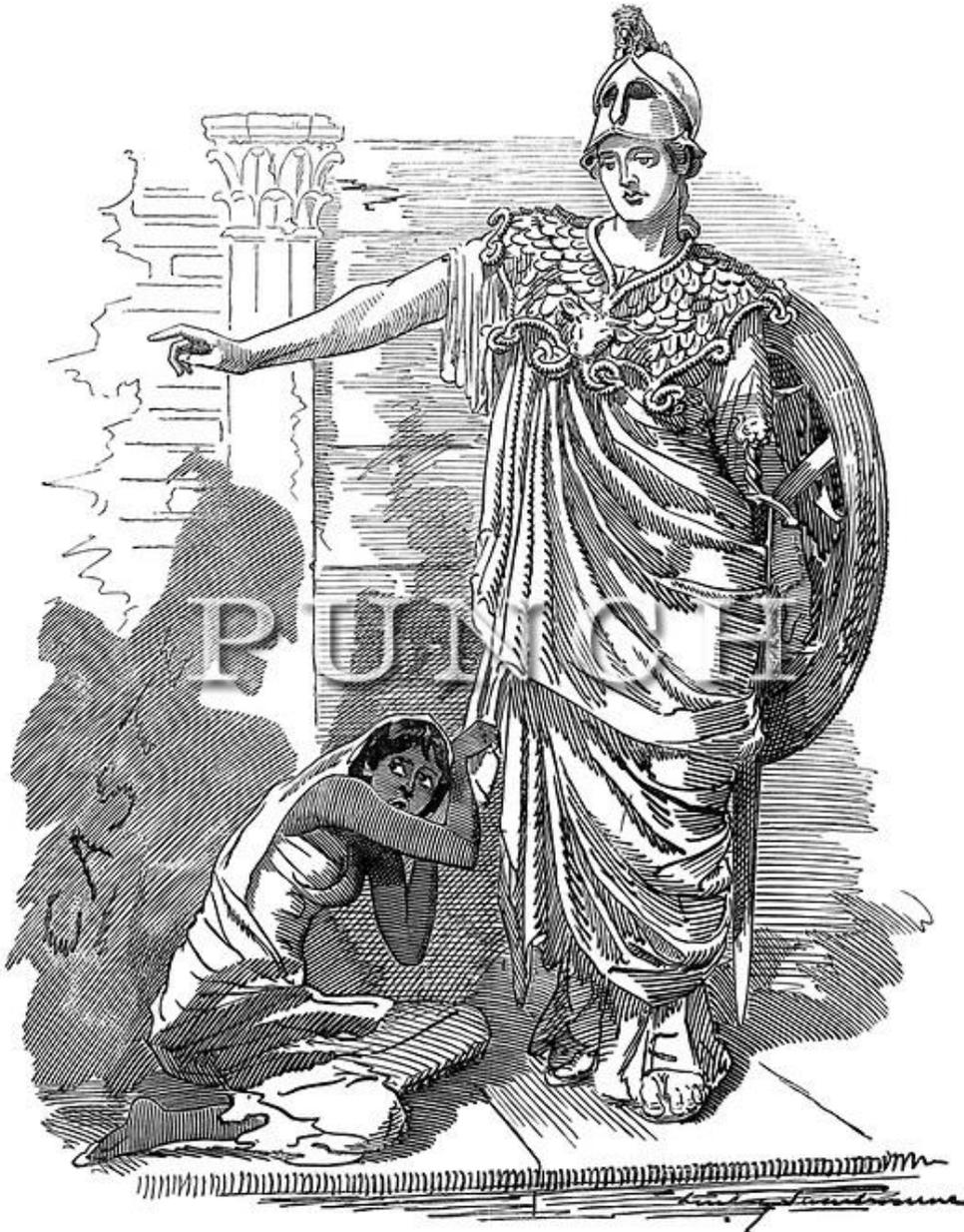
TOO "CIVIL" BY HALF.

The Governor-General Defending the POOR Sepoy.

Figure 18: "Too 'Civil' by Half." *Punch*. Nov. 7, 1857:191.



Figure 19: "The Clemency of Canning." *Punch*. Oct.24, 1857:171.



THE SHIELD AND THE SHADOW.

Figure 20: "The Shield and the Shadow." *Punch*. October 18, 1890: 182.



“BROTHERS IN ARMS.”

[“The stanchness and devotion of the whole force, and particularly the excellent conduct of the native officers when thrown on their own resources, are worthy of the highest praise; . . . and the fact that at the very first the men saw all their British officers shot down, makes the stanchness and gallantry of the native officers, non-commissioned officers, and men even more praiseworthy.”—*London Gazette Despatches quoted in the Times, Sept. 8.*]

Figure 21: “Brothers in Arms.” *Punch*. Sept. 18, 1897:127.



A LESSON.

Figure 22: "A Lesson." *Punch*. Jan.3, 1879:91.



HAIL, BRITANNIA!
(OPENING OF THE COLONIAL EXHIBITION, MAY 4.)

Figure 23: "Hail Britannia!" *Punch.*, May 8, 1886:222.

CHRISTMAS REVELS THROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE.
 INTIMATE STUDIES OF EMPIRE LIFE, OBTAINED AT ENORMOUS PERSONAL RISK BY MR. PUNCH'S TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT
 TO ASSIST THE BRITISH PUBLIC TO PICTURE FOR THEMSELVES THE STATE THEIR FRIENDS AND RELATIONS ACROSS THE SEAS
 GET INTO DURING THE FESTIVE SEASON.

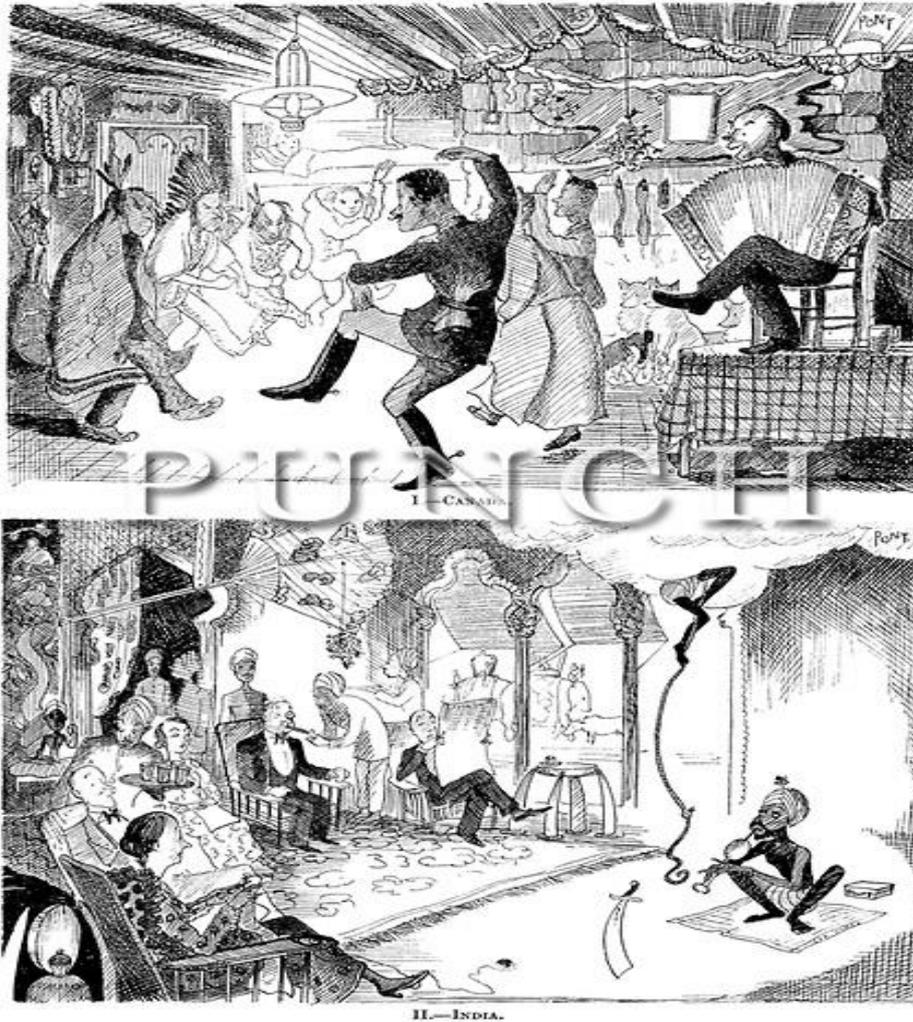


Figure 24: “Christmas Revels Throughout the Empire.” *Punch*. 1935: 18. ALM

Works Consulted and Cited

Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation).” *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971. 127-186. Print.

Altick, Richard D. *Punch: The Lively Youth of a British Institution, 1841-1851*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997. Print.

Derrida, J. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri C. Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974. Print.

Donato, Eugenio and Edward Said. "An Exchange on Deconstruction and History." *Boundary* 2 8.1(1979): 65-74. Web. 4 September 2015. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/303139>>

Farrell, J.G. *The Siege of Krishnapur*. 1973. Reprint. New York:NYRB Classic, 2014. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin, 1998. Print.

Gatrell, V. *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*. London: Atlantic Books, 2006. Print.

Gombrich, E.H. *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*. London: Phaidon Press, 1963. Print.

Gombrich, E.H., and Ernst Kris. "The Principles of Caricature." *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 17 (1938): 319-42. Web. 10 October 2015.

<<https://gombricharchive.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/showdoc85.pdf>>

Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. "Visualizing the Nation." *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 27-28 (1995): 7-40. Web. 15 October 2015. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/books/artsandideas/pager.html?issue=27-28&objectid=HN681.S597_27-28_009.gif>

Hannerz, U. *Transnational Connections*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Khanduri, Ritu Gairola. *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Print.

Kramer, Paul A. "Empires, Exceptions and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1830-1910." *The Journal of American History* 88.4 (2002): 1315-1353. Print.

Punch. Web. <<http://www.punch.co.uk/>>

Rabinow, Paul. ed. *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's thought*. London: Penguin, 1991. Print.

Said, Edward. "An Exchange on Deconstruction and History." *Boundary* 2 8.1(1979): 65-74. Web. 4 September 2015. DOI: 10.2307/303139.

Sen, Satadru. "Savage Bodies, Civilized Pleasures: M. V. Portman and the Andamanese." *American Ethnologist* 36.2 (2009): 364-379. Web. 15 October 2015.

Spielmann, Marion H. *The History of Punch*. London: Cassel & Co. Ltd., 1895. *Project Gutenberg*. Web. 8 March 2015. <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23881/23881.txt>>

Thomas, Nicholas. *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994. Print.

Consciousness-Raising in the Postcolonial Novel

Tej Nath Dhar
Professor of English
Faridabad

Abstract: In spite of conflicting views about the value of literature, which have been voiced right from the Greek times, there is a high degree of unanimity among readers world-wide that reading literature does provide valuable gains. Among these, the most striking one is that it raises the level of consciousness of its readers by putting them in the interrogative mode. They question received opinions, social norms and conventions, political and cultural correctness, all forms of oppressive ideologies, and are motivated to initiate reforms, raise voices for change, and even bring about revolutions. This essay tries to demonstrate how the postcolonial novel seeks to raise the level of consciousness of readers by using history in varied ways, in the work of Chinua Achebe, Mulk Raj Anand, and Salman Rushdie.

Keywords: Literature, ideology, social change, history, postcolonial novels.

Controversies about the value of literature have been heard right from the Greeks to the present times. In spite of voices of dissent about its value, literary works continue to be written and read in greater numbers than before. A vast majority of readers and writers believe that literature does affect us positively in several ways. It improves our understanding of life by exposing us to human experiences that would not be available to us because of the limitations within which we are forced to live; it provides us pleasure because this understanding is made available in pleasing packages. It also encourages us to question modes of justice, conventional morality, accepted patterns of behaviour and thinking, and notions of political and cultural correctness. These largely constitute the consciousness-raising aspects of literature. Mario Vargas Llosa puts it forcefully by stating that literature is meant to “arouse, to disturb, to alarm, to keep men in a constant state of dissatisfaction with themselves: its function is to stimulate, without respite, the desire for change and improvement even when it is necessary to use the sharpest weapons to accomplish this task” (72). My essay attempts to demonstrate how the postcolonial novel does this through its complex relationship with history. Since the history-novel connection dates back to the origins of the novel, I shall first outline this connection to clarify how it has changed over time, and then move on to the postcolonial novelists.

Right from the time of its beginning in the eighteenth century in the West, the novel's connection with history has widened and deepened over time and gone through three major phases. In the first phase, novelists imitated history, by writing narratives that approximated life as we know it, which laid the foundations of the realistic novel; in the second phase, novelists also incorporated history within their novelistic frames by bringing into them actual people and incidents and juxtaposing them with invented happenings and characters, which gave rise to a variety of historical novels; in the final phase, almost in the middle of the twentieth century, novelists also problematized history, by using the fictional space of their novels to deal with the complexities involved in history-writing, which brought these two disciplines very close to each other.

History in the postcolonial novel not only reflects some of these trends, but also goes beyond them to allow for a special relationship between the two, mainly because the novel had its roots in the actual historical experience of colonialism. Since colonialism is a political arrangement in which people of one country take control of people in another country, resulting in a relationship between them of masters and slaves/servants, the writers of the colonized countries use the resources of fiction to dramatize accounts of the colonial encounter from different perspectives and for different purposes.

The most known and widely explored example of history in the postcolonial novel is the one in which the novelists recreate their country's past to offset its disfigured versions by the colonial writers, and as a resource for combating the social and psychological damage to the colonial subjects caused by their situation. This I shall demonstrate through the personal narrative of Chinua Achebe and a brief reference to his novelistic theory and practice.

Apart from this, novelists also use history as a resource for raising consciousness of the native subjects by making them aware that their understanding of the processes of history can make a difference in their lives and help them evolve effective strategies for fighting the colonizer's might. This I shall illustrate by using the fictional and non-fictional writings of Mulk Raj Anand.

Finally, I shall show that postcolonial novelists also problematize the very discourse of history, to draw attention to the fact that there can be several versions of a country's past. In this, the postcolonial novelist's engagement with history comes very close to one of the major varieties of the postmodernist novel.

Achebe's narrative about how he turned into a novelist who made special use of history is dealt by him in detail in *Home and Exile*, which owes its origin to the three lectures he delivered at Harvard University in 2000. He tells us that during the course of his formal education, he understood the true meaning of living under the imperial gaze. The British colonizers not only exercised control over the people of his country but also damaged their psyche, by inducing in them a sense of racial inferiority.

This is similar to what Frantz Fanon has written in his classic work on colonial subjectivity, in which he shows how the colour difference between races is legitimized by the colonial masters by invoking scriptural authority and quoting passages such as: "We [the whites] are the chosen people—look at the colour of our skins. The others are black or yellow: that is because of their sins" (23). So, sinful and depraved, people of black races are no better than barbarians; they have "no culture, no civilization, no 'long historical past'" (25).

The colonial masters convinced their subjects that the scriptures could not be wrong; they truly were depraved and barbaric. In this way, the colonizers constructed for them a picture of the world they lived in and their place in it to make them accept their superiority over them as well as to justify their moral right to rule them.

To add to this, almost as a proof of their assertions, the colonizers also created a vast storehouse of knowledge to justify their presence in the colonies. The main purpose of producing such historical, fictional, and non-fictional writings was to

expose the moral and spiritual degeneration of the native population. This is the kind of work that Edward Said examined with passion in his thesis on *Orientalism*: to explain the widely-circulated stereotype created by the West of a lazy, wild, and morally poor people with no history and culture.

Achebe read about the falsehood spread about the Africans in the novels of Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad. He also found that for over three hundred years, nearly four hundred volumes of fiction and non-fiction had been produced in the Western world, a mixture of “fantasy and myth,” for the sole purpose of establishing the inferiority of Africans. These find mention in a volume put together by Hammond and Alta Jablow titled *The Africa That Never Was* (26).

Achebe drew two important lessons from this. First, the belief about “the innocence of stories” that had been instilled in people like him was false and needed interrogation. Reams of fabricated narratives and piles of interested knowledge needed to be read with “greater scrutiny” and “with adult eyes” (Hammond and Jablow 34). Second, literature that clouds artistic insight with “stereotype and malice” is a literature of devaluation, an example of “the colonization of one people’s story by another” (43).

This understanding made him realize that the story of Africa had to be reclaimed and retold. Fanon too had said that if Africans desired to free themselves, they needed first to regain their lost voice, which could be done only by reclaiming their past. Achebe calls it “‘storying’ people who had been knocked silent by the trauma of all kinds of dispossession” (79), to make them recover from their “badly damaged sense of self” and to help them regain their eroded self-esteem. His belief in what he calls the “curative power of stories” grew so strong that he made it the cornerstone of his fictional practice and propounded the idea of the novelist as teacher (Achebe, 1990).

As a teacher, he uses the resources of fiction to retell the story of his people and to re-frame the colonial encounter to do two things simultaneously: a) expose the deceit and treachery in the carefully contrived route the colonial master took to gain control over his country; b) demonstrate that his people were neither barbaric nor did they lack a viable institutionalized political structure that was less democratic than what the British had imposed on them.

It goes to the credit of Achebe that in his recreation of the past of his country in his novels, especially in *Things Fall Apart*, which has been widely written and commented upon, he is honest and truthful. This is evident from his depiction of the colonizers and the colonized; he neither romanticizes the oppressed, nor does he demonize the oppressors. The British succeeded in making inroads into his country, because they were helped by the natives. That was the sad truth, but that does not in any way lessen the culpability of the colonizers.

Since Achebe did not want to be what he calls a copycat, he used the form of the Western novel to do his job but made it his own by combining it with the narrative traditions of his country. Likewise, though he wrote in the language of the colonizers, he transformed it by bending its syntax, by bringing it very close to the native speech rhythms, and lacing it with versions of local proverbs and expressions, thus creating a basis for more language experiments of the later-day postcolonial novelists.

If Achebe brought history within the fictional frame to correct the misrepresentation of his country's past by the British and thus help his people regain their self-confidence, Mulk Raj Anand, much before his time, used history in his fiction not only to make sense of their pitiable situation but also to help people find the main cause of their long enslavement by the British.

Anand is not generally read as a postcolonial novelist but as one who is concerned with the plight of the downtrodden in the society of his day, the untouchables and the coolies. If the British also figure in his novels, it is because, during his time, they formed an important part of the social and political scene. Besides this, Anand does not approve of his people's traditional thinking on history.[†]

A close study of his fiction and non-fiction shows that Anand does use history in the manner of a postcolonial novelist in his fiction to do two things simultaneously: a) he unravels the oppression of the Indians by the British quite tellingly; b) he also lays bare the cause of this oppression by relating it not as much to the distortion of their past by the colonizer as to their own understanding of the march of events in history.

Anand's delineation of the colonial bondage of the Indians forms a recurring backdrop in almost all the novels that he wrote before the independence of his country, but it does not function merely as a setting. Its microscopic picture dramatized in *Two Leaves and a Bud* brings out forcefully the two repulsive aspects of the presence of the British in India. The first is their dissemination of the theory of racial superiority for legitimizing their rule and the exploitative and immoral nature of their policies and practices. The novel also uncovers the "layer upon layer of the superciliousness, the complacency and the assurance of the spirit that built the Empire" (*Two Leaves* 49) by showing how the British perpetuated themselves in power because "they let lie pass for truth," made "deceit a virtue," and "exalt[ed] the worse to the best" (65). The exposure of the exploitative policies and practices of the British is thorough and complete. Anand's purpose is not merely to expose the depravity of the British, but also to understand why the Indians accepted the colonial bondage for long, without any effective resistance. He found that it was mainly because of their belief that God was always present in history, and events and happenings in human lives were governed by forces beyond their control.

In his *Apology for Heroism*, which Anand calls his intellectual autobiography, he writes: "We put too much emphasis on the unknown fate and prostrated ourselves before the deity.... We became bound in the cycles of Karma" (*Apology* 111). These words capture the essence of the traditional thinking of the vast majority of Indians on time and history. This view had also encouraged gross exploitation of people of lower classes and castes: "...the realities of life lay buried beneath the thick crust of mendacity and superstition, of dogma and unreasoned belief, where knowledge had been sedulously built up only in the interest of the few...." (*Apology* 112).

[†] The discussion on Anand and Rushdie draws on my earlier work published in 1993, 1998, and 1999.

In *Two Leaves and a Bud*, Havre, as Anand's mouthpiece, helps us see that the Indians accepted everything in life with hopeless silence. They put up with all forms of oppression, both at the hands of the British and their fellow beings, with "resigned indifference." When Gangu's visions of liberation are snuffed out by the brute British forces, he understands his situation only in divine terms, as the working of "an inevitable, inexorable fate, imposed by the Omnipresent, Omniscient Providence, of whom Siva and Vishnu and Krishna were the supreme incarnations" (261). In a tone of passive resignation, he tells his companions: "brothers, there is nothing to be done except to make up our minds to settle down here and smoke the hookah, and mention the name of Ram" (213). Anand suggests that in the popular imagination, the British were the kinsmen of God, and therefore to be obeyed. In *Across the Black Waters*, Lalu thinks of George Panjim as the incarnation of God. The soldiers who fight for the British in France "obey the orders of the Sarkar and of God who made us servants of the Sarkar for our past deeds" (133). They think they are "without a will of their own," and therefore act like "soulless automatons" (136).

This is further reinforced in *The Sword and the Sickle*, in which Lalu's perception of the Sarkar is presented through a powerful image, invested with divine force, which inspires awe:

...one could merely stand aside for a moment and contemplate its potencies, stand aghast and gaze, wide-eyed, at its invisible, insidious presence, gaze at it as one gazes at a god, merely to see its magnificent, all-embracing, omnipresent, omniscient being in action and to seek to understand its inscrutable, inexorable presence, to realize the reality behind its various manifestations. (188)

The most striking quality of this image is that Lalu associates all the divine attributes with it: it is all-powerful, omniscient, and inscrutable. It compels obedience in the same manner in which people pay obeisance to the Gods. Anand is suggesting that the Indians have accepted the British as divine beings. As such, they form part of the inexorable wheel of time, and beyond their control.

After establishing that the British and the gods cohabit in the psyche of the majority of Indians, Anand develops the action of his novels to work out a fundamental change in their attitude, without which it was impossible to fight the British. He makes Lalu accept and then recognize that there is an alternative mode of understanding the processes of history, which provides hope for a healthy change.

A careful look at the Lalu novels reveals that, initially, Lalu is totally in the grip of fatalistic thinking. When he returns from France to India, he looks back on his life up to that point as a movement within the inexorable wheel of time, the pitiless fate, which had consumed several of his companions. But he also experiences the first stirrings of the spirit with which he could shake off this burden and break the chains of that fate that prevented people from shaping their own lives. Caught in the thick of turmoil in India after returning from France, he resolves that he would "look for it, he would track it down, the oppressor that drowned the agonies of the people—he would know it and seek to master it." (*Sword and Sickle* 66) This contrasts with the view of his uncle, who sticks to his earlier thinking of the "pessimistic faith in renewal, in the going back to God, who seemed to the devout the beginning as well as the ultimate end of the journey" (67).

Throughout the novel, Anand elaborates these contrasting views in such a manner that they develop into two conflicting attitudes towards the march of events in time, two different kinds of historiography. Lalu has to decide whether he should believe in the divine interpretation of history or the one directed by human agency. Through his struggle and the understanding he finally arrives at, Anand endorses the latter. Lalu's moment of realization is bright and clear:

The Sahibs were no gods, as he himself had seen at close quarters in Europe. The days were gone when he would be cowed by the red-faced monkeys or by rich Indians, like Harbans Singh and other greasy sycophants. Why, the Hindustanis were a separate nation like the Germans and the Francis and the Angrezi people...! They had the right to be a separate nation and, what was more, they had the right to their own land! (82-83)

When Lalu learns to disentangle the presence of the British in India from the belief that they were gods, he develops confidence to think of ways and means to combat them. This provides the basis for debates on the modes of resistance to fight the British.

The Big Heart has the same contrasting views of history at its centre, which are related to the crisis in the community of Thathiars, because of the introduction of machinery in their trade. Ananta understands the constraints of objective reality, that the machines had come to stay in their trade, but maintains that even then one could control and direct change. In contrast to this is the view of Viroo, who says: "I got my trust in my kismet and my God," and that of Ralia, who extends its scope to the whole range of human activities: from playing cards to fighting his masters. Ananta thinks differently about gods and fate: "God's won't help us because, as far as I have known Him, he has always preserved a discreet silence in the affairs of men. And Fate, like money, seems to be bitch goddess, favouring the few..." (197). He does not merely dismiss God's role in human affairs, but also suggests that this has been exploited by vested interests to gain access to wealth and power. Even the British used the idea of providence to legitimize their rule over India. Anand sides with Ananta when he says: "It is a good thing that we are not like wax in the hands of Destiny ... we can now make a choice in this world of evil and destruction, if we have heads and hearts" (198-99).

It is interesting to note that although Salman Rushdie distanced himself from what he calls the earlier group of Indian English novelists, Raja Rao, R K Narayan and Anand (Rushdie 1982:19), in *Midnight's Children* we see a reflection of Anand's insight, for the novel builds a contrast between two kinds of India's past.

Rushdie's assumption in the novel is that India as a nation was born only in 1947. An invented and imaginary country, it was made possible through a massive collective dream. This is expressed in a passage of remarkable power:

There was an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary, into a mythical land, a

country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will—except in a dream we all agreed to dream....” (*Midnight’s Children* 111)

The passage clarifies that Rushdie is putting on a new interpretation on the very entity called India. Since he dates its existence from 1947, he thinks that its five thousand years of history are inconsequential. This is a massive act of interpretation, much more severe than Anand’s opinion that the country’s past had many ugly spots. In Rushdie’s view, post-independence India takes on a mythical shape, because it is the result of a collective dream of a large number of people, representing its different regions and communities.

Although Rushdie’s view might sound like the well-covered thesis that the British really made us into a nation, it is much more than that. For his India is a wished-for country. He invests it with a new character, so that it contrasts with its older version, which is unhealthy and therefore undesirable. The things he associates with the new nation are suggested through the children who were born along with it. Saleem, hints at this:

They can be made to represent many things, according to your point of view: they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation, whose defeat was entirely desirable in the context of a modernizing, twentieth-century economy; or as the true hope of freedom.... (Rushdie Interview 197)

The passage makes it clear that Rushdie understands India’s post-1947 past from the perspective of the 1970s, more precisely, the declaration of Emergency in 1975, about which he states in one of his interviews: “...it seemed to me the period between ’47 and ’77—the period from Independence to the Emergency—had a kind of shape to it: it represented a sort of closed period in the history of the country. That shape became part of the architecture of the book” (Pattanayak 21).

Rushdie projects the idea that India has two kinds of past: the pre-and post-independence pasts, which are qualitatively polar opposites. The thrust of the narrative in the novel is to make us perceive that the problems of post-independence India arise from its occasional lapses into the myth-ridden, undesirable past of the pre-independence days, where time operates on a different scale and the values of a secular polity, associated with the new one, are messed up completely. This is made clear in another passage in the novel:

History, in my version, entered a new phase on, August 15th, 1947— but in another version, that inescapable date is more than one fleeting instant in the Age of Darkness, Kali-Yuga, in which the cow of mortality has been reduced to standing, teeteringly, on a single leg; Kali-Yuga—the losing throw in our national dice-game; the worst of everything; the age when property gives a man rank, when wealth is equated with virtue, when passion becomes the sole bond between men and women, when falsehood brings success.... (*Midnight’s Children* 191)

The passage implies that in a country like India, there are alternative ways of understanding events and happenings because of alternative notions of time. Saleem's version follows the Western mode of horological time, but the other mode is mythical, and is related to ancient India. The imagery employed for bringing out this contrast suggests that the latter is not the Indian mode, as Rushdie understands India, but the Hindu mode. By extension, these two modes of time lead to two modes of understanding the past, or history: one is based on a proper understanding of the movement of time and also on reason and the secular ideal; the other is shaded by myth and legend and aided by superstition.

Apart from this, Rushdie's novel also deals with the problems related to writing history, through his protagonist, Saleem Sinai. Rushdie builds him carefully as a person who is a world in himself—history encapsulated in a human frame. Every passing moment makes him full and heavy. The cracks and fissures in his body are constantly widening because of its pressure. "History pours out of my fissured body," he tells us quite often.

Saleem's connection with history is also suggested by the amalgamation of the public and private in his person:

I was linked with history both literally and metaphorically, both actively and passively, in what our scientists might term 'modes of connection' composed of 'dualistically composed configurations' of the two pairs of opposed adverbs.... (*Midnight's Children* 232)

The different types of the active and passive connections between Saleem and history are both interesting and problematic. As an embodiment of history, Saleem is made into a receptacle of what has happened and is happening around him. This makes him into a passive being, even a kind of victim. Because he is also placed at the centre of all the happenings in the novel, he gives history shape and meaning, which makes him into an active agent. This active part of him becomes the nucleus of the problematizing of the historical discourse.

To begin with, Saleem, like the traditional historians, aspires to produce some kind of a totalization of the past, a complete and coherent account, and avoid the temptation of selective representation of events, which he illustrates by telling us that he would write the history of his family with all its pleasant and unpleasant aspects. But he realizes that it is not possible to do that, because, as Rushdie writes in one of his essays "Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions" (*Imaginary Homelands* 12). This is clarified by the metaphor of the perforated sheet through which Saleem's grandfather looks at his future wife only in bits and parts. This clearly suggests that howsoever hard we might try, all accounts of history are bound to be incomplete; this makes historical knowledge provisional and relative.

Rushdie explains this by connecting Saleem's links with his past through his memory, which "selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also, and yet creates its own coherence. By implication, he suggests that the same happens in the process of representation. Events can be shortened or lengthened by controlling the distribution of space among them" (*Midnight's Children* 211).

In spite of these handicaps, Saleem works vigorously and with speed, which increases the risk of errors:

I remain conscious that errors have been made, and that, as my decay accelerates...the risk of unreliability grows....I am learning ... what actually happened is less important than what the author can manage to persuade his audience to believe.... (*Midnight's Children* 263)

Saleem realizes that mistakes and exaggerations are the lot of a historian; he has to work within serious limitations. But in the last two lines, we also get to see his arrogance and mischief: what actually happened is less important than what the author is able to persuade his audience to believe. It suggests that cohesiveness in historical accounts is more a function of how things are put than the truth of the things themselves. This is where historical truth, no matter how elusive, becomes a casualty.

Rushdie offers another variation on this, when he writes about the preservation of past through memory, the chutnification of history: "in words and pickles, I have immortalized my memories, although distortions are inevitable in both methods. We must live, I'm afraid, with the shadows of imperfection" (*Midnight's Children* 442). He then goes to another extreme, where we see his arrogance: "...I fell victim to the temptation of every autobiographer, to the illusion that since the past exists only in one's memories and the words which strive vainly to encapsulate them, it is possible to create past events simply by saying they occurred" (427). This is where history comes very close to fiction.

At another place, we see the same mixture of helplessness and arrogance. To remove imperfections in his account he thinks of subjecting it to revision: "I should revise and revise, improve and improve; but there is neither the time nor the energy. I am obliged to offer no more than this stubborn sentence: It happened that way because that's how it happened" (443). That is why in his account, Gandhi will continue to die at the wrong time. In fact, it also suggests that the uniqueness of all historical accounts lies in their novelty of presentation or interpretation. It is because reconstructions of reality are "built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as on our perceptiveness and knowledge" (Rushdie, Errata 100).

Reading all the three passages together we find that these are a mixture of humility and authority. Historical recreations are the result of our knowledge and ignorance; carefulness and carelessness; and finally of our modesty and arrogance.

Thus we see that the three novelists sharpen our understanding of the colonial encounter through the fictional recreations of history in their works. We also get to know the reasons for doing so, as well as the complexities involved in the processes of history-writing, which create space for historiographic contestation in postcolonial novels.

Works Consulted and Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Home and Exile*. New York: Anchor Books, 2001.

---. *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Anchor Books, 1990.

- . *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959.
- Anand, Mulk Raj. *Across the Black Waters*. 1940. Delhi: Orient Books, 1980.
- . *Apology for Heroism*. 1946. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1986 (a).
- . *The Big Heart*. 1945. New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1980.
- . *Two Leaves and a Bud*. 1937. New Delhi: Arnold Publishers, 1981.
- . *The Sword and the Sickle*. 1942. London: Asia Publishing House, 1986 (b).
- Dhar, T N. "Historiographic Contest and the Post-Colonial Theory." *Literature and Ideology: Essays in Interpretation*. Ed. Veena Singh. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998: 27-43.
- . *History-Fiction Interface in Indian English Novel*. London: Sangam Books Limited, 1999.
- . "Problematizing History with Rushdie in *Midnight's Children*." *Journal of South Asian Literature*. 28. 1&2 (Fall-Spring 1993): 93-111.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Paladin, 1970.
- Llosa, Mario Vargas. *Making Waves*. Ed and Trans. John King. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.
- Pattanayak, Chandrabhanu. "Interview with Salman Rushdie." *The Literary Criterion*. 18. 3. (1983): 19-22.
- Rushdie, Salman. "'Errata': Unreliable Narration in *Midnight's children*." *A Sense of Place: Essays in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Ed. B Olinder. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1984.
- . *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991*. New Delhi: Penguin Viking India, 1991.
- . "Interview with Rushdie." *Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing and Culture*. 4.2 (1982): 17-26.
- . *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981.
- Said, Edward. W. *Orientalism*. 1978. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

Post-Catastrophe Futuristic Scenarios: A Perspective upon Aldous Huxley's *Ape and Essence* (1948)

K. B. Razdan

Professor and former Head
Department of English
University of Jammu

We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be.
Kurt Vonnegut

It is the devil who taught women to dance and asses to bray.
Old Chinese proverb

... hell is boiling over. And heaven is full.
We're chained to the world. And we all gotta pull.
Tom Waits

Abstract: Post-catastrophe literature related to futuristic scenarios, depicting the human race as extinct, focuses upon grim apocalyptic disasters, mostly as end-products of nuclear cataclysm, by simply projecting current scientific and technological adventurism to a logical outcome in the near future. Post-catastrophe writings become highly relevant as a warning to mankind to desist from use of atomic weapons and other technological innovations that cause irreversible damage to the ecological environment. Modern, and now postmodern, man is symbolically portrayed as the architect of the world of “nightmare and scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion”. It is a world of “perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly”.

Aldous Huxley's classic novel *Ape and Essence* (1948), becomes a landmark text among the post-second World War literary writings of diverse genres of the previous century. *Ape and Essence* portrays twenty-second century California in the United States as the locale of atomic disaster in the aftermath of World War Three. Human civilization has been wiped out, and savages who use half-burnt books as fuel, are shown as grotesque living specimens of genetic mutation, as the consequence of nuclear radiation. This paper focuses on all these factors as illustrated in *Ape and Essence*, closely approximating the current violence and mayhem, and the now established fact that man on this planet is sitting on the crater of a volcano which may erupt anytime.

Keywords: Post-catastrophe literature, dehumanization, higher ignorance.

Post-catastrophe literature till the 1960's and 1970's of the preceding century got consigned to the realms of fantasy and even science-fiction. But with the end of the Second World War in 1945, writers across all prominent genres: fiction, poetry, prose, allegory, science-fiction etc, came to harbour in their minds the real destructive potential of modern mankind to annihilate the human race by a demonic use

of nuclear cataclysm, ecological pollution, global warfare, and last but not the least, terrorism and the stockpiling of nuclear arsenals by the advanced nations of the world. Twenty - first century is already heading towards the completion of its first two decades, and, now, ISIS in Iraq has emerged as the current hydra-headed monster, beheading hapless and innocent victims in a grotesquerie of bizarre satanic executions. Focusing upon apocalyptic disasters mostly as end-products of nuclear cataclysm is justified by simply projecting current scientific and technological adventurism to a logical outcome in the foreseeable future. Post-catastrophe writings serve as a strong warning to mankind to desist from use of destruction-wreaking weapons like atomic bombs, chemical and biological warfare, proxy wars and damage to the ecological environment. Modern and postmodern man is symbolically portrayed as the “central protagonist”, the prime architect of the world of “nightmare and scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion”, besides being a world of “perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and moments of folly” (Frye, 1973). Aldous Huxley’s *Ape and Essence* (1948), attains the status of an iconic work of literature among famous post-catastrophe writings, reflecting an identical world as defined by Frye.

Ape and Essence portrays twenty-second century California in the United States as the bizarre locale of an atomic disaster in the aftermath of World War III. Human civilization is depicted as virtually extinct, as in Bernard Malamud’s *God’s Grace* (1982). The inhabitants of California in the twentysecond-century are mere savages, animals in human garb, with visible signs of bodily deformity as a consequence of genetic mutation, the net end-product of nuclear radiation. These “savages” celebrate “Belial night” as a tribute to Satan, the tempter and the architect of the Sin of Disobedience in the “Genesis.” Most of the savages of the twentysecond-century California, exhibit six fingers and toes, with women having two to three nipples on their breasts. After all, what does Huxley mean by the depiction of such a nightmarish scenario? The answer is simple: the current violence, mayhems, rapes, murders, unimaginable atrocities being committed all around the world, convey the stark and realistic message that the current human world of *Homo sapiens* is sitting on the crater of a volcano which may erupt anytime.

Ape and Essence is bifurcated into two parts: “Tallis” and “The Script”. The first part reflects a dissection in retrospect, of twentieth-century mankind, human civilization and society, from the perspective of a futuristic twentysecond-century society, a post-apocalyptic world, depicting the human race as that of wild savages with repellent genetic mutation, as their trademark. The mutation, as pointed out earlier, is the consequence of atomic and nuclear radiation, the inevitable fall-out of the Third World War in which annihilating weapons like atomic and hydrogen bombs were used. The state of affairs narrated in the second part “The Script” climaxes with the twenty-second century savages of a destroyed California celebrating “Belial Night” as a glorification of evil forces represented by Satan. The evil and horrendous acts of twentieth-century humans who employ their advanced scientific, technological and nuclear prowess to annihilate their own race and civilization, besides propitiating Belial by assassinating a God-fearing, non-violent individual in the form of Mahatma Gandhi. On January 30, 1948, Bob Briggs, a Hollywood movie-writer and director is ruminating about how to carry on with his girlfriend without making his wife suspicious, when the news is broadcast that Gandhi has been shot dead. The news fails to evoke any kind of response or interest in Briggs. Saints cannot be tolerated in

politics, that is why twentieth-century cohorts of Belial had no option but to annihilate Gandhi.

The plot unfolds in an unusual manner: Briggs goes to the studios of Hollywood in the company of the narrator, ostensibly Huxley's persona, and on the way they encounter a truck loaded with rejected movie-scripts, some of which spill over and fall out. Among these spilled movie-scripts is one titled *Ape and Essence*, by a certain William Tallis. This script arrests the narrator's attention and evokes interest in him to meet the author William Tallis. Unfortunately, Tallis is not traceable and his daughter informs that her father is already dead. The "Tallis" section concludes with this and the narrator resolves to print the movie-script *Ape and Essence*, as completely as he found it. It is with the next section, in the form of Tallis's movie-script, that the reader is served with the demonic "feast": a nightmarish, horrific apocalyptic scenario of evil-addicted, war-devastated humanity in general and the United States, in particular. This nuclear war, clearly the Third World War of the future, has occurred towards the end of the twentieth-century or the beginning of the twenty-first, and even a century after the catastrophe, the scars of destruction and annihilation are not only visible but, un-eroded as well.

The fictional "present" of *Ape and Essence* is February 2108. An exploratory expedition from New Zealand, the New Zealanders being the only humans to have remained unharmed by the nuclear war, reaches the North-American continent. New Zealand's geographical remoteness has saved it from the apocalyptic destruction by atomic war. A geologist, a nuclear physicist, a biologist, an anthropologist, a psychologist, an engineer and two botanists are on an expedition to rediscover America, after Christopher Columbus.

Dr Alfred Poole, one of the botanists in the New Zealand expedition, gets captured by the savages of Los Angeles who, besides being inveterate Belial-worshippers, indulge in a grotesque mockery of civilized ways. Their style of functioning constitutes "a savage parody of what were once civilized mores" (Hight 173). Besides Belial worship, a demonic parody of love and marriage takes the form of mass copulation and erotic frenzy on Belial Night. The depravity, dehumanization, and slavish addiction to evil is ironically illustrated by a romantic relationship which blossoms between Dr. Poole and a genetically mutated young woman, known as Loola. Poole and Loola cannot openly express their love for each other. Normal sex or love is taboo in post-catastrophe California of the twentysecond-century. Only mass sex or intercourse during the celebrations of Belial Night, is admissible. Women are dubbed as the vessels of the "Unholy Spirit", sources of deformity as they give birth to deformed babies, thanks to atomic war induced genetic mutation. Huxley's narrative really unfolds a carnival of animalism, transcending the apes like gorillas, chimpanzees, orangutans and baboons. Metaphorically, it can be said with a modicum of finality, that the California of 2108 is an ironic transmogrified 'Devil's Discotheque'. In war-devastated California, nothing is available except poor food. The savages have to depend upon the stripping of corpses of the victims of nuclear war, for valuables like jewellery, clothes, watches, half-burnt currency notes, etc.

During the celebration of Belial Day, Poole learns this fiendish information from Loola: "And then comes the Belial Day... and then... well you know what that means. And afterwards if you have a baby, the chances are that He'll punish you for

what He has made you do” (Huxley 63). Tattered, mauled and shattered remnants of mankind, blindly and wholeheartedly implement what Satan wills, and yet are punished by Hell’s monarch. About the baby, Loola may be having she tells Dr Poole: “I just know it’ll have more than seven fingers. They’ll kill it, they’ll cut my hair off, they’ll whip me... and He makes us do these things.... It’s because He wants us to be miserable” (65). The savage Californians are blighted physically and spiritually by radiation, and their collective memory of the extinction of human civilization has eventually evolved into a blind eulogization of the Devil. Even the church of 2108 is “the body of which Belial is the head and all possessed people are members” (70). A more shocking spectacle witnessed by Dr Poole is how these savages make drinking cups, knitting needles, flutes, ladles, shoe-horns, etc; from bones and enormous piles of human bones, “dry bones of those who died, by thousands, by millions in the course of those three bright summer days...”(74).

During the celebration of Belial night, the Arch-Vicar of the devil becomes Huxley’s spokesman for enumerating one by one, the main causes of mankind’s degradation and destruction during the twentieth-century. Progress and Nationalism are the two main facades, “the two great ideas” which the devil put into man’s head. Under the bogey of progress and nationalism, twentieth-century humans indulged in an orgy of atrocities, which, befittingly, brought about their eventual ruin. Even science and technology, of which modern and post-modern *Homo sapiens* feel so proud, became Satan’s cardinal instruments with which the “Prince of Darkness” wreaked havoc and brought about the apocalyptic end of the human race. The novel identifies man’s perfectionist plans as ape-chosen: “Doesn’t every schoolboy know it? Ends are ape-chosen; only the means are man’s” (11). The words on the gate-post of Tallis’ house condemn man: “The leech’s kiss, the squid’s embrace, the prurient ape’s defiling touch, and do you like the human race? No, not much” (15). The “Leech’s kiss” suggests the blood-sucking nature of contemporary man, the “squid’s embrace” his monstrous disposition, squid being a sea monster akin to the Octopus. “The prurient ape’s defiling touch” symbolizes the excessive lust, lascivious and lecherous tendencies which defile and deconstruct the soul and mind of a human being. Huxley, here, presents a repellent demonic parody of the human and animal worlds, in sheer apocalyptic imagery.

Dr Alfred Poole and Loola dream about establishing their own “Garden of Eden” and, eventually, they succeed in running away from the Californian Kingdom of Belial. The climax of the narrative presents an ironic kind of redemption of the two central protagonists, Poole and Loola escape as fugitives to the community of “Hots”, an oppressed minority of those who do not conform to the society of priest-dominated savages, the minions of Belial. The young lovers as runaways break eggs over the grave of their “creator,” Tallis. Poole feels inspired with a new meaning and an ardent hope for a better and a beautiful life. He recites lines from Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*. The celebrity English romantic poet is made a symbol of love and hope, of revolt and defiance, Poole and Loola as ‘rebels’, feel a catalytic impact upon their minds and souls, thanks to the iconic rebellious euphoria which inundates their psyches on reading Shelly’s poetry. The narrator asks: “is there already the beginning of an understanding that beyond *Epipsychidion*, there is *Adonais*, and beyond *Adonais*, the wordless doctrine of the Pure in Heart?” (148) Huxley concludes the novel with Poole reciting one of the concluding stanzas of *Adonais*. Just as Huxley’s persona retrieves the manuscript of *Ape and Essence* from being burnt with other rejected manuscripts,

so does Poole retrieve Shelley's volume from the ovens of the Californian doxified savages.

Thematically, the novel depicts modern man "crushed by the cataclysmic collapse" (Firchow 134), and the utter failure of contemporary man to "transcend both ape and essence" (Firchow 137). What twentieth-century humans called knowledge is in fact "another form of ignorance highly organized and eminently scientific, but for that very reason all the more complete, all the more productive of angry apes" (27). Thanks to this "higher ignorance" which constitutes our knowledge, "man's social stature has increased" and "the least among us now a baboon, the greatest an orangutan or even if he takes a rank as a Saviour of Society, a true Gorilla" (27). *Homo sapiens*, Huxley seems to suggest, may well be the final ape of history. Man's total subservience to the machine, to the wonders of science and technology, has made him a dehumanized heartless robot which makes the devil's task easier: "Needless to say nobody ever gets anything for nothing.... Take these machines for example. Belial knew perfectly well... that the flesh would be subordinated to iron and mind would be made the slave of wheels" (91). Nuclear weapons and unbridled sex would be enough to annihilate the human race, "copulation resulted in population...with a vengeance" (91).

The Arch-Vicar of Californian savages, while anatomizing the causes of the twentieth-century man's destruction in a holocaust of hate, explains the annihilating increase in human population in these words: "...bodies that grow progressively sicker, scabbier, scrubber, year after year.... The overcrowding of the planet... up goes spiral of industry, down goes the spiral of soil fertility" (93). He goes on to say, "bigger and better, richer and more powerful – and then almost suddenly, hungrier and hungrier...the New Hunger, the Higher Hunger... the hunger that is the cause of total wars that are the cause of yet more hunger"(93). An orgy of criminal imbecility in the name of progress can be witnessed in the present times as well. To cater to the "myth" of Progress and Nationalism, humans adopt a cataclysmic posture, something we witness in the 'whirlpools' of global politics these days. Orwell's Big Brother culture of his celebrity work *1984* which is apparently enforced upon the hapless humans operating within the fictional cosmos of the novel, can be witnessed as dominating the human race across the globe these days in a kind of demonic apotheosis of Satanic politics and global hegemony, enacted by powerful nations. Needless to say, the current state of affairs in world politics seems akin to what Huxley portrays in the post-catastrophe analysis of the Arch-Vicar when he enumerates the main causes which led to twentieth-century man's destruction of human civilization. The Last Loosening of Satan, the penultimate stage before the end of the world as described in 'The Revelation', propels and drives mankind with an "ape-mind" to action. Robert C. Elliot is right in saying that *Ape and Essence* (1948) "is Huxley's dystopia, his *1984*, a hideous picture of the United States after the next nuclear war" (147). Finally, it would be befitting to conclude with these unforgettable lines, which Huxley quotes from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (II. ii. 117-122):

But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority...
Most ignorant of what he is most assured.
His glassy essence... Like an angry ape,

Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angelsweep. (26)

The current species of *Homo-Sapiens*, Huxley seems to suggest, may well be the final apes of history. The ape is still inside the postmodern man, more ferocious and virulent than ever, symbolized by such activities as beheading of innocents by ISIS in Iraq, the bestiality of Boko Haram, and many such terror groups around the world. *Ape and Essence* in a collective mix of plot, characterization, theme and imagery, vis-a-vis twentieth-century human civilization, reflects an such an ambience.

Works Consulted and Cited

Elliot, Robert C. *The Shape of Utopia*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. Print.

Firchow, Peter. *Aldous Huxley*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974. Print.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974. Print.

Hight Gilbert. *Anatomy of Satire*. London: OUP, 1972. Print

Huxley, Aldous. *Ape and Essence*. New York: Bantam Books, 1958. Print.

From Silence to Speech: Women Warriors in In-between Worlds

Nandini Bhadra

Associate Professor and Head
BKM Science College, South Gujarat University

Yet so many stories that I write, that we all write are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that though years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only something of the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories – like her life – must be recorded.

(Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Garden* 700)

In 1975, Maxine Hong Kingston published her critically acclaimed autobiography *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* which describes her experiences and struggles of growing up as a Chinese American girl in California. Apart from being a path-breaking text, Kingston's *oeuvre* may be considered a landmark not only in Chinese American literature, but also in the entire range of diasporic women's writing. Although classified and awarded as a non-fiction, it is truly a hybrid of fiction with non-fiction as it alternates often seamlessly between fantasy and reality, fact and fiction, legend and myth. Much of the book comes out of the oral tradition where stories constantly change between acts of narration. Kingston by her own confession, admits that limiting to any one genre may not be the best possible option for a creative writer as she says "I think that in every one of my books I had to create a new way of telling what I had to say...breaking through pigeon holes of fiction and non-fiction and integrating them" (Fishkin 791). Despite her publisher insisting that non-fiction was more marketable, Kingston decided to call it a "memoir" which is to a large extent autobiographical. Consisting of five chapters entitled "No Name Woman," "White Tigers," "Shaman," "At the Western Palace" and "Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe," the text contains memoirs from Kingston's own life, written versions of her mother's stories and tellings of two famous warrior women legends, thus lying in the border zone where mythology, legend and autobiography converge and diverge, creating a true heteroglossia.

In fact through the vehicle of the Chinese talk story, which is a non-Western mode of narration, writers like Amy Tan and Kingston deconstruct stereotypical representations of Chinese women as sex objects like China doll, Suzy Wong and Madame Butterfly and redefine them through metaphors of dragons and bones. Readers of Asian American literature are familiar with Aiee Group's (Frank Chin and Ben Tong's) nationalist criticism of Maxine Hong Kingston and Tan's essentialist work and allege that they have feminized Asian American literature, and undervalued the power of Asian American men to combat stereo typing of the dominant white culture.

In a pattern similar to the representation of white women, stereotypes exist for Asian women too. Sandra Gilbert points out how a woman writer must examine, assimilate and transcend extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male

authors have generated for her (Gilbert and Gubar 17). The observations made by Gilbert and Gubar in the context of literary productions by 19th century Victorian women writers can also help us understand not only Asian American women writers like Maxine Hong Kingston or Amy Tan, but also an American writer of Indian origin like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni whose fiction, *The Palace of Illusion* is a re-imagined version of the story of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, narrated from the point of view of Princess Panchali, the wife of the legendary Pandava brothers. Like Kingston, Divakaruni also explores the genre of fictional autobiography as the immediacy, directness and artlessness of the form makes it appropriate for an “authentic feminine literary voice” (Chatterjee 139).

Rocio G Davis in an essay entitled “Asian American Autobiographical Strategies” points out how the first person narrative form blends “selfhood and writing to stress evolving subjectivities, challenge contextual authority or claim agency” (42). She also suggests that such texts often exhibit the writer’s process of self-awareness and struggle for self-representation through the narrative structure itself. The form is explored both by Kingston and Divakaruni to show how the narrators juxtapose their lives with those women in their family and community. In such writing, Davis asserts, the “writing subject” views and writes his or her story from the “prism of intersecting lives” which is also dialogic in nature. Susanna Egan uses the term “mirror talk” to describe the process in which the autobiographer is a child or partner of the biographical subject and the represented identity is shaped by the process of exploratory mirroring (quoted in Davis 45). Such reflections within the text stress the dialogic element making the relationship, rather than the individual, the essential centre. For example, *The Woman Warrior* presents both Brave Orchid’s and the child narrator Maxine’s version of the story, while Draupadi’s story is unfolded through *dai ma*’s narrative. In *The Woman Warrior*, Kingston thus blends autobiography with old Chinese folktales—talk stories transmitted from mother to daughter to acquaint her child with their history and culture. In this context I am reminded of an observation made by Michael Foucault:

It is no longer a question of saying what was done and how it was done, but of reconstructing, in and around the act, thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations and qualities of the pleasure that animated it. (*The History of Sexuality* 467)

One of the striking features of the reconstruction of the past is the contradictory nature of the story. The mother tells her daughter stories of other women on which to grow up, but the girl gets confused as to what lessons to draw from her mother’s story. The first story in the volume “No Name Woman” is about a Chinese immigrant’s life in the U S. The mother Brave Orchid, in order to educate her daughter about sexual relations, tells her a story about her aunt’s shameful pregnancy, but from the fragmentary bits, the author infers a different narrative of a brave feminist figure. On the surface, the maternal discourse is a family secret passed on to the daughter by the mother. However in retelling the story the daughter narrator comes to detect a warrior spirit in the supposedly condemned aunt. In our reading of “No Name Woman” and the narrator’s reading of the aunt’s story, we find great discrepancies between the mother’s narration and the daughter’s representation of the same issue. While recollecting the aunt’s story, the mother focuses her narration more on the villager’s attack, depicting their marching towards the house, slaughter of

domestic animals and the meticulous damage they caused to the family. Significantly, another salient message at the beginning and end of the story is: "You must not tell anyone.... don't tell... Your father does not want to hear her name" (*The WW* 15). However in the entire narrative, there is no detailed description of the aunt's narration except for one single paragraph. The reading strategy employs only the indispensable elements to achieve final aim which is the education of the daughter; the maternal inscriber is thus dictated by social necessity.

Amy Ling provides an insightful of the imaginary nature of the narrator's story: reality is created through words and words are ripe with possibilities. Kingston delights in the richness of possibilities and in her own creativity in imagining them. The child narrator reconstructs the story in her own way; imagines that the aunt demonstrates her feminine courage in declaring love for her illicit lover and doesn't even disclose his name, Huntley calls it a courageous act of will. No Name Aunt in fact maintains total silence through the months of her ordeal and refuses to identify the name of the father of the child, she gives birth in silence and dies in silence; - an act of deliberate will. Her name however is never mentioned in the family discourse; a deliberate way to relegate challenging behavior to silence, disappearance and ontological non-existence. If the aunt desires her name to be carved in the "family hall," she has to be a virtuous woman meeting patriarchal expectations, the very things she lacks and regrets.

The child narrator in Kingston's text listened to the adult's talk story, the real punishment is not the raid, but the family's deliberately forgetting her. Kingston solicits ancestral help tapping into the resources of familial oral stories. These stories are more generally popular, communal and empowering talk stories combining autobiography and memoir, history and mythology. Kingston's narrator repeatedly emphasizes her inability to separate these different genres. To quote: "what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, your mother who marked your growing years with stories, from what is Chinese, what is the Chinese tradition and what is the movies?" (*The WW* 12) It is perhaps surprising then, that the text is often praised as exotic, mysterious and Oriental. The American reviewers unfortunately did not see the American setting of the story.

"The White Tigers" is a depiction of a powerful female figure. The story and its heroine provides a stark contrast to the forgotten Chinese woman in the rest of her memoir, the No Name Aunt and Moon Orchid. In the story "At the Western Palace", Moon Orchid travels to the US in the early 1970s to be re united with sojourning husband, a doctor now in America, whose new life, specifically his career and family, leaves no room for her. He informs Moon Orchid that she is for him "people in a book I had read a long time ago..." He further says "it's a mistake for you to be here. You can't belong. You don't have the hardness for this country" (*The WW* 154). Although he had supported her financially for thirty years, he has deliberately erased him not only from life but from memory as well, which is enough to make her mad. Brave Orchid resigns herself and the three part ways never to meet again. Moon Orchid develops a paranoia for Mexican Ghosts imagining they are after her, shuts out the outside world demanding lights turned off, windows closed and reeling in fear. The story in a way explores relationships between women as sisters, and Kingston through the powerful medium of talk story empowers the diasporic Chinese American women marginalized and subordinated by patriarchy and imperialism. Brave Orchid's talk

stories to her sister Moon Orchid (encouraging her to challenge her estranged husband) is about an emperor who had four wives and ultimately the eldest wife successfully claims her space. The elder sister urges Moon Orchid to confront her husband and claim her due as his wife. For Moon Orchid thus the American Continent is a dystopic space which saps her identity. She attempts to work at the laundry and finds the heat quite challenging, fails at every work while her sister who has long relocated to America has adjusted to a hard life. As a result Moon Orchid who does not utter a word of English is left to fend for herself in the American Continent. Eventually she goes mad and dies in a mental asylum in California.

The story in a way, explores relationship between women as sisters, and Kingston through the powerful medium of talk stories, empowers the diasporic Chinese American women marginalized and subordinated by patriarchy and imperialism.

While narrating the above story, the child narrator Maxine refers to her mother's advice: "If you are not heard, you don't exist. You become a ghost. That is why you need to talk story...to be. And To be sane, you have to be able to change your stories. Only mad men keep saying the same old story....you have to tell your story, to stop being a ghostto start being you" (*The WW* 159).

The child narrator in *The Woman Warrior* is trying to negotiate between the sane and the insane, story and reality, myth and history, fact and fiction, the said and the unsaid speech and silence. She also recalls her mother's early act of cutting her frenum, misinterpreted as an attempt to tamper with her speech: "The first thing my mother did was to cut off my tongue." (164). And though the questioned mother over and over again repeats: "I cut it so that you would not be tongue-tied." But the child narrator realizes that the act requires reporting to relieve the pain that bottles up in her throat under the pressure of prohibition and silence.

Kingston's narrative is a bildungsroman, the story of growing up of a Chinese American girl in a California laundry for whom life in the United States is a series of dualities, --- two identities, two voices and two cultures and even two names. Maxine the child narrator says

"to make my waking life American normal, I turn on the lights before anything untoward makes an appearance. I push the deformed into my dreams which are in Chinese, the language of impossible stories. Before we can leave our parents they stuff our heads like the suitcases which they jampack with homemade underwear." (*The WW* 87).

Maxine's head is stuffed with Brave Orchid's talk stories. During the daytime she banishes those tales, yet at night they haunt her,---stories of boxes of ashes next to the birth bed lest the new born is a girl, stories of babies born with defects abandoned to die haunt her dreams---these suitcases of Chinese impossible stories haunt her dreams and are always present with her in America.

At times Maxine is the narrator but sometimes like the story in 'At the Western Palace "she slips into a third person role" representing the collision of two extremes... China in the form of Moon Orchid who is so utterly confused that she even utters such statements like "...so this is United Statesit certainly looks

different from China ...I'm glad to see the Americans talk like us," (*The WW* 186) and America represented by Brave Orchid's children. Brave Orchid acts as a mediator balancing between two poles just as Maxine must learn to do.

Kingston's last story "A Song for the Barbarian Reed Pipe" ends with talk story, "the beginning is hers the ending mine" (*The WW* 206). Talk story as a conclusion is indefinite in nature simply because it in itself is indefinite as it changes with every telling. The story is partially the mother's and partially the daughter's and one cannot say what is imagined. Kingston also rewrites the ancient ballad of Mulan revisiting the heroine Fa Mulan's story. She takes the foundation of the ballad and transforms it into a radically different, much more complex story in which Fa Mulan spends years having to become a warrior, has a child, keeps the baby with her during the battle in a sling beneath her armor and allows her parents to physically carve Chinese ideographs into the skin of her back as symbols of revenge. In the end, Kingston the child narrator realizes that "the swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar.... May my people understand the resemblance soon so that I can return to them. What we have in common are the words on our back" (*The WW* 53)

The swordswoman, the woman warrior, thus provides for Kingston the title of her book. While Fa Mulan avenges her family with the sword, for Kingston, "the reporting is the vengeance, not the beheading, not the gutting, but the word" (53). Kingston in her oeuvre in fact gives voice to the voiceless, victimized wronged women. The immense dimension given to the articulation comes to the fore in the incident where the young Maxine almost brutalizes a mute girl into speech by pinching, hitting and screaming, appealing to her to "talk," "because if you don't talk, you can't have a personality. So talk, please talk" (180-181). Kingston in fact devotes the last pages of her book to the story of a historical female figure Ts'ai Yen, another historical ravished and impregnated woman who gives birth on the sand but eventually returns to her people. However the most interesting part of the story is her articulation of the pain during her captivity through articulation of poetry which she sings to the flute music of her capturers.

Thus in almost all the stories Maxine's potential words become the woman warrior Kingston's autobiography wherein she moves from silence to voice and becomes a word warrior. Kingston's narrative thus stands at the confluence of a large number of discursive traditions—mainstream feminist writing, matrilineal Asian American literature, autobiography, and non-fiction. It has been reported by the MLA as the most commonly taught text in modern University education. Used in disciplines as far reaching as American literature, Anthropology, Asian Studies, Education, Psychology, Sociology and Women's Studies, Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* has great interpretative possibilities and readers of different persuasion may see in the text what they desire or expect to see.

Our engagement with literature is incomplete if we cannot relate it to contemporary reality. As we read Kingston's text we realize that it remains an exemplary one as we have women warriors all around us who have long been suppressed and silenced and have at long last arrived from silence to voice. I'm here reminded of the ordeals of Nirbhaya, the warrior woman (a victim of gang rape in a Delhi bus) who fought till her last breath resisting assault on her body and mind. Her name had not been disclosed initially as the name of rape victims are kept under wraps like the No Name Woman in *The Woman Warrior*. But the victim's mother

disclosed her identity in a public ceremony in December 2015, honouring her, and proudly declare that she is Jyoti Singh, insisting that a rape victim is not a No Name Woman, her identity should not be hidden, and perpetrators of crime should hide their names and conceal their identities.

In literature, as in life, the woman warrior still struggles to find her voice and just as myths oppress women denying them voice, visibility or dignity, the same continues in life too. One is here reminded of John Berger's observations in the context of European art that while a man's presence suggests what he can do, a woman's presence suggests what can be done to her. Thus decentering and disturbing patriarchal myths can be a truly emancipatory exercise as Kingston says in response to Sinologist's criticism of distortion of myths: "[Myths] have to change, be useful or be forgotten.... The myths I write are new" (Kingston, 24).

In the new myth that she writes, Kingston establishes the association between voicelessness and victimization by giving voice to wronged women. The ordeal of women continues and it is for the writers and poets to give words to their mouth and break their silences. The journey from silence to speech will then be truly worthwhile.

Works Consulted and Cited

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London, BBC/Penguin, 1972, pp. 45-46.

Bhadra, Nandini. *Locating Asian American Women Writers in the Diaspora*. New Delhi: PrestigeInternational, 2013.

Davis, Rocio G. "The Self in the Text versus the Self as Text: Asian American Autobiographical Strategies" in *Asian American Literary Studies* ed. Gujarati You Huang, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005, 41-63.

Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston." *American Literary History* 3.4 (Winter 1991): 782-791. Web. 9 April 2009.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar. *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale U.P, 1979.

Kingston, Maxine H. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977.

Ling, Amy. *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry*. New York: Pergamon Press, 1990.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Garden*. London: The Women's Press, 1983.

**“Being Violent”: Critiquing Masculinity and Capitalism in Joyce Carol
Oates’s *Zombie***

Payel Pal

Humanities and Social Sciences Department
Indian Institute of Technology
Kanpur

Abstract: This paper focuses on Joyce Carol Oates’s *Zombie* (1995) as a compelling critique of the patriarchal co-option of violence as socially efficacious and regenerative. If in representing the monstrous psyche of Quentin P, a serial killer who practices ice-pick lobotomy on his victims, Oates ushers her readers into a gothic world of dread and terror, then the narrative no less carries graver social undertones in probing such malevolent perversities. This paper studies Oates’s novel as unveiling America’s obsession with masculinity and heroism vis-à-vis the privileging of violence which escalates racism and jeopardizes the lot of commoners. Against the backdrop of the cultural observations made by Richard Slotkin (in *Regeneration through Violence*), Susan Faludi (in *The Terror Dream*) and James Gilligan (in *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*), the paper analyzes how in *Zombie* violence becomes the apparatus to perpetuate phallogocentric norms. It also highlights Oates’s interrogation of the structures and assumptions of capitalism that goad individuals toward violence.

Keywords: Violence, Masculinity, Capitalism, Joyce Carol Oates, Serial killer.

In much of her fiction Joyce Carol Oates, one of the most celebrated contemporary American women writers derides the nation’s patriarchal co-option with violence seeking to uncover the malaise blighting it. Condemning violence that is often deemed redemptive in the nation’s culture, Oates, a humanist at heart, registers how America’s obsession with violence debilitates the lives of ordinary human beings. Reprimanding the prevalence of violence that finds vindication in the capitalist dispensation of America, Oates in her novels such as *Broke Heart Blues*, *What I Lived For* and *Carthage* demonstrates how violence, privileged as an attribute of strong masculinity, abets predatory drives in contemporary America. Testifying to her reformative vigor, Oates’s fiction provides an incisive critique of phallogocentric violence that panders to heinous notions of heroism and manhood. Keeping in view Oates’s misgivings about cultural championing of violence, the present essay seeks to analyze her humanist credentials in *Zombie* that indict the capitalist order for its complicity with patriarchy in celebrating violence.

Before proceeding further to discuss Oates’s critique of capitalism vis-à-vis masculinity in *Zombie*, a brief overview of the socio-historical phenomenon of violence in America assumes significance. Since its founding, America has internalized the spirit of violence that finds manifestation in various cultural and political assumptions. If seen historically, the eighteenth and nineteenth-century frontier narratives testify to this championing of violence as intrinsic to construct a powerful ‘white’ nation. Richard Slotkin’s *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973), a significant study of the American frontier narratives, discusses the veneration of the frontier hero as much for his masculine “acts of predation” (557) as for bringing about a national salvation

through those aspiring acts. As Slotkin insightfully argues, “the hunter myth provided a justification for the process by which wilderness was to be expropriated and exploited [and] it did so by seeing that process in terms of heroic adventure, of the initiation of hero into a new way of life and higher state of being” (554). Further, this “myth of regeneration” if it “enable[d] the [white male American] to exploit and lay waste the land as a means of transforming and improving it and converting it into . . . [a] world of dreams” (Slotkin 555), then, it also tacitly sanctified his “predatory . . . habits” (Slotkin 556) on the natives as “part of the progressive extension of civilization and progress” (Slotkin 556). Such retributive notion of violence impinged on the collective psyche gradually evolved into the “structuring metaphor of American experience” (Slotkin 5). No wonder, down the centuries the American idea of progress and social stability became irreversibly associated with rugged masculinity gained through regenerative violence.

In examining the cultural phenomenon of violence, Susan Faludi’s *The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America* (2007) also continues Slotkin’s critique of violence. By foregrounding the media representations of the post 9/11 terrorist attacks on America, Faludi shows how the images of frightened women and hapless citizens seeking justice from the ‘bold warriors’ undoubtedly depict the capitalist visions of redemptive masculinity. Discussing a wide-range of narratives from the American superhero movies that include *The Searchers* and *The War of the Worlds* to cult fictions such as James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Faludi justifiably argues that the American hero’s capacity to perpetrate violence had always been celebrated as part of his identity, that of a “larger-than-life . . . rescuer” (322). Needless to say, the political responses and the media coverage of the post-9/11 period “replay a rendition of [this] oldest national myth” (Faludi 271) of the invincible American male shielding the country from evil. If the mass slaughter in the nineteenth-century was driven by a virulent desire to rid the nation of the native population and thereby purify it, then, contemporary America’s mission to decimate the terrorists also draws inspiration from the promise of social rejuvenation vis-à-vis the appropriation of violent masculinity. Arguably, Faludi concludes that this notion of violent manhood as intrinsic to national stability is being continually reinforced, thanks to the American media and its advertising industry.

Likewise, the noted psychologist, James Gilligan in his analysis of the “brutalizing and dehumanizing prison system” (24) of America in *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (1997) also traces the cultural dogma of violence to the “abstractly conceived notion of justice and punishment of evil” (23). Admonishing the culture of violence, the psychologist views it as a malady emasculating “the United States . . . [with] the highest rates of criminal violence of Western democracy or, for that matter, of any economically developed nation on earth” (24). Gilligan exposes the violence-ridden American imagination through a reading of Melville’s *Moby Dick*, a cult fiction, in which Captain Ahab’s “obsession with retributive justice” (23) drove him to “kill Moby Dick” because it was only through such an act that “[Ahab] would destroy the evil and restore justice to the world” (23). Perceptively, the psychologist argues that the nation’s overriding objective of abolishing crime either by killing or “immobilizing” (23) the wrong-doers stems from the cultural privileging of violence. Laced with sarcasm, Gilligan expresses his dismay thus: “What else are our endless, futile, and self-defeating crusades, called the ‘War on Crime’ and the ‘War on Drugs’ but our version of the

voyage of the *Pequod*?”(23). In his study of the American prison system, the psychologist comes to terms with the notion of violence that prevails either as salvaging or retributive. Pertinently, Slotkin, Faludi and Gilligan in focusing on different facets of American culture and history ably record the nation’s perennial investment in violence.

Against the backdrop of such cultural discourses on violence, Oates’s fictions sharpen our understanding of the novelist’s humanist outlook that deplors America’s pervasive violence sanctioned by patriarchy. Importantly, Oates’s sensibility on this subject is also informed by an understanding of American capitalism as thriving on violence. Discerning in her portrayals of the prevailing social climate, Oates expresses her indignation at the escalating violence vis-à-vis concepts of heroism and masculinity. Clarifying to Lucinda Franks in 1980 that “when people say there is too much of violence in Oates, what they are saying is there is too much reality in life” (93), Oates in her fictions uncovers the massive upsurge in crime in contemporary America. Perceiving violence as ubiquitous on the American landscape, the novelist avers that “I did not create the streets of Detroit. When I write about a man who murders or commits suicide, where do I get the idea from? From a hundred different sources, from the violence and cynicism that is part of our national character” (Franks 93). Evidently, in depicting the spine-chilling instances of murder, child kidnapping, school shootouts and killing, Oates cautions how the nation’s overriding fascination with violence is increasingly jeopardizing the lives of the common Americans. While the poignant tales of murder form the core of Oates’s early novels such as *Expensive People* (1968), *Wonderland* (1971) and *The Assassins: A Book of Hours* (1975), the novelist’s late fictions offer more penetrating insights into the egregious romanticizing of violence and manhood. For instance, the author’s *Zombie* (1995) and *Daddy Love* (2013) delineate the torturous psyche of the American men who seek perverse gratification in killing others. Needless to say, through the narratives of sadistic killers Oates depicts the dangers underlying the consumerist ethos of America. For instance, the cultural preoccupation with “the serial killers has developed so far that . . . [people in America now] purchase the nail clippings and hair of some killers, as if they were religious icons” (Schmid 3). Recently, in *High Crime Area: Tales of Darkness and Dread* (2014) and *Prison Noir* (2014), the novelist explores the morbid psychologies of murderers. Oates in her committed endeavor thus seeks to understand the cultural asymmetries that aggravate violence in today’s America. Ellen G. Friedman notes “whether in the form of gluttons as in *Expensive People*; overreachers such as Dr. Pedersen in *Wonderland* and Jean Pierre in *Bellefleur*, who attempts to establish a sovereignty of his own within the borders of the US, or the inventor John Quincy Zinn . . . Oates increasingly associates [her characters] with [the] masculinized ideas of nation and of the US in particular” (Friedman 484). In this context, Oates’s recent novel *Carthage* (2014) also provides an illuminating example. In narrating the story of a psychically distressed young Iraq war veteran who later murders a girl in his locality, *Carthage* tellingly brings to light the underside of the megalomaniac America. The novel protests against the power-hungry nation that preys on societies and individuals. Precisely, Oates deconstructs the hegemony of violence vis-à-vis masculinity in the American capitalist dispensation.

Continuing this argument, this essay examines how *Zombie* foregrounds masculinity and heroism vis-à-vis the privileging of violence as causes of psycho-

social exclusion and disasters. Chronicling the bizarre tale of a homosexual serial killer, Oates's *Zombie* stridently explores the pervasiveness of violence in contemporary America. A middle-class white American, Quentin P's adulation of mindless violence provides a glimpse of the darker capitalist pathologies. A psychopath obsessed with the idea of creating zombies, he represents an extremely perverted form of American heroism. In centralizing Quentin's psychic aberrations, Oates provides a compelling critique of the capitalist society that ruthlessly appropriates and executes power. Accordingly, the novel with its focus on Quentin's malefic proclivities bespeaks the coercive temperament inherent in the capitalist ideology. Oates's fiction delineates how the capitalist ethic of annihilating the vulnerable puts the ethnic others in jeopardy. In so doing Oates, through the narrative of Quentin P in *Zombie*, exposes the racial fault lines underlying the ideals of regenerative violence.

Like Oates's *Blonde* and *Black Water* that are inspired by real life stories, *Zombie* also draws on the story of Jeffery Dahmer of Milwaukee who was allegedly a homosexual murderer known for brutally dismembering the bodies of victims. In portraying Quentin's insane yearning to transform human beings into zombies by practicing ice-pick lobotomy on them, Oates's novel leads the readers into a gothic world of bone-chilling terror. As Cynthia Tompkins states: "The vivid depiction of the intersection of race, class, violence, and desire adds a Gothic appeal to the novel" (693). Ironically, Quentin's repeated failures in experiments that lead to the killing of his victims turn him into a maniac. Despite the gory depictions of his perversity, Oates's novel is not a sensational thriller but a clear testimony to ingrained social evils. Thus, Oates's narrative of a serial killer in delineating the capitalist culture's penchant for mystifying violence condemns the society for creating such monsters. More important, in dramatizing Quentin's desires, ambitions, frustrations and discontent, Oates traces the genesis of his grotesque psyche to the phallogocentric norms of the capitalist society.

In *Zombie*, Quentin comes from a traditionally affluent American family. Scion of a distinguished family who is weaned on the belief that manhood is tantamount to social glory or stellar intellectual achievements, Quentin, since childhood, awe-inspired by his father develops a morbid sense of inferiority. Though he has an extraordinary "I.Q. ... [of] 121" (*Zombie* 3) as a high school student, he lacks the enthusiasm for either winning a "scholarship" or exhibiting his skills in the "sports teams, school newspaper or yearbook" (*Zombie* 4). Undoubtedly, his reluctance to become a man of success turns out to be a matter of deep regret for the family. Contrary to his distinguished father, a Harvard graduate with "Ph.D. ... in both physics and philosophy" (23) and a celebrated professor, Quentin has a lacklustre scholastic record which shames and depresses him. Admitted to part-time courses in the Dale Technological County College, he regularly attends classes but shows extreme indifference to learning. If Quentin behaves as a responsible and obedient son outwardly, deep inside him, he is torn by a pathological hatred of his elders.

Perceptibly, Quentin's estrangement from his family and the society exacerbates with his homosexual impulses. In a phallogocentric society driven by the mystique of masculinity, Quentin unfortunately comes to realize that his sexual orientation will never find acceptance. No sooner his father discovers Quentin's homosexual inclinations, he punishes him by burning down the latter's paintings of

male genitals. However, despite his father's suspicion, Quentin commits his first sexual offence against a black minor. Though detained, he remains adamantly candid declaring that "in my heart I did not plead GUILTY because I was NOT GUILTY & am not" (*Zombie* 20). Being unrepentant, he is rebuked for maligning his family's reputation. Much to Quentin's chagrin, he is taken to a psychiatrist who keeps him under observation. Treating him like a lifeless automaton, the psychiatrists forcibly try to establish his deviant nature: "*What are your dreams, Quen-tin. What are your fantasies. ... Your son Quentin is not making much progress I'm afraid. Did you know he never dreams and his posture is so poor*" (*Zombie* 14-15). Ironically, these punitive measures only enlarge Quentin's sense of victimhood and inadequacy. Significantly, Oates perspicaciously argues how social norms and state apparatuses insidiously atomize citizens and deprive them of their individualities.

Rejecting such a repressive society, Quentin seeks to assert his individuality by creating a 'zombie' that will gratify his sexual desires unconditionally. Testifying to his ruthlessness, Oates depicts how this perverse idea of zombification perpetuates the evils of racism. Metamorphosed into a dreadful racist killer, Quentin shockingly aspires:

A true ZOMBIE would be mine forever. He would obey every command & whim. Saying "Yes, Master" and "No Master." He would kneel before me lifting his eyes to me saying, "I love you, Master. There is no one but you, Master." . . .

His eyes would be open and clear but there would be nothing inside them *seeing* and nothing behind them *thinking*. Nothing *passing judgment*. . . .

A ZOMBIE would pass no judgment. . . . He would say, "You are good, Master. You are kind and merciful." . . . He would beg for his food & he would beg for oxygen to breathe. . . . He would be respectful at all times. He would never laugh or smirk or wrinkle his nose in disgust. He would lick with his tongue as bidden. He would suck his mouth as bidden. (*Zombie* 49-50)

Horribly, Quentin goes on to imagine sadistic libidinal excesses such as anally penetrating his zombie "until [it] bleed[s] blue guts" (*Zombie* 49). Entertaining such perverse fantasies, he stealthily lures his victims, often from the lower strata of the society.

As the novel unfolds, we learn that initially Quentin selects his 'specimens' from the margins of the American society. For instance, he begins kidnapping young African Americans, Asian Americans, hitch-hikers and junkies as they prove to be "safer specimen[s]. . . . [as] nobody gives a shit for" (*Zombie* 28) their absences. Conforming to his white supremacist pride, he voices his racial bias that the African Americans and the Asian Americans are biologically "retarded" (*Zombie* 46) and "monkey-like" races (*Zombie* 65) with "blood so different from [the white Americans]" (*Zombie* 65). Derogating the ethnic others as sub-human, Quentin idiosyncratically calls them as "Frogsnot," "Velvet Tongue," "Bunny Gloves," "Raisin Eyes," "Big Guy," and even "No Name" (*Zombie* 55-56). Disgustingly enough, his perverse desire for a zombie reeks of hideous racism. It is only when

Quentin plans to kidnap “a Caucasian upper- middle-class kid,” he becomes cautious as “lots of people cared for and would miss [the white kid] at once [and] notify the police in a panic” (*Zombie* 109). No wonder, the thrill of hounding a white victim brought him a new sense of challenge.

Significantly, Quentin’s violence informed by his desire for self-empowerment typifies the practice of coercion and subjugation that plays havoc in capitalist America. Indeed, Oates’s “murderous narrator . . . signif[ies] for us a number of important tendencies and truths about contemporary American life” (Marcus 13). One such glaring truth is that of covert racism. Irrefragably, Quentin’s morbidity and indifference toward African American and Asian American citizens betray the white nation’s racial intolerance, particularly in the urban areas during the post-WW II period. The huge influx of African Americans in the cities following the abolition of the segregationist policies is thought to have unsettled the cozy lives of the whites. For instance, Quentin’s grandmother broods over the post-War social changes that allowed the “*coloreds*... to move in [and compelled the] *whites* to move out in a steady irreversible stream to [the] suburbs as Dale Springs” (*Zombie* 102). Raised in such a social climate of hatred toward the blacks, Quentin understandably experiences immense pride and satisfaction in emasculating the ethnic others. Thus, Oates insightfully maps how racism and violence intersect in the American society promising the white male false assurances of masculinity.

In a symbolic way, Quentin’s macabre experimentation with his specimens exemplifies the predatory scientific temper of the American nation. Strikingly, his techniques of lobotomy are informed by the psychosurgical procedures practiced in the 1940s and 50s. As the narrative shows, Quentin learns from a newspaper report about his father’s involvement in the Atomic Energy Commission experiments that fed “radioactive milk” (*Zombie* 171) to regenerate “mentally retarded children” (*Zombie* 171) and treated the “testicles of prisoners” with “ionizing radiation” (*Zombie* 171). Through his wild craving for a zombie and his father’s dubious involvements, Oates unmistakably uncovers the absurdities that have trampled down humanity through decades in the capitalist dispensation. Simply put, Quentin’s atrocities epitomize the antipathies characteristic of the American political structures.

The final part of the novel dramatizes Quentin’s merciless savagery stemming from his excessive narcissism. As his objective of procuring a zombie is continually deferred with the death of all ‘specimens’ during his experiments, he becomes more and more frustrated and furious. So, at last, when Quentin kidnaps a school boy crazily naming him ‘Squirrel,’ he can no longer wait to take him to his laboratory. Losing his patience, he hauls off his victim inside the van, violently penetrating him till the helpless child lapses into “a blackout” (*Zombie* 145). More brutishly, Quentin goes on banging his victim’s head till he dies and finally decides to dump the body into the river.

Oates’s *Zombie* provides a sharp critique of violence inherent in a patriarchal society, showing Quentin’s degeneration and the horrors attendant on it. The protagonist’s vacillations vis-à-vis his self-constructed identities show only too well his horrible psychic fragmentation. With his unruffled appearance, Quentin derives perverse pleasure in beguiling naïve outsiders. He grins: “I could habit a FACE NOT KNOWN. Not known ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. I could move in the world LIKE ANOTHER PERSON. I could arouse PITY, TRUST, SYMPATHY,

WONDERMENT& AWE with such a face. I could EAT YOUR HEART & asshole you'd never know it" (*Zombie* 60). Given his diabolical mindset, Quentin could flaunt himself as the responsible "CARETAKER" (*Zombie* 50) of the university boys who stayed as tenants in his flat and also bestially revel as "TODD CUTLER" (*Zombie* 142) over his innocent victims. Withdrawn, he seeks gratification in self-conversations, jabbering and fantasizing his malicious plots. Strangely, at times Quentin avoids eye contact with others. There is no denying that his grotesque psyche stands as a most pathetic example of the crudities underlying the nation's celebration of violence and masculinity. Undoubtedly, Oates castigates the extremities of waste, abuse and decay rife in the consumerist America.

Oates's *Zombie* thus elucidates that violence can neither be redemptive for the perpetrators nor for the victimized. Ostensibly, Quentin's beastly proclivities and racial vindictiveness hound the lives of the commoners. *Zombie* questions the cultural paradigms of masculinity that in being detrimental to the entire community puts its future in doldrums. Oates interrogates the structures and assumptions of capitalism that goad individuals toward violence. To conclude, if in *Zombie*, Quentin's repressive sexuality in the face of the cherished ideals of violence triggers sadistic brutalities, then Oates more importantly, through his perniciousness captures the devastation that is the lot of the individuals and society in phallogocentric America. Undoubtedly, in so doing, Oates sounds an alarm about the social decadence resulting from America's fascination with violence and thereby denounces the escalation of violence in the American socio-political system.

Works Consulted and Cited

- Faludi, Susan. *The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America*. New York: Picador, 2008. Print.
- Franks, Lucinda. "The Emergence of Joyce Carol Oates," in *Joyce Carol Oates: Conversations 1970-2006*. Ed. Greg Johnson. Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 2006. 85-97. Print.
- Friedman, Ellen G. "Feminism, Masculinity, and Nation in Joyce Carol Oates's Fiction." Special Issue on *Joyce Carol Oates* in *Studies in the Novel* 38.4 (Winter 2006):478-493. Print.
- Gilligan, James. *Violence:Reflections on a National Epidemic*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997. Print.
- Marcus, Steven. "American Psycho." Rev. of *Zombie*, by Joyce Carol Oates. *New York Times* 8 Oct 1995: 13. Print.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. *Expensive People*. New York: The Vanguard Press Inc., 1968. Print.
- . *Wonderland*. New York: The Vanguard Press Inc., 1971. Print.
- . *The Assassins: A Book of Hours*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1981. Print.
- . *What I Lived For*. New York: Plume, 1995. Print.

- . *Zombie*. New York: The Ecco Press, 2009. Print.
- . *Broke Heart Blues*. New York: Plume, 2000. Print.
- . *Daddy Love*. New York: The Mysterious Press, 2013. Print.
- . *Carthage*. New York: The Ecco Press, 2014. Print.
- . *High Crime Areas: Tales of Darkness and Dread*. New York: The Mysterious Press, 2014. Print.
- , ed. *Prison Noir*. New York: Akashic Books, 2014. Print.
- Schmid, David. *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Print.
- Slotkin, Richard. *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973. Print.
- Tompkins, Cynthia. Rev. of *Zombie*, by Joyce Carol Oates. *World Literature Today* 70.3 (Summer 1996): 693. Print.

Sam Shepard's "Curse of the Starving Class": The Contemporary Family and the "Curse" of the American Dream

Galawezh I. Muhiadeen

Asst. Prof., Sulaimani University
Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Abstract: This paper sheds light on the theme of the American Dream and its negative impact on members of the middle and lower classes in their search for a better life in the modern American society. Sam Shepard's social and political play *Curse of The Starving Class* (1978) indicates the strong relationship between literature and politics and the great impact on literature of the changes and developments in the society. The paper is an attempt to prove that the American Dream is a deluding goal. Members of the Tate family struggle to keep their falling farm house, a symbol of their status in the society, but there is no hope of any kind for them. Despite Ella's protestations that they "don't belong to the starving class," they are all trapped in its trauma. Their dreams fade and they are destroyed by the disillusionment of the capitalist system.

The nuclear family, that is the basic unit of the society, functions in this play as the microcosm in which an account of the disappointment and destruction of the 'American Dream' and its negative impact on the social cultural, and political landscape of the modern American society, are discussed. Thus Shepard becomes a leading representative and the voice of the depressed and underprivileged classes who struggle for change and creating a better life.

Keywords: postmodern drama, political theatre, American Dream, American family.

Political theatre is an attempt to analyze the nature and function of theatre in relation to the dynamics of the society and the audience's involvement in it. It is a daring re-consideration of the moral values of the society, and a deep investigation of political topics and contemporary events. It encourages the individual to recognize his own critical understanding. It gives a direction to the people and helps them discover their strengths and build their confidence in a way that they can improve their solidarity, express their opinions and assert their collective determination. Political drama raises questions rather than provide answers. A good example is Shepard's social and political play *Curse of the Starving Class* which represents the strong relationship between literature, society and the individual.

Sam Shepard, American playwright, actor, television and film director, is the author of notable works, including his Family Trilogy: *Curse of the Starving Class* (1978), *Buried Child* (1978), and *True West* (1980), all of which have received considerable acclaim. *Curse of the Starving Class* was awarded the Obie Award. Shepard is considered the leading representative of post-war American drama for being the 'voice of America' of that period. According to Shepard, family is the base of everything. In an interview in 1988; he asserts the significance of family and heredity:

What doesn't have to do with family? There isn't anything.... Even a love story has to do with family. Crime has to do with family. We all come out of each other, everyone is born out of a mother and a father, and you go on to be a father. It's an endless cycle. (Adler 111)

Taking a realistic approach, Shepard concentrates mainly on decay, strife and estrangement in the family and society. In this tragedy he focuses on the inner dimensions of the characters and the emptiness of an artificial, decadent society. Shepard avoided concentration on the commonly admired American values. Instead, he focused on the disintegration of the American family while pursuing the dream of raising and improving their social status and how they are beaten and suppressed in the struggle. Thomas P. Adler says that:

Shepard displays a peculiar power in his highly symbolic family problem plays and allegorizing the American experience, of deflating the myth of America as the New Eden – whether the proverbial “garden” be an orchard in California or a farm in the Midwest – and of showing the new American Adam as the cause of a new fall from grace.(Adler 112)

To Shepard, the family stands for the American spirit. Shepard, throughout the play wants to criticize his community, its social, cultural, and political reality, and the anguish resulting from the deprivation of the family values which struggle to stay alive. The play reflects a gloomy and comic psychological account of the American family; it is about the aggressive conflicts between its frustrated and disintegrated members who are unable to live together and the degradation and destruction of the familial spirit and morality under the influence of a materialistic system.

This play is a social satire in three acts; its plot focuses on a grotesque, disturbed and dysfunctional family: the Tate family. It combines a profound, semi-autobiographical exposition and criticism of 1950s American rural life through a surreal black farce.

Act 1 opens with Wesley trying to fix the broken door of the kitchen and piling the broken pieces into a wheel barrow, but Ella, his mother, asks him to leave fixing the door for his father since he broke the door in the first place, “You shouldn't be doing that...He should be doing it. He's the one who broke it down” (*Curse* 5).

Weston, the father, had broken the door when he had returned drunk the night before as his wife had closed it in his face. His violent attacks threaten the safety of his family and frightens them. Shepard presents the father as addicted to alcohol, unable to work and support his family. Slightly drunk, Weston enters the house speaking to himself. He opens the refrigerator to find it empty, hunger makes him upset and angry, “I don't know why we keep a refrigerator in this house.” The family has nothing to eat; they suffer hunger pangs. This is their ‘curse’ and the main reason for their problems. Weston is idle; he is not the traditional ‘breadwinner’ father and cannot satisfy the needs of his family. His role is the opposite of the patriarchal type which is the base of the traditional family. Poverty and the lack of patriarchal authority are the main reasons for the masculinity crisis of an individual. In his struggle to regain his status in the family, Weston adopts a terrible relationship with

his children and wife. The strife between Ella and her husband represents strained marital relationships in the contemporary age. In the postmodern era the familial role between men and women has changed radically with the decline of the patriarchal authority of the husband. Ella is an independent woman with a mind of her own. A self-centered and absent-minded mother, she indulges in daydreams and fantasies to escape the gloom and hopelessness of her situation. She denies her actual bankruptcy because social status is decided by the economic status of the family.

When Wesley opens the refrigerator and finds it empty, the conversation goes thus:

Wesley: I'm hungry.

Ella: How can you be hungry all the time? We're not poor. We're not rich but we're not poor.

Wesley: What are we then?' (*Curse* 12)

Ella not only scorns her husband, she betrays him as well. She decides to sell the house and to start a new life without even telling him: "He's not going to kill me. I have every right to sell. He doesn't have a leg to stand on" (*Curse* 16). Weston, a previous pilot, has lost one of his legs in the war, so physically, spiritually and symbolically he lacks power. Weston's weakness makes him face a masculinity crisis as a result of which Ella further neglects him. She plans to visit Europe before she gets old and it becomes too late. "They have everything in Europe. High art. Paintings. Castles. Buildings. Fancy food.... I'm selling the house, the land.... Everything" (*Curse* 14). Ella aspires for the American dream of prosperity and luxurious life. So she tries to sell the farm to Taylor, a greedy land dealer, even if it means going to bed with him. Weston speaks as a powerful man, "I'll track her down and shoot them both in their bed. In their hotel bed.... I was in war. I know how to kill" (*Curse* 38). Weston uses violence against his wife only to prove his manhood.

The refrigerator is opened and closed by every member of the family but it is often empty. It is the center of the hunger and starvation theme of the play and a symbol that emphasizes the meaning of deprivation of the family members. All the characters feel hungry though they all agree that they do not belong to the "starving class". "Starving" in the play stands for the "hunger" for satisfaction resulting from psychological agitation within the characters. Their starvation is not just physical or economical; what they miss is love, trust, close familial relations and affection. The refrigerator is the story of their lives as Americans starved for a sustenance that is no longer there and they all search for. As Adler calls it, "the spiritual starvation amidst plenty":

The starvation is multilayered, not only physical and emotional, but spiritual as well... [It] conveys an almost metaphysical feeling of anguish and desperation. (Adler 112)

Like many Americans under the Capitalist system, the family is controlled by the ethic of consumerism. They believe that buying and owning things are a guarantee of future success. They borrow money from the banks because it is offered to them easily and they think it does no harm. Weston, the irresponsible father who has driven his family deep into debt, not only borrows to buy, but this analysis of the fantasy

world of the American economy gets even more frighteningly alarming when he uses “invisible money”:

“The whole thing’s geared to invisible money.... You never hear the sound of change anymore. It’s all plastic shuffling back and forth. It’s all in everybody’s heads. So I figured, if that’s the case, why not take advantage of it? Why not go in debt for a few grand, if it is all numbers? If it’s all an idea and nothing’s really there, why not take advantage?”(*Curse* 194-195)

Wesley, the idealistic son, struggles in order to avoid being a failure like his father. He clings to his roots which help him define his identity. He is connected with the land of the West: “I could smell the avocado blossoms...I could feel this country close like it was part of my bones” (*Curse* 5). Wesley rejects the idea of selling the house because it means a lot to him. His house and his identity are linked together, so losing his house would mean losing his identity. Wesley’s act of fixing the door shows his connection with this house. He wants to protect the house and to keep his family together. Wesley’s crisis begins when these feelings begin to intermesh with their terrible state of poverty and the continuous quarrels between his parents. The theme of fragmentation of the family in the play is interconnected with the wife-husband relationship, which is described here symbolically in broken, incomplete expressions:

Feet coming. Feet walking toward the door. Feet stopping... Foot kicking the door. Man’s voice. Dad’s voice. Dad calling Mom. No answer...Wood splitting... Glass breaking... Man cursing. Man going insane. Man yelling. Shoulder smashing. Whole body crashing. Woman screaming. Mom screaming. (*Curse* 8)

The father is not a good role model for his son. Wesley suffers from his parent’s behavior and finds that both his parents are idiots; instead of thinking of how to protect their family they both want to sell the house: “She can’t think. He can’t either” (*Curse* 29). Wesley needs to see his father strong but reality reveals the opposite. Wesley, the postmodern son, does not have a hero to imitate; he then will be a failure like his father. Shepard shows how the son might inherit the diseases and characteristics of the father because heredity plays an essential role in forming one’s identity. The physical image and the weaknesses of the father’s character are reproduced in Wesley’s body. Thus the children substitute for their parents. Inheriting and watching each other, they all learn similar traits, infected with this social ‘curse’ which possesses them and they can do nothing about. The ‘curse’ is that they are part of the social ‘starving class’ but they hold on to the ‘American Dream’ which they cannot attain. Wesley returns, and brings a sick lamb from outside. The lamb is affected by ‘maggots’. It resembles Wesley himself, for both are infected victims and need treatment. There are Biblical allusions too; Abraham wanted to sacrifice his son Isaac but then slaughters a lamb instead. Christ himself was the lamb who shed his blood for the sins of mankind. Wesley is the victim of both his biology and the political-social system of his country (Adler 117).

The feeling of loneliness is a common characteristic of all Shepard’s heroes who face masculinity crisis including Wesley “Makes me feel lonely”. The struggle

between the estranged parents ruins all mutual understanding with their adolescent rebellious daughter Emma. She, like her mother, does not want to acknowledge the bad circumstances and the social status of her family, “We don’t belong to the starving class! There is a starving class of people, and we are not part of it!” (*Curse* 142). Infected by the American dream she is also yearning for the lifestyle of richer people, yet she cannot have it. She tells her mother, “the Thompsons have a new heated pool. You should see it, Ma. They even got blue lights around it at night. It’s really beautiful. Like a fancy hotel” (*Curse* 139).

The fact is that Emma is fully aware of the hard circumstances of her family and like her brother Wesley, she criticizes the parents because of their wrong behavior and their wish to sell the house for their selfish purposes. Emma represents the contemporary liberated woman in the play. She wants to free herself and become independent of man’s authority in her search for security and meaning in life. She plans to go to Mexico and live a life full of adventure. She enthusiastically plans to become a mechanic and pursue her projects and horseback fantasies. She dreams of new possibilities and a better life: “I was going to work on fishing boats... I was going to work my way along the coast... I like cars. I like travel” (*Curse* 18). Emma wants to work and to live her life the way she likes.

The change in the role of modern women affects men negatively because in this case they cannot exert their authority over women. So the relationship between Emma and Wesley is a difficult one. Emma is carrying materials for her 4-H project on how to cut up a frying chicken, which may be read as her pretense of upper-class table manners. She goes to look for her chicken in the family’s refrigerator only to find it is gone. Emma accuses her mother of boiling the chicken and begins to argue with her and with Wesley. The language between them lacks respect, as Emma says to her brother: “Eat my socks.” Her brother in return ridicules her and her work, and he urinates on her charts and destroys them:

Emma: What type of family is this?

Ella: I tried to stop him but he wouldn’t listen.

Emma: (To Wesley) Do you know how long I worked on those charts? I had to do research. I went to the library. I took out books. I spent hours.

Wesley: It’s a stupid thing to spend your time on.

Emma: I’m leaving this house! (*Curse*, 12)

Emma’s strong character is opposite to that of Wesley who is connected with his house and the life at the farm. As a postmodern woman she is educated and has the ability to look forward toward a new future. Yet with no guidance from their parents, Wesley and Emma are lost souls. Emma becomes the victim of criminals and Wesley prepares to assume his father's role as a violent drunk. Their dreams are vanishing and they are destroyed in the relentless march of a ‘civilization’ which leads to the death of the American family.

Shepard's characters may not be perfect, but they are real and life-like people with the depth of humanity that he attributes to them. They are all people that we can recognize in the world around us. Annamaria Pileggi, Professor of Practice in Drama in Washington University, says:

This is a family that is down and out. They're starving, and not only in the physical or economic sense. They're starved for intimacy, for love, for companionship. Their needs aren't being met and they're literally wasting away... Shepard's theme is the dissolution of American family life How the sins of the father are passed down to the son, and how that inheritance affects the rest of the family.... This is a recognizably American landscape, and these characters are all people that we can recognize in the world, and yet the structure and experience of the play are deeply unsettling, almost Absurdist. Shepard is constantly displacing audience expectations and assumptions in a way that's almost nightmarish. *Curse of the Starving Class* is a very funny play. We do recognize ourselves in these characters, which keeps us from simply dismissing their foibles. (Pileggi)

The "curse" in the title of the play refers to everything, from the tragic flaws inherited from ancient generations down to the new ones, which damn whole families and force the action towards inevitable disaster.

Thus, when at the end of the play Wesley and Ella talking about Weston's story about an eagle that picks up a cat in its talons, the cat fights so fiercely that both, the cat and the eagle, come crashing down, and fall to earth to be killed at once. It is not only the animals that are destroyed, but also the myths of "identity," "family," and "prosperity." In other words, the promise of the American Dream.

The play is a symbolic drama; it depicts the social and political landscape in the contemporary American history during the second half of the twentieth century. The unnatural absurdist plot of *Curse of the Starving Class* embodies what Shepard thinks is wrong with America. The play deals with the themes of search for identity, both personal and social, the lack of spirituality, the loneliness and fragmentation of the family, and the continuous physical and psychological starvation of its members for familial intimacy and contentment. The unrest of the family and the psychological disturbance of its members result from the society that is full of dishonest, sharp-dealing, exploitative businessmen and a rapidly changing economic boom run by men who want to transform the natural landscape into houses or restaurants. Thus this dark comedy becomes an exploration of the American family psyche; it depicts the reality of poverty-stricken families and the mentality and the psychological disturbances that accompany it. It exposes the nature of the capitalist system which controls the American society and its negative impact on the middle and working classes. The Tate family represents the lower-middle-class American families that today's economy has made all too familiar all over the world. The members of the family are all ambitious for a better life, but cannot escape the vicious circle of violence and desperation in which they are trapped. It is an account of the disappointment and the decline which result from the disillusionment of the American dream. The materialism and urbanization of the American dream are fragile things in a harsh-dealing Western political and economic system which spells ruin and unhappiness. The play reflects the diminishing role of the family which is on its way out as an institution. More than losing a house, a family or a culture is at stake; it is like losing the country.

Contrary to the popular notion that poverty means simply being hungry, naked and homeless, Shepard wants to say that real poverty is being unwanted, unloved and uncared for; this is the greatest poverty. The remedy for this kind of poverty can be found in our families and inside our homes, rather than outside in the society and the country at large.

Works Consulted and Cited

All quotations of the play are from Sam Shepard, *Seven Plays*, ed. Richard Gilman. New York: Bantam Books, 1981. Print.

Adler, Thomas P. "Repetition and Regression in *Curse of the Starving Class* and *Buried Child*," *The Cambridge Companion to Sam Shepard*. Ed. Mathew Roudane. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 111-112. Print.

Pileggi, Annamaria. *PAD presents Curse of the Starving Class. Liam Otten*. PAD, Washington University's Performing Arts Department in Arts & Sciences. Web. 18-21, November 2010. www.imdb.com, www.theguardian.com, www.wustl.edu

Many Stories, Many Lessons: The Plurality of Draupadi, Sita and Ahalya

Benu Verma

Assistant Professor, USHSS
Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University
Dwarka, Delhi

Abstract: The relationship between life and literature is a dialogic one. Life inspires literature and literature in turn influences life. Various genres in which literature is manifested reflect on the orientation, significance as well as the place of the text in its social environment. Mikhail Bakhtin proposes that genres dictate the reception of a text. Yet the same text could be interpreted differently in different times and contexts and be rewritten to reflect the aspirations of the author and her/his times. The many life stories of the feminine figures from the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* assert not only the inconclusive nature of myth and the potency of these epics, they also tell us that with changing political and social milieu the authors reinterpret and record anew given stories to contribute to the literature of their times. Draupadi as the epic heroine of *Mahabharata* has been written about popularly and widely and in each version with a new take on the major milestones of her life like her five husbands and her birth from fire. The motifs of her disrobing and her hair have been employed variedly to tell various stories, sometimes of oppression and at others of liberation, each belonging to a different time and space. Each story reflected the political stance and aspiration of its author and read by readers differently as per their times and contexts. Through an examination of various literary renditions of the feminine figures from the epics, like Draupadi, Sita, and Ahalya, this paper discusses the relationship between life and literature and how changing times call for changing forms of literature.

Keywords: Draupadi, Sita, Ahalya, retelling myths.

“In India and Southeast Asia, no one ever reads the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* for the first time. The stories are there, ‘always already.’”
(Ramanujan 46)

“Mythological references in literature establish our psychological origins or the structure of our collective unconscious: we all know how a single reference to a character or situation in an episode of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* suddenly illuminates a whole personal or social context and unleashes a flood of associations in the readers or listeners.” (Satchidanandan)

“...It is because women are never fully incorporated into the normative structures of their societies that subversion becomes an archetypal feminine activity.” (Chatterji 5)

Draupadi, Sita and Ahalya – three mythic heroines from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* – have been re-imagined and narrated, performed and remembered diversely. While there is a basic storyline to their multiple tellings, the famous motifs of their life stories have been variously imagined and re-produced. The various

tellings of their life stories are a product of different times, spaces and political positions of their authors. In the larger narrative universe, the diversity of their connotations merges together as a collective memory of each of them, a memory which is not static but fluid, which can be borrowed from and added to as per the authors and readers who receive them. The very nature of myth being open-ended, every effort at particularizing it through a new story, location or purpose widens the scope for more alternative storylines for its characters, situations and objectives.

Interestingly the etymology of names of these mythic figures has also been a source for these multiple tellings. For example 'Sita' in Valmiki's *Ramayana* is supposed to have been found in a furrow by king Janaka who adopted her. This story of her birth is usually justified as the word 'sita' means 'furrow'. In a Laotian *Ramayana* telling '*Gvay Dvohrabi*' Sita is born in Ravana's house as a reincarnation of Indra's chief queen Sujata, who seeks revenge on Ravana, for seducing her in Indra's form. On the advice of astrologers, the infant Sita is put in a golden casket and set afloat on a river. Janaka finds the casket and as he opens it, the infant girl is rubbing her eyes, so she is called 'Sita', where in 'si' means rubbing and 'ta' means eyes (Singaravelu 239). Similarly, in the Kannada oral telling of *Ramayana*, Sita is born out of a pregnant Ravula's (Ravana's) nose as he sneezes, in Kanadda 'sita' means 'he sneeze'(Ramanujan 36). 'Ahalya' means 'flawless' and 'one who cannot be ploughed' – a virgin, which could also mean one who cannot be tamed as her marriage could not contain her sexual desire. Draupadi has been named as Krishna, Yajnaseni, Paanchali, each of these names defining a different aspect of her life. The potential of their diverse life stories lay latent in their names as also in their mythic trajectories. Ernst Cassirer (2-33) has argued that language and myth share a solidarity. Language is both specific as well as ambiguous. One word could refer to more than one thing, its potential is ceaseless. Similarly myth with its tendency to be inconclusive belongs to the negative side of language: when science, reason and logic cease to please man, myth takes over as the predominant force, propelling many political and social motives hitherto condemned or rendered illogical.‡

The ability of these mythic feminine figures to transcend and connect the three realms of the divine, the mythic and the mortal, makes them relevant in the contemporary times and all the other times and contexts that they have been rekindled in. They act as a link between the mortal woman and her ideal self in the divine realm, the Great Goddess. William Sax (134-156) in his study of the '*Pandava Lila*' in Garhwal, describes Draupadi's identification with Goddess Kali. The *Pandava Lila* performance and especially the part played by Draupadi in it, who is both a Goddess as well as a wife and a daughter-in-law, highlights the significant link between the figure of a Goddess and that of an ordinary woman who is a wife. The two figures are intimately connected by their primary duty of protection of the male lineage. The *lila* is performed during a '*shraadh*' (annual rituals for the dead ancestors) ceremony, wherein the daughter-in-law of the family performing the '*shraadh*' gets possessed by Draupadi, who is also looked at as Kali in the region. This woman possessed by Draupadi/Kali is offered a goat kid sacrifice on the last day of the *lila* performance to quench her 'thirst for blood' (reminiscent of a popular belief that Draupadi was responsible for the Mahabharata war).

‡ Elsewhere I have argued that Jung's idea of the archetypal feminine, the anima, arising out of our collective unconscious is manifested in the mythic and the divine feminine, rendering the former its potential for multitude of interpretations (Verma 62-63).

As these mythic heroines occupy a flexible, abstract and pervasive space between the sacred divine and the profane mortal/everyday, they can guide, dictate, be guided and dictated to, reflecting subject positions of their authors and their desirable readers. This paper is an attempt to study some of the varied connotations of these mythic feminine figures through some popular motifs of their lives, the deployment of their sexual agencies and their connotations in the larger narrative universe which presupposes the continuum of mortal, mythic and divine spheres for human life.

Popular Motifs of the Mythic-Divine

According to the *Mahabharata* by Vyasa, Draupadi was born from the *yajna* fire, unwanted, uncalled for, to destroy the order of the Kshatriya, hence her birth was preordained to bring about the destruction of the warring clans. In some of her renderings she has been looked at as Kali, the Goddess of destruction for her role in bringing about the war. As the story of Barbareek (Ghatotkacha's son) goes, his decapitated head witnessed the eighteen day war of *Mahabharata*. When he was asked who really slew the Kauravas, he answered that he saw only the 'sudarshan chakra' (Krishna's discus) flashing everywhere and Draupadi roaming the field, drinking the blood of the enemies (Bhattacharya, *She who must be obeyed* 29). She has a thriving cult in the South of India and temples devoted to her as a deity where her devotees celebrate her as a virgin Goddess, the Amman. In 'Bheelon ka Bharath' – an oral telling of Mahabharata among the Bheel tribe of Gujarat (transliterated and translated as a collection of the episodic songs of Bheel *Mahabharata* carried out by the Sahitya Akademi), Draupadi has been described as a goddess, who controls and threatens lives of Pandavas and does this in collaboration with Kunti, who is also a Goddess.

Sita has been interpreted as the goddess Lakshmi, as an earthly consort to Vishnu as Rama. She has been looked at as the goddess Kali in *Adbhut Ramayana* (the Ramayana of wonders) – written somewhere in the 15th century in the *shakta* tradition (Coburn 5-7). In many regional telling of *Ramayana*, Sita is supposed to have taken birth only to kill Ravana, as per a divine plan. Ahalya was created by Brahma as the most beautiful woman in the universe. Her divinity is established through her unnatural celestial birth. Though she is closer to the mortal woman than Draupadi or Sita, having been punished and suffered as a mortal for a mortal sin, her unusual trajectory, her birth and her survival of the curse for an exceptionally long time (mostly recorded as 60,000 years) bring her close to being divine whereas her suffering for a mortal sin makes her the perfect role model for the mortal woman. Valmiki describes Ahalya in Rama's words as follows:

The Creator, it seems, with utmost care
had perfected this form divine, enchanting.
Like a tongue of flame smoke-shrouded,
Like the full moon's glory ice-reflected,
Like blinding sunlight mirrored in water
(Bhattacharya, *Panchkanya: The Women of Substance* 16)

Sita is popularly appropriated for her temptation for the golden deer and her abduction, her loyalty to Rama and her strength of character, both for defending and challenging patriarchal control on women. The popular motifs of her life story are her

birth, which has multiple versions, her *agnipariksha* (trial by fire) and her disappearance into the Earth. Draupadi's most appropriated life event is her disrobing in the hall of men, her birth from fire, her dark complexion, long hair and her marriage to five men. Ahalya's infidelity to her husband Gautama, her coitus with Indra and redemption by Rama have been the life events popularly picked up and retold, mostly pivoting around Ahalya's knowledge of Indra as an imposter and her regret or defiance of the act. Their stories are both in conformation to and questioning patriarchal norms for women.

The Sexual Agency of the Mythic Feminine

The use of feminine figures through their sexualities to symbolize the ominous in the epic tradition has many precedents, most famously in the case of Helen of Troy. Helen, who is remembered more for her seduction by Paris than any other event of her life, was both the cause and the price of war. Medea, another popular Greek epic heroine is remembered for having killed her children in order to avenge herself against her infidel husband, Jason. Jason is emotionally shattered by this event. Medea's identity as a 'lover' overpowers her identity as a nurturing mother as she kills her own children, hence exposing the ominous and destructive potential of her sexuality, which connotes different things in these two identities. As a mother in a patriarchal society who uses her children as means to avenge herself, she shatters the stereotypical image of the ever protective and nurturing mother. On similar lines the attempted disrobing of Draupadi's menstruating and therefore potentially reproductive body is understood to have caused the bloody war for kingship. As described in the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi, brought to the hall of men, while she is menstruating, is ritually impure and wearing a single garment, her sexual and reproductive powers are exposed to the public eye. The humiliation and rage caused to Draupadi, is avenged through the Great War which killed thousands of people. Her sexuality also like Helen's and Medea's therefore holds destructive potential, unraveled in the event of the war. The process of her disrobing was never complete. However, the threat of that which could potentially be robbed off her spelt destruction for the *Kshatriya* order.

Similarly it is the abduction of Sita by Ravana, and her confinement in his palace that brings the *Ramayana* to its climax and calls for the final destruction of evil. Sita becomes the crucial link in the chain of events, which, according to many *Ramayana* tellings (for instance, the *Adbhut Ramayana* and the Kannada oral telling referred to above), were pre-ordained and part of the divine scheme of things. In both cases it is the impending 'rape' or the threat to these heroines' sexual honor that brings about destruction. Draupadi and Sita remain untouched but they suffer; they have to pay a price for something which is not their doing. Ahalya on the other hand, succumbs to the actual act of coitus, which makes it inevitable for her to be punished in order to uphold the institution of marriage. Draupadi as 'Dopdi', in her famous rendering as a tribal naxalite woman in a short story by Mahashweta Devi, turns the tables by questioning the very concept of shame and honor attached to a woman's body. After being raped by Senanayak and his men, she refuses to be clothed again, accosts him with her naked body and asks, "Are you a man? There is not a man here that I should be shamed!" (Devi 37)

Sita, in some of the tellings of *Ramayana*, has been given a past life. A chaste woman called 'Vedavati' (a manifestation of Sri Lakshmi), desirous of marrying Vishnu and while undergoing penance for it, was approached by a lustful Ravana. He

tried word and force but could not have Vedavati, who promised to be reborn to destroy him and jumped into fire (Doniger 22). In two of the Laotian telling of *Ramayana*, *Rama Jataka* and *Gvay Dvohrabi*, Sita is born as a reincarnation of Indra's wife, who was seduced by Ravana in the guise of Indra and seeks revenge in her birth as Sita (Singaravelu 239). Whereas Sita is given this sexual past in some versions, in 15th century *Adhyatma* (spiritual) *Ramayana*, we see the insertion of an illusory Sita – Maya/Chhaya Sita (Hess 9). It is said that it was actually this Maya Sita whom Ravana abducted so that the celestial plot of his doom could be unfolded, while the real Sita stayed safe with the fire god (Agni). After Rama, won her back from Ravana, he forgot about the duplicity of Sita and ordered *agnipariksha*. The fire God took in the Maya-Sita and gave him back the real one. This version absolves any possibility of sexual pollution of Sita, even by the sight or touch of Ravana. According to a local bard, Bacan Singh Rawat of Toli, Garhwal, whom Sax interviewed, it was this Maya Sita who was later re-incarnated as Draupadi (137).

In her elaborate analysis of the motif of Sita's *agnipariksha*, Hess highlights the embedment of this episode in the cultural and social memory of India. She argues that while the fact of the 'trial by fire' is pervasively retained in the Indian psyche, the concept of Maya-Sita, which brings in some justice to Sita as a woman and does away with the absurdity of the 'trial by fire' episode, is largely forgotten (even though it was shown in the popular TV series on *Ramayana* by Ramananda Sagar). While *agnipariksha* is popular, remembered and often quoted, the concept of 'Maya-Sita' is far less known. This reflects the patriarchal order's preoccupation with sentencing and maintaining prescriptions of behavior and conduct for married women. Hess argues that the memory of *agnipariksha* is deeply embedded in the Indian psyche, and is manifested in so many sacred patriarchal events like vows of marriage, where agreeing to jump into fire at the husband's command in order to prove one's fidelity and subordination to the husband is taken as the ultimate test of virtue.

In Bheel Bharath, Draupadi's sexuality is deployed as a preamble of destruction of the powerful king of serpents, Vasuki. Draupadi lives in her seven-storied palace in Hastinapur. While her handmaidens are grooming her one day, a golden hair falls from her head and is carried away by the wind to the 'Pataal lok', the underworld. Serpent king Vasuki, who is in deep sleep is awakened and gets intrigued by the golden hair. He becomes desirous of making love to the woman whose hair it is. In spite of his wives' effort to restrain him, he mounts his horse and after wandering on Earth for some time, finds Draupadi sitting on a swing with her golden hair loose, shining in the sun. He carries Draupadi to her bedroom and ignoring all her protests he seduces her. Draupadi initially resists and tells him that he will be killed if the Pandavas were to find out about this, but eventually she gives in. She then cooks for him a thirty two course meal, serves it on a golden platter and feeds him, heats water for his bath and bathes him. Afterwards she asks him to leave, lest her husbands find out. Vasuki insists on spending the night with her. As Arjuna enters, he is beaten up by Vasuki and is hung on a nail on the wall tied by a hair from Vasuki's moustache. Vasuki and Draupadi then have sex on the bed under Arjuna's gaze, who cries all night in pain. In the morning Vasuki cuts the hair string with his sword and Arjuna falls from the wall with a thud. After Vasuki leaves, Arjuna whimpers and tells Draupadi that Vasuki's visit would now be an everyday affair. He expresses the intense pain he might have to go through physically if Vasuki's visits continue. He then asks her to find out from Vasuki how he can be killed. The following night while

Vasuki is asleep, Draupadi crawls into his stomach and finds out the secret of his destruction. Draupadi tells Arjuna that the only man who can save them from Vasuki is Karna, son of the Sun God. Then follows the revelation of Karna being the son of Kunti and consequently also a Pandava. Karna agrees to help his brother and sister-in-law in distress. Next time when Vasuki comes to the palace, Karna fights him and burns eight of his nine hoods. As the fire catches his body, Vasuki pleads for his life and Karna being kind-hearted, spares his life and lets him go with his one hood intact.

While Ahalya's sexual agency has been deployed to create a role model for the ideal, chaste married woman, it also exposes the male privilege within a patriarchal social order especially through the institution of marriage and Rama's ability to free her from her curse. Her later renditions have been around the question of her sexual will as a woman, her dilemma as a married woman succumbing to Indra and her internal conflict of emotions especially after being released from the curse. In a poem by Pratibha Bhat (51-52), written from Ahalya's perspective, after being punished and petrified as a stone, she expresses her innocence and the agony of waiting. Manorama Mahapatra (34-35) vindicates Ahalya of any wrong-doing in her poem, "Ahalya: the Self-fulfilled". She establishes her as a woman with her own mind, her own choices.

She is what she is! Herself Her Time present Her Time future; She
manifests now To fulfil herself. She needs the touch Of no holy feet
Any longer!(35)

The author establishes Ahalya's agency as a woman in an unapologetic manner. Without getting into the question of what she did and whether it was correct or not, Mahapatra attempts to disconnect her freedom as a woman from her actions vis-à-vis her patriarchal environment. The author says that Ahalya, who stands for the modern Indian woman in this poem, shall now define her own present and future. Her time is now, or whenever she chooses it to be. She will no longer abide by her social or physical boundaries (from the symbolism of Ahalya being bound as a stone, made immobile for centuries), because her time to find herself as a person is here and she shall cease the moment. So, this new Ahalya shall find her freedom, assert herself and be whoever she wants to be in the present or in future and she does not need any 'holy feet' any longer. Here the 'holy feet' stand for both religious and patriarchal institutions which are socially sanctioned ways for women to assert themselves, but actually keep women from achieving their potentials as persons in their own rights. The author borrows from the myth of Ahalya, to bring her closer to the modern Indian woman, who might be suffering a similar fate vis a vis her social environment and exclaims that time has changed and so Ahalya's trajectory needs a change as well, meaning, the lives of the modern Indian women need to change and that change can only be brought about by themselves.

The Kannada short story 'Ahalya' by Yashwant Chittal (76-86) is a poignant reminder of Ahalya's merciless treatment by Gautama. Though conforming to the ancient fate of Ahalya, it presents a chilling description of her predicament, her position and desire as a woman. *Ahalya*, a short film, by Sujoy Ghosh is an interesting take on the myth. Here, whoever makes love to Ahalya in guise of her husband is arrested into the frame of a little wooden doll, looking like the man originally did. Trapped, suffocated, screaming at the top of their lungs, yet not being heard by anyone, clueless about their mistake, they are left for an indeterminate time to ponder

over it as well as their fate – exactly how Ahalya must have felt while suffering her punishment as an ‘invisible stone woman’.

The Tamil short story “Saba Vimochanam” (The Redemption) by Pudhumai Pithan (Saravanan) deals with Ahalya’s life after her curse has been lifted by Rama. She and Gautama go through the pangs of questioning their actions in the past. While Gautama is secretly remorseful, Ahalya wants to stay away from the very shadow of another man. Her curse has traumatized her; her only emotional anchor are Rama – Sita and the ideal relationship they have. Then she learns about Sita’s *agnipariksha*, which the latter describes as something she had to undergo regardless of what she believed, as her husband commanded it. Disillusioned with the marital terms of the most righteous man and woman she knew and bewildered by the sense of justice of Rama, who was (now) the same as Gautama in her eyes, she goes back to being a stone. As if the numbness of the cold stone were better, more reassuring, more peaceful than the vehemence of human emotions that cause pain and hurt repeatedly.

Connotations of the Mythic Feminine

The meaning and connotations of Draupadi, Sita and Ahalya in the cultural memory of India and South Asia, owing to the inconclusive nature of their figures, can best be termed as a bricolage. Draupadi is indeed viewed as *‘nathawati anathawat’*, having husbands but still as if alone, a sad, unfortunate and ominous symbol. Her condition also simultaneously sets the standard for an ideal Sati (virtuous woman). On the other hand it also evokes the fact of her multiple marriages and thus sets her ‘sat’ (virtue) in the realm of suspicion. Alf Hiltebeitel (297-363) argues that as the cult of ‘Sat dharma’ grew in Rajasthan, the followers of Pir Shams Ali appropriated Draupadi’s story to reflect the glory of the Pir as the savior, while it sets a model example of sati through the figure of Draupadi. Pir is said to have ten lives, the eighth of which is that as Krishna, “Luckily he came as Krishna! He protected Draupadi with reams of clothes (347).” The ninth life of the Shams Pir is as Budhha, whom Draupadi recognizes as she is ‘fixed in concentration’. It is this Budhha who later saves the Pandavas, destroys Kauravas, kills Duryodhana and brings the Pandavas moksha (348).

In the Kritayuga Renuka was Kritya,
In the Satyayuga Sita was Kritya,
In the Dvaparayuga Draupadi was Kritya,
And in the Kaliyuga there are Krityas in every house.
(A Kritya is a bloodthirsty, demonic female)(Karve 92)

While Draupadi and Sita are considered ‘Krityas’, as they spelled the doom of two very powerful empires in wars that took many lives, Ahalya’s sexuality having been realized and punished, is an example for infidel wives, so in a way, it is a destruction saved, of many other women, who may ‘stray’ from their marriages. The recognition of Ahalya’s sexual desire and agency in later texts, also exalts her as the ideal of modern Indian woman, who wants to assert control on her own sexuality. In contemporary wedding rituals in Sri Lanka, Ahalya is portrayed as a black stone that the bride appropriately touches with her foot (Doniger 39).

In the same regional context (South India) where Draupadi is hailed and worshipped as a virgin Goddess, we have popular metaphors like *‘Ati Keshi Pati*

nasha, meaning – women with long hair spell doom for their husbands. Draupadi is polyandrous and therefore not the ideal wife in the contemporary times. In Garhwal her polyandrous status is understood as the original precedent to the social practice of polyandry in the region which also signifies her hypersexuality (Sax 142). The most popular motif of her life-story, which is her disrobing and challenging of Dharma in a hall full of men, is used to both evoke patriarchal succor as well as render it needless and overhyped. In “Dopdi” (short story by Mahashweta Devi), Draupadi overturns her subjugation and blame of shame (Verma 73-74).

Sita is remembered most popularly as the ideal, chaste wife of Rama. She also has connotations as the ‘fickle feminine,’ as the one who fell to the temptation of the golden deer and landed her husband into trouble and then questioned the intentions of her brother-in-law, Lakshmana, inviting trouble for herself and all others. Ahalya symbolizes the ominous and the brave simultaneously. She is an unchaste adulterous woman but at the same time and context she is also the one who represents a woman’s free choice of asserting her sexual agency. Their plenitude denotes not only women troubled deeply by their patriarchal world order, but also women who have challenged it and in some cases rejected its prescriptions for their lives.

Their life stories have been opened up at various subsequent times to be given new colors and trajectories by authors according to their aspirations and contexts. This has given them newer politics and newer social connotations, all of which exist together, merged in the larger narrative imagination. The more they are written about the more the scope of their meaning widens. The space of myth and the instrument of the feminine figures of the mythic tradition facilitate a platform for negotiating power, social structure and cultural change for authors, performers, readers and audience/participants alike.

Works Consulted and Cited

- Bhat, Pratibha. “Ahalya”. *Indian Literature* Vol 33(5) (1990): 51-52. Print.
- Bhattacharya, Pradeep. “Panchakanya: Women of Substance”. *Journal of South Asian Literature* Vol 35(1/2) (2000): 13-56. Print.
- . “She who must be obeyed: Draupadi the Ill-fated One”. *Manushi*, Vol 144 (2004): 19-30. Print.
- Cassirer, Ernst. *The Myth of the State*. New York: Yale University Press, 1946. Print.
- Chaterji, Roma. “Feminine figures in narrative tradition.” *Journal of Indian Folkloristics* Vol VI No.1/2 (2004): 3-24. Print.
- Chittal, Yashwant. “Kannada **short story**: Ahalya”. *Indian Literature* Vol 27 (5) (1984): 78-86. Print.
- Coburn, Thomas B. *Encountering the Goddess*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1991. Print.

- Coburn, Thomas B. "Sita Fights while Rama Swoons: a Shakta version of the Ramayana". *Manushi*, Volume 90 (1995): 5-16. Print.
- Devi, Mahashweta. *Breast Stories*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Kolkata: Seagull Press, 1997. Print.
- Doniger, Wendy. "Sita and Helen, Ahalya and Alcmena: A comparative study". *History of Religions* Vol 37(1) (1997): 21-49. Print.
- Hess, Linda. "Rejecting Sita". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol 67(1) (1999): 1-32. Print.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims and Dalits*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999. Print.
- Karve, Iravati. *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch*. Delhi: Disha Books (Orient Longman), 1991. Print.
- Mahapatra, Manorama. "Ahalya: the Self-fulfilled". *Indian Literature* Vol 36 (5) (1993): 34-35. Print.
- Patel, Bhagwandas and Mridula Parikh (trans). *Bheelon ka Bharath*. Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. Print.
- Ramanujan, A.K. "Three Hundred Ramayanas: five examples and three thoughts on translation". *Many Ramayanas* Print.. Eds. Paula Richman. California: University of California press, 1991. 22-49. Print.
- Saravanan, K. "Redemption: an English translation of Pudhumaipithan's saba vimosanam". *The Unending Page*. Blogspot. Web. 1st Sept. 2014.
- Satchidanandan, K. "The power of myth". *Frontline*. Web. 8th Aug. 2014.
- Sax, William S. *Dancing the self: Personhood and Performance in the Pandav Lila of Garhwal*. US: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.
- Singaravelu, S. "Sita's birth and parentage in the Rama story". *Asian Folklore Studies* Vol 41(2) (1982): 235-243.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakraborty. "'If only', Writing a Feminist's life: The legacy of Carolyn G. Heilbrun". *S&F Online*, Vol 4 (2) (2006). Print.
- Verma, Benu. "Plenitude of the singular: Draupadi in literature and life". *Society and Culture in South Asia* Vol 1(1) (2015): 56-78. Print.

Gendering the Genre: Interrogating the Fairytales of Colonial Bengal

Sarani Roy

Research Scholar, Department of English
Visva-Bharati University

Abstract: This paper argues how the fairytales of colonial Bengal resist closure in absorbing the very silences of the gendered discourse of nationalism of which the genre is a product. The paper will try to address how the nineteenth century Bengali fairytales registered subversive moments in the process of the evolution of a new historical consciousness, one that both accepted and rejected the dominant categories of available gender identities. The paper deals broadly with issues of pregnancy and its representation in fairytales. It will examine how particular socio-cultural meanings of pregnancy play a vital role in the understanding of our fairy stories. The working definition of fairytale provided by Vladimir Propp insists that the functional axis of fairytale proceeds from lack toward fulfillment. While poverty has been the traditional marker of this lack in fairy tales from distant parts of the world, nineteenth-century Bengali fairytales have defined this lack especially in terms of childlessness. This is something symptomatic of the contemporary discourses of gender roles. This paper analyzes stories from collections like *Thakumar Jhuli* and *Folktales of Bengal* involving discourses of pregnancy and childbirth, motherhood and fatherhood in ways varied and critical, and exposes the very instability of the cultural meanings of these concepts.

Keywords: Fairytales, gender, pregnancy, labor-room, male-impotency, nationalism, colonial Bengal.

Recalling an early scene from Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth*, where Carmen, the very pregnant mother of the protagonist, Ofelia, feels a sudden need to vomit following her rebuke of Ofelia for carrying a book of fairytales, the question which has troubled me is whether the figure of the pregnant mother bears any special significance in the context of the film, especially in its use of the fairytale narrative not only as a thematic component but as a structuring principle. Whether the pregnancy narrative demarcates or delimits the generic scope of the fairytales is a question that I address in this paper. I look for the answers not in films from abroad but in the fairytales of colonial Bengal. The reference to the film, though brief and not pursued in detail, remains an important point of departure for my argument in this paper.

Shibaji Bandopadhyay in his seminal work on colonialism and children's literature in Bengal has observed how fairytales always move towards a definite telos but end by suggesting a timeless future: "so they lived happily ever after" (73). They show a consciousness of space but are apparently forgetful of time. Bengali fairytales have in fact spatialized time; crossing the seven seas and thirteen rivers are all that the prince takes in reaching the demon's den to retrieve the princess. But the complexities of dealing with time become unavoidable as soon as there is a pregnant woman present in the story. The span of her pregnancy is always specified in time; at times she is in a hurry to produce the newborn whose story it is going to be and at times the moment of delivery is unexpectedly prolonged to arrive at the climactic scene. In both cases there is an attempt to keep the pregnant body outside the main narrative

discourse, in the process, however making it all the more central to the cultural meanings of the text. The pregnant body is essentially marked by porous boundaries and thereby it takes on unstable connotations vis-à-vis the culture that produces it. The chief source of its fluidity is its ambivalent positioning in between visibility and invisibility. But it has always been the visible belly which has rendered the woman invisible. More recently, theorists have identified how the deployment of visual images of women's pregnancy not only alters their experience of being pregnant and their decision-taking capacity, but also alters the definition of maternity altogether (Maher 97). In *Disembodying Women*, Barbara Duden asks "How did the unborn turn into a billboard image and how did that isolated goblin get into limelight?" (7). The fact that the infant can be seen even before it exists in the world leads up to the erasure of the mother's subjectivity. It is a pre-formed person, "simply awaiting discovery" (Hartouni 23).

The working definition of fairytale provided by Vladimir Propp is relevant here. According to Propp, the functional axis of fairytale proceeds from lack towards fulfillment and the journey along this axis hinges on obtaining something precious from the other world followed by a return to the mundane world where the shift is necessitated by a stable string of thirty one "functions" (263). While poverty has been the traditional marker of this lack in fairy tales from distant parts of the world, nineteenth century Bengali fairytales have defined this lack especially in terms of childlessness. I shall be reading this as something symptomatic of the contemporary discourses of gender roles and their performance and shall also try to show how this reading can help us perceive something beyond the "universal", "timeless" status of fairytales. My reading would chiefly focus on four texts – *Thakumar Jhuli* and *Bongoponyasa Thakurdadar Jhuli* by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, *The Folk Tales of Bengal* by Lal Behari Dey and the story of *Kheerer Putul* by Abanindranath Tagore.

Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar in the preface to his *Bongoponyasa Thakurdadar Jhuli* has identified the labor-room of rural Bengal as the birthplace of the numerous circuits of stories which have continued to enchant life there from time immemorial (14). Dakshinaranjan's preface merits special attention because of the way it makes connections between the labor-room and fairytales. He even adds an annotation to further the discussion, elaborating how from the day the pregnant mother enters her labor-room it becomes a community-practice to entertain her with an unending flow of stories; stories narrated, sung, performed till the middle of night. On the sixth day of the child's birth everyone remains awake till dawn for it is believed to be the night when the "bidhata purush", someone like a divine messenger, will come down to write destiny on the infant's forehead (14). The author of the preface has also added that in our traditional medical discourses of the Ayurvedas this practice has been considered especially beneficial to the expecting mother's health. Dakshinaranjan's romanticization of the rural labor-room actually falls into a larger project of the time – one that has set out to locate markers where cultural differences can be negotiated vis-à-vis the habits and customs of the colonizer. Partha Chatterjee, in one of his seminal texts, *The Nation and its Fragments* has elaborated a model in which he has shown how "[Indian] nationalism has separated the domain of culture into two spheres – the material and the spiritual" (119).

While in the material sphere the claims of the western civilization reigned supreme in terms of science, technology, economic organization and statecraft, the spiritual sphere remained unparalleled in its superiority to the West (119-20). Elsewhere he has suggested this was necessary for the Indian nationalists because they had to draw the closure to the question of women in society, an issue hotly debated by both western thinkers and reformers and also Indian nationalists (“The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” 237). While the British needed to highlight the “poor condition” of women in India to argue for the logical need of their “civilizing mission”, the Indian nationalists had to reclaim their women “to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence” (239). All these arguments are important here for several reasons. Women’s health and childbirth had been a constant focus in the “civilizing mission” of the colonizer who considered it “barbaric and medieval” to give birth at home with the help of midwives with no doctors, nurses or medicine. This, I argue, constitutes the moment of breach in the nationalist paradigm of thought which took pains to keep apart the western world of medicinal sciences and Indian women’s health and problems of childbirth primarily because the two belonged to two different spheres of action – respectively, the material and the spiritual. The two cannot be equated despite the connections they may have. This is the process of selection which characterizes the appropriation of colonial modernity. Dakshinaranjan’s representation surely has a political claim to make because we are to remember the tryst between Tagore and Dakshinaranjan in “collecting” the tales of Bengal in *Thakumar Jhuli* as a desperate attempt in replicating “the musical aura of the past” in “the present-day idiom of Bengali language” (Tagore xii). In writing the Preface to the book Tagore asks rhetorically “Can there be anything more *quintessentially indigenous* [my emphasis] than *Thakumar Jhuli* in our country?”(xi). This project of nation-building had its own silences and aporias which need to be discussed and for that we will have to go back to our fairytales once more.

The representation of the labor room complicates the fairytales to a great extent. The Bengali word for labor-room is *antur ghor* and as the Bengali dictionary tells us it denotes a separate place exclusively set for the pregnant mother till the birth of the child (Basu 570). It is quite different from the western labor-room that is precisely a medicalized space meant for the delivery of the child while the *antur ghor* is retained for a broader span of time. The western model of the labor room is located within the hospital which is a male domain as opposed to the *anturghor* which is primarily a feminine space. The *antur ghor* is a suspension of the marital bed when the woman is carrying her child. In post-pregnancy period, the *antur ghor* takes on a different function. It sanctions the female body’s return to normalcy by institutionalizing the suspended menstrual cycle followed by a dip into the Ganges after twenty one days. Altogether the *antur ghor* experience provides the new mother with rigorous social training upholding values like restraint, sacrifice and thereby reinforcing the conventional meanings of motherhood. More importantly, this is also a period when the woman is subject to constant vigilance and the policing is done by the other women of her family and neighborhood. And exactly this is where our fairytales would lead us to while exposing the invisible links between the discourses of patriarchy and nationalism.

The stories of “Kironmala,” “Princess Kolaboti,” and “The Champa Brothers” from *Thakumar Jhuli* hinge upon the dangerous potential of the labor-room as an

exclusively female space functioning outside the male supervision. Due to its veiled status it involves an ambivalent positioning between power and powerlessness. The supposedly vulnerable condition of the pregnant woman inside it grants a position of control and authority to other women who are in charge of her. All of the three above-mentioned stories are marked by the disappearance of the new-born child immediately after the birth. The other women deputed to take care of the pregnant mother are responsible for this as they are clearly jealous of the new privilege accorded to the expecting mother. They declare the child to be dead as a consequence of which the new mother falls a victim to the king's wrath and is rendered homeless. In "Kironmala" it is the spinster aunts and in "Champa Brothers" it is the other queens who are the evil players. "Princess Kolaboti" is a slight variation of the theme where the youngest queen only gets to drink the leftovers of the other queens who have finished taking the magical herb prescribed to induce pregnancy. As a result the youngest queen gives birth to a monkey and subsequently is banished from the palace by the king.

When discussing Abanindranath Tagore's *Kheerer Putul* or *The Condensed Milk Doll* we have to think whether it can be put into the same brackets with the other fairytales as it is certainly not part of any "collection" and is an original text. However there can be no doubt that it uses the dominant model of Bengali fairytales and also consciously plays with its conventions. In *Kheerer Putul* the labor-room is an absence for the child is never born. Yet the elder queen enjoys all the privileges of a pregnant woman including new house, good food, maids to look after and so on. The fact that the king cannot see his son for ten years until the day when the son gets married prolongs the period of the queen's supposed pregnancy. It is again a female intervention that threatens it. The witch on recommendation of the jealous younger queen sells her poisonous sweets.

The nineteenth century was a turbulent time in the history of Bengal when all the distinctions between the categories of the public and the private were miserably blurred. The decisions taken within the four walls of female quarters had the potential to change the course of the history of the nation and the female body was the site where the questions of nationalist self-fashioning could be negotiated. The labor-room was private in its location but public in its function, a mediating space between the palace and the outside world – a life of privilege and a life of struggle. Once expelled from the labor-room, the mother and child together bring into focus the internal divisions that characterize the king's kingdom. While the unfortunate children grow up fast and try to mend the ways of the world, the destitute mothers literally become working-class figures: the rag picker in "Champa Brother," the maid servant in "Princess Kolaboti," and so on. We may remember the monkey in *Kheerer Putul*. A representative of the common masses, visibly the "other", he is instrumental in restoring equilibrium in the country. The return of the lost child then becomes a symbol of a possible reintegration of the nation. Until then the labor-room remains a mystery. This is actually the mystery of origins to which the tale has to return. The entire point of a fairytale is to draw a "suitable," "happy" closure to the narrative of origin – not only the origin of an individual but the origin of a nation.

The idea of male impotency is somewhat unique to these tales where the shame of being childless is assigned to the king instead of the more common practice of accusing and excommunicating the woman. The stories of "Madhumala",

“Pushpamala”, “Malanchamala”, from *Bongoponyasa Thakurdadar Jhuli* open with the king’s mourning for a child. It is curious the way he is called “antkunde”, the Bengali word for impotent where the gender is identified as masculine (Basu 48) in “Madhumala” and is shown to be living a life of humiliation and depravity for not being able to produce an heir where even the sweeper has the audacity to dismiss the king for being impotent. Does this signify an improved status of women in society? To locate this shift, I have looked into the correspondences between Freud and his Indian psychoanalyst friend Girindrasekhar Bose. Bose, noticing the absence of castration fears in many of his patients (most of them were middle-class, educated Bengali *bhadralok* of nineteenth century Calcutta), a symptom claimed to be universal in men by Freud, reported it to the latter (Indian Psychoanalytic Society 16-17). Bose has defined this absence as a “wish to be female” which was prevalent in Bengali men (17). Christine Hartnack’s postcolonial reading of the situation demands special attention here. According to her these men indeed wished to be female for they envied their own women who lived an unchanged life in the safety of the home, unaffected by the realities of colonial domination while they had to remain stuck to the colonial chronotope of the merchant offices (10). Following this line of argument, Hartnack interprets the wish “as a desire not to be tainted by colonialism, to belong to a world imagined to be all Bengali, thus untouched by the stresses and conflicts induced by foreign rulers, or as an imaginary withdrawal into a presumably ahistorical pre-colonial time, where the contemporary demands for change were not an issue” (147). In “Pushpamala,” impotency is represented as an equalizing force which makes the king no less a subject of pity than his executioner who is also childless. Even to highlight the absolute powerlessness of the king it is ultimately the executioner who is awarded a son and the king finds himself bound in an unwanted pledge of marrying his daughter to the executioner’s son. The sense of being powerless to change anything of the colonial reality remained omnipresent in the male consciousness which perhaps found its displaced expression in their experience of being impotent and childless in the fairytales of this time.

The story which deals with the idea of pregnancy and the corollary issue of breastfeeding is “Shankhamala” from *Thakurdadar Jhuli*. “Shankhamala” which settles the dispute of “the real” mother by a unique test in which the two mothers are asked to make a public display of their ability to breastfeed. As a result the real mother turned out to be the one whose milk went straight into mouth of the boy without faltering a little as opposed to the false one whose milk could cover only a short distance coming out of her breast. The episode is significant in showing how the female body is discursively constructed where it is literalized that a woman’s body and her reproductive abilities indeed constitute her social position. We must here refer to Rousseau who talked at length on the debate between the efficacies of breastfeeding and wet nursing in the context of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe. In Rousseau’s argument wet nursing represented a complete moral travesty in need for reform which he saw as symptomatic of a society in political and social decay (Beauvoir 526). Penny Weiss and Anne Harper point out that Rousseau’s criticisms of wet nursing were not to do with the quality of a mother’s care but rather with the dangers it presented to blood ties and patriarchal patterns of family (52). To save a declining moral order Rousseau even put women on public display, and what they displayed was a capacity for “perfected pity,” “the possibility of free-imagining bodily needs and compulsions as ethical, and putting the impulse of commiseration to the service of the social order” (Wingrove 34). They created “a maternal spectacle,”

(159), as a defense against the civilizational contamination of what is “naturally” good and “naturally” feminine. In turning motherhood into festivity, Rousseau invoked the dangers inherent in coalescing the categories of the private and the public, the personal and the political. We cannot forget that a touching spectacle was still a spectacle, and virtuous display was still a display. The ending of “Shankhamala” features a similar spectacle which serves the function of restoring the real mother to her glory, that of punishing the false mother and sustaining the family and the kingdom. It answers all the questions of the legitimacy of Shankha’s pregnancy in the absence of her husband, guaranteeing her chastity.

Speaking of pregnancy we cannot help thinking in terms of hunger, desire and excess – ideas related to female biology with which patriarchal society has been uncomfortable. The female body lactates to regulate its excess. Self-preservation and self-gratification are the carnal points of the narrative of pregnancy no matter how much patriarchy denies them. In “The Boy whom Seven Mothers Suckled” from Lal Behari Dey’s *The Folktales of Bengal*, the elder six queens eat up their own newborn babies out of severe hunger. The only exception is the youngest queen who decides to keep her son alive and all the six queens help in nursing him; they all suckle him; the child is born to not one but seven mothers. The story is central to this discussion for it registers the lacunae of the dominant discourses of pregnancy and motherhood that operate primarily by glorifying the sacrificial and ever-suffering image of the mother. The story of “Malancamala” is even more rebellious in rendering the connections between motherhood and sexuality clear and obvious. Married to a new born child Malanca feeds her own husband. The boy takes full control of his wife’s breasts and since there is no father to confront he grows up without knowing the oedipal wish.

The entire question of the struggle between the reified image of the mother-goddess and the “real” woman of flesh and blood claiming to live in her own right is dealt by Abanindranath Tagore in *Kheerer Putul* where goddess Shashthi is unable to control her lust for the condensed milk doll. Even being a “goddess” her human needs are alive. When the text equates and replaces the doll with a real (male) child the issue is even more complicated. Shashthi, a Hindu folk goddess, venerated as the benefactor and protector of children, especially as the giver of male child, takes on an alternative independent female identity in the text. Perhaps what we are seeing is the woman coming into age, growing increasingly conscious of her body, emerging out of the Bengal Renaissance with too much force to be safely enshrined within the perfect private sphere which colonial modernity has designed for her. This is the threshold moment in the formation of a new historical consciousness where the long-held beliefs of a culture are contested. Thus the fairytales had to end without proclaiming a closure.

Works Consulted and Cited

- Bandopadhyay, Sibaji. “Desher Roopkotha O Roopkothar Desh.” *Gopal Rakhal Dwandwa Samas*. Kolkata: Karigor, 1991.65-98. Print.
- Basu, Rajshekhar, comp. *Chalantika: Adhunik Bango Bhashar Abhidhan*. Calcutta: M.C Sircar, 1937. Print.

- Beauvoir, Simon de. *The Second Sex*. London: Picador, 1988. Print.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and Its Fragments*. New Delhi: Oxford U P, 1993. Print.
- . "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women Question." *Recasting Women: Kali for Women*. Eds. Kukum Sanghari and Suresh Vaid. New Delhi: Oxford U P, 1993. 233-253. Print.
- Duden, Barbara. *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*. Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1993. Print.
- Dey, Rev. Lal Behari. *Folk Tales of Bengal*. Kolkata: Script, n.d. Print.
- Hartnack, Christine. "Freud on Garuda's Wings: Psychoanalysis in Colonial India." *IIAS News Letter* 30 (2003): 10. *International Institute for Asian Studies*. Web. 3 Mar. 2016.
- Hartouni, Valerie. *Cultural Conceptions: On Reproductive Technologies and the Remaking of Life*. Minneapolis: Minnesota U P, 1997. Print.
- Indian Psychoanalytic Society. *The Beginnings of Psychoanalysis in India: Bose Freud Correspondence*. Calcutta: Indian Psychoanalytic Soc., 1964. *Centre for the Study of Culture and Society*. Web. 3 Mar. 2016.
- Maher, JaneMaree. "Visibly Pregnant: Toward a Placental Body." *Feminist Review* 72 (2002): 95-107. *Jstor*. Web. 9 Mar. 2016. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395888>>.
- MitraMajumdar, Dakshinaranjan. *Tales from Thakumar Jhuli: Twelve Stories from Bengal*. Trans. Sukhendu Roy. New Delhi: Oxford U P, 2012. Print.
- . *Bangoponyasa Thakurdadar Jhuli*. 17th ed. Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 1906. Print.
- Propp, Vladimir Jakovlevic. *Morphology of Folktale*. Trans. Laurence Scot and ed. Louis A. Wagner. 2nd ed. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. Print.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile*. 1762. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979. Print.
- Tagore, Abanindranath. *Kheer er Putul*. Kolkata: Signet Press, 1896. Print.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. Preface. *Tales from Thakumar Jhuli: Twelve Stories from Bengal* by Dakshinaranjan MitraMajumdar. Trans. Sukhendu Roy. New Delhi: Oxford U P, 2012. xi-xiii. Print.
- Toro, Guillermo Del, Dir. *Pan's Labyrinth [El Labertino del Fauno]*. PictureHouse - Telecinco - Estudios Picasso Tequila Gang Esperanto Filmo, 2006. Film.
- Weiss, Penny and Anne Harper. "Rousseau's Political Defense of the Sex-Role family." *Feminist Interpretations of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. Ed. Lynda Lange. State College: Pennsylvania State U P, 2002. 42-64. Print.

Wingrove, Elizabeth. *Rousseau's Republican Romance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton U P, 2000.Print.

The Kashmiri *Ramayana*: Voices and Silences

Aartee Kaul Dhar
Independent Researcher
Delhi

Abstract: Prakash Ram Kulgami, the devotional Kashmiri poet composed *Ramayana*, The *Ramavatarcharit* in the 19th century. Though his mission seems to be similar to Tulsidas's, a devotional poet of the 16th century, his text is not. *Ramavatarcharit* is the first written epic of the Kashmiri language and is unique in many ways. Out of the seven *Ramayanas* of Kashmir this was the only one to be published. The text is a dialogue between Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati and does away with multiple tellers and listeners. There are a large number of deviations and diversions from the popular *Ramkatha* as most people know it. Why? What was the poet's agenda and how did he fulfill it? The shift between both the Bhakti poets was of 300 years; hence the characters differ in their portrayal. What is also different in the text is that Sita gets a voice. She speaks and recounts all injustices meted out to her. Sita's silence has been frustrating for many a writer and poet. Perhaps it was time to provide this epic heroine with a voice. The paper examines the peculiarities of the text, also highlighting the fact how a pan Indian tale has been appropriately localized and regionalized. The epic does not claim to change the tale, but it does change the way its readers now look at the *Ramayana* characters. It augments the tale, localizes it, abstracts its characters and yet raises some meaningful and pertinent questions. The paper is an endeavour to answer the same.

Keywords: Kashmiri *Ramayana*, Sita's characterization.

When the *Ramayana* is mentioned what comes to mind is the well-known *SriRamcharitmanas* of Tulsidas. It will be an engaging exercise to cast a glance at the Kashmiri *Ramayana* by Prakash Ram Kulgami a devotee of Ram in the nineteenth century and though his mission seems to be similar to Tulsidas's, his text is not.

The variety that exists in the *Ramayana* tradition and also in Sita's character in the *Ramayanas* is perplexing. The portrayal of Sita by the poet Tulsidas in his medieval text *SriRamcharitmanas* is familiar to all north Indians. The author interpreted her on the basis of socio-cultural realities that existed in the sixteenth century when he wrote a lyrical text using imagery and metaphors in Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi which pulled the *Ramayana* out of the elite circles and brought it to the masses. Tulsidas made the text comprehensible to the common man and his Sita, at a cursory look, appears to be an ideal and conforming woman, wife and daughter-in-law, self-sacrificing and obedient. She exists solely for others and operates in subjugation, placed secondary to Ram as his *Bhakta* or devotee.

Is this Tulsidas's politics of repositioning Sita, who is a woman of substance in Valmiki's *Ramayana* which he considers his source text? If yes, why so? Is it because he was a devotee of Ram and had an agenda to establish him as a perfect reincarnation of Vishnu and the giver of salvation, worthy of worship? It seems it is for this purpose he has muted many aspects of the Valmiki story as Sita's birth, her abduction, trial by fire, abandonment and disappearance. Was it the demand of the time he wrote in? If

not, then does a deeper analysis show that Tulsidas is a clever poet who wrote a text for the common man but as far as Sita is concerned he wrote for the smart reader who can read between the lines. He has hinted at five places that Sita was greater than Ram and has placed her at par with the holy Trinity. Tulsidas's text can be compared and contrasted with the Kashmiri text of Prakash Ram Kulgami, a devotee poet of Kashmir in the nineteenth century, tracing the shift the character has taken in the gap of just three hundred years. The pan-Indian text acquires the rainbow folk colors of the Kashmiri life and gets contemporized, humanized, localized and augmented in this process making it a living text, sung and recited in Kashmiri homes even outside Kashmir on a daily basis.

Prakash Ram (1819-77 AD) wrote *Ramavatacharit* which is considered to be the first epic of the Kashmiri language. It was translated into English by George Abraham Grierson in 1893. His text compiles the *Sri Ramavatar Charit* and the *Lavakusha Yuddha Charit* which is the second section or the *Uttarkand* and is divided into seven cantos. The second section is about Lava and Kush, Sita's sons. The text is in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati when the latter enquired how people would be saved in Kalyuga. Tulsidas's *Uttarkand* is the take-off point for the poet Prakash Ram. His poem has many deviations and divergences.

The *Ramavatacharit* carries forward and expands what Tulsidas started and is more sympathetic to Sita. It is very vocal at acknowledging the injustice done to her, and melodramatic at places. Full of similes and metaphors, it shows Ram as gentle and loving, but retains the destiny motif. It also localizes the text greatly in describing locales, the bountiful and beautiful nature, the clothes and dresses, food, marriage ceremony, local Gods and Goddesses and Kashmiri rites and rituals. Even names of characters have been Kashmirified, e.g. Kekeyi becomes Kiki. A Kashmiri feels at home while reading it and totally identifies with the tale while the non-resident reader feels he is travelling through the valley. It has its own story to tell in its own way, making it a characteristic text of its environment and age, making use of songs and lyrics, vandanas and prayers and embedded myths and tales. In the Kashmiri text the characters are abstracted and Sita is seen as a "pious desire" (Grierson 23). There is a shift in her depiction as she stands more for an abstract virtue than a person. Lord Shiva is the teller of the tale and Devi Parvati is the listener.

The very first stanza is didactic and seems to be motivated by the purpose of raising the level of human consciousness, sending out metaphysical messages making the Sita story its medium. Not only does it make it more personal, it also provides the tale a higher, more pious plane. At Ram's birth nature becomes miraculous, opposites reconcile. Dialectic ideas suggest that the world is seen as composed of binary forces by the poet. Imagery of flora and fauna is employed and with the divine introduction the text attempts to follow epic traditions. There is an absence of divine invocation though. Sita's birth is described in detail, an event many other texts are silent about. It is also significant that it allots primacy to Mandodari who plays a large role in the text. The suggestion is of a pre-ordained destiny and divine machinery playing its role in Sita's life. All major male characters know what is to happen in future, except Sita. It is not clear why she is kept in the dark. In the Shurpanakha episode Laxman also tears her garment. This disrobing of a demon woman in the wilderness to teach her a lesson is pregnant with meaning. Politically it could be the princes' way of establishing their supremacy and an indication of their authority over the space but it

signifies total and absolute lack of restraint. If viewed from the gender angle it shows the empowerment of man as the physically stronger sex. The scene of Sita's abduction has lord Indra, the king of Gods, offer her drops of *Amrita* which makes her immortal. The tale is thus being enacted at two levels simultaneously, the human and the divine. Though crying for help during her abduction, Sita has the presence of mind and keeps her wits about her. In his fight with Jatayu, Ravana accepts Sita's suggestion which shows she is capable of quick thinking even in a crisis.[§]

After she is taken to Lanka, there is a moving scene between Sita and Mandodari. The poet's depiction of the emotional motherly aspect of female nature is touching. Also Sita's strong bond with nature is highlighted, the moon is eclipsed and flowers weep. Nature's empathy with Sita is mentioned in *SriRamcharitmanas* also but here it is clearly more pronounced and Nature has been used as an active agent. Lanka is seen as a holy place by all the Gods as Sita was born there and is expected to be brought there again. Two things are striking here: first an elaborate description of Lanka full of grandeur in the Beauty canto and second, the place being guarded, revered and served by Gods and Goddesses in anticipation of Sita's arrival. It places Sita over and above all divine entities and gives her the most exalted status. Poet Ashok Chakradhar commented in the Literature festival of Jaipur 2012, that Lanka became Sri Lanka because "Sitaji" stayed there. Hanuman is surprised to find the presence of divinities from the Hindu pantheon in Lanka. It could also be taken as a hint of Ravana's exalted stature, like in "Lanka Chadhai" a Rajasthani oral text, where the Gods serve Ravana because he is mighty and respectable. An interesting myth is embedded here about the origin of Lanka and how it got its name. The embedded tales in the Kashmiri *Ramayana* do not take a sharp diversion but are related to people and places mentioned in the text. The myth mentioning the tree Parijata which signifies sadness (known as the sad tree), depicts that the poet has localized the tale.

Kashmir is a place laden with flowers so the poet's choice of flower similes is not surprising. Mandodari, though prominent, is not a very strong figure; she does not feel free to speak about everything to her husband and withholds information, e.g. when she tells him about Sita being the cause of his ruin, she cannot muster up courage to tell Ravana that Sita is their daughter. There is a place in North of Kashmir known as Nilamata which is called the Sand Ocean. This is again localization of the text. Many novel incidents are entwined in the text. It is notable that the Kashmiri poet does not mince his words in mentioning that Ram is hesitant about accepting Sita, wondering if she has been faithful to him. Mandodari sings a song in which she intercedes for Sita, addressing the song to Ram (Grierson 40). It is employed to show the love between the mother and daughter and two women empathizing and bonding together, bringing out the pathos in the story. Apart from the pattern of destiny that the poet underscores time and again, the text also brings to light the fondness of the Kashmiri people for songs and poetry, lyrics and ballads. The rich tradition of music

[§]This is a very interesting incident in the Kashmiri *Ramayana*, as Sita is being abducted she is scared that jatayu may either be killed by the mighty Ravana or badly injured. Then who will tell Ram what happened and who abducted her. So she suggests that Ravana should throw large stones at Jatayu to pin him down, as that would prevent Jatayu from fighting with Ravana. Ravana does so and Jatayu cannot fight anymore. Ravana is happy and Sita is content that she has saved his life as well as ensured Ram will be informed of all details of abduction.

and dance in Kashmir is age old and their folk tradition is full of songs that describe their motherland equating it with heaven and its rich flora and fauna. Songs of flowers and bumble bees are commonplace in Kashmir. Description of nature in the text is rich and contributes further towards the localization of the tale. The fire trial is followed by a total contrast of setting and environment and the reader learns about the onset of the spring season, one of the most beautiful seasons in Kashmir. There is a long description of the blooming and rejoicing of the flowers. Kashmir valley's socio-cultural and geographical environment influenced the poet's writing at every step.

The second part starts with Ram being childless. It is subtly suggested, though underplayed, that Ram probably had many wives. Sita is very vocal about the injustices done to her. She sings a song giving the summary of the main events. From here on the *Karuna Rasa* or pathos takes over in the story completely and becomes predominant. The exact same situation is described in an *Awadhi* folk song with the same sequence of events. She deliberates upon various facts which establish her as a woman capable of thinking and not being blinded by love and affection; she recollects and puts together the facts of her life: abandonment by parents and husband, the trials and tribulations she faced thereafter, and the fire trial.

The differences between the Kashmiri text and others may not be earth shaking but they are considerable and substantial because this epic provides voice to the voiceless. This shift in three hundred years of time gap on the part of a devotee poet is a step further and the poet is clearly very sympathetic to Sita. The shift also lies in the fact that the poet has not minced words about Ram anywhere, gives Sita a larger depiction in the narrative than Tulsidas, and is quite vocal about it through other characters like the sages Valmiki and Vasishtha. Additionally, Sita is shown as a woman who rationalizes and ponders over the fact that all those people who supposedly loved her were not fair to her.

Consequently, Sita is capable of rebuffing Ram who is full of regret after he abandons her. Consoled by Vashishtha, Sita is totally humanized by the poet and her behavior can be called spontaneous, logical and hence understandable by the reader. Valmiki plays a bigger role in the Prakash *Ramayana*; Ram is a loving husband who beseeches Sita again, distressed at her refusal but imploring it was God's will. The last scene is a celebration. There is glory invested in the episode turning Sita into a living phenomenon shifting from a human role. She does not die of despair but the scene has been used to establish that she was a divine entity in human form and returns home showing her actuality to all those present – an idea explored in the modern graphic novel by Saraswati Nagpal, *Sita - Daughter of the Earth*. Gods shower flowers at the divinity of Sita and the poet says that ever since the Holy Trinity is searching for Sita but cannot find her. Valmiki informs those present that Sita has descended to Shankerpore, four miles from Kulgam district of Kashmir, forty miles from Srinagar, Shankerpore had a sacred spring and this area was inhabited formerly only by Hindus (Brahmins) with a reputation for sanctity. Hindus visited this spring for religious ablutions but now the area is populated entirely by Muslims. A natural water spring is shown to display anger at the treatment meted out to Sita. The poet adds that Sita can be invoked with love, true faith and respect in the heart and would certainly appear for such a devotee. She has been elevated to the status of a divine entity that is alive but invisible.

Grierson has summarized the story episodically, omitting all details that make the document Kashmiri, e.g., details of the flora and fauna, songs of love, of disenchantment and disillusionment, of lovers' imploration and rebuttal, sub-stories and myths, prayers and details of food, music, Gods, Goddesses, wedding ceremony and so on. It is contemporized, localized and augmented with details. Time is handled on an epic scale saying Ram ruled for a thousand years before Yama came to take him. The *Ramayana* concludes with a final song, which highlights the predominance of music in Kashmiri life. Sita, though humanized at places, is treated as a diminutive double of Goddess Laxmi. The text, unlike *SriRamcharitmanas*, is largely Sita-based and not Ram-centric. The *Ramayana* did contribute significantly in establishing the Vaishnavite tradition in predominantly Shaivite Kashmir. "Classical Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions merged with Goddess dominated folk traditions and spread across the land" (Pattanaik, 28). Kashmir does have a rich Goddess tradition as it is the abode of Goddess Vaishnodevi in Katra Jammu, the Kheer Bhawani or Ragya Devi in Tulmul and the Sharika Devi on Hari Parwat, Srinagar. Every episode is titled which shows the Persian influence of the Masnavi style in writing Hindu epics. Some words also have been Persianised by prefixing 'Ba' meaning 'with', some Hindi words like Ba-Aakash makethe text sound odd and forced. It hints at gradual replacing of Sanskrit words in Kashmiri language with Persian words suggesting cultural terrorism which requires research in the context of Kashmir.

In the Kashmiri *Ramayana*, Sita has biological parents unlike the other two texts. Its *Uttarkand* also has the sister-in-law's tale. Shabri and Anusuya are absent. The Ahalya episode is condensed, but Ahalya is respected by the poet. Mareech tells Ravana about Laxman's might and hence if he is around, a thousand Ravana cannot abduct Sita. This highlights Laxman's role which is not so common in Ram-centric texts. The same episode is found in the drama script of NSD (the National School of Drama) Delhi titled *Mareech Samvaad* which is a dialogue between Ravana and Mareech.

The Bali episode is dealt with in detail. Bali realizes that he committed a sin by abducting his brother's wife (Ruma). Sita refuses to accompany Hanuman to save Ram's name and honor as she wants to keep her abduction a secret, also because she knows she is Ravana's daughter and hence she must not defy the patriarch. Here the influence of contemporary society on the poet can be gauged. *Laxman-rekha* is absent in Kashmiri *Ramayana*. It speaks of other peculiar incidents as how and why Lanka came into existence, Ravana goes to Kailasha and appeals to Lord Shiva to help him after Indrajeet is killed by Laxman, Mandodari is insulted by Hanuman so she disturbs Ravana even as he is engaged in a secret sacrifice to win the battle against Ram. The characters of Ahravana and Mahiravana, Ravana's cousins, are incorporated. The poet has not minced his words about Ram's doubt about Sita's faithfulness. It is significant that Prakash Ram, from a pan-Indian text, has transformed and transcreated the *Ramayana* into a folk text with the help of localizing devices such as rich and elaborate description of local food, clothes, dresses, ceremonies, Gods and Goddesses, locales, flora and fauna, thus taking it closer to a folk epic, intertwining prayers and songs, giving it a totally different texture, and yet revitalizing it and making it easier for a Kashmiri to include it in his day-to-day life. Whether these songs found their way into it or are popular and commonly sung because they are a part of it, cannot be ascertained. The author's aspiration is towards an epic but he

takes it forward and incorporates folk flavor in it to make it a living, identifiable text.

The shift from Tulsidas to Prakash Ram took three hundred years and characters, too, shift in their depiction including Sita who, the author suggests, returns home when she sinks into the earth. Nevertheless she is victimized. She may not sit under the Ashoka tree, she pines under the Parijata or the sad tree but sad she is. Also, she is divine but does not know it and acts as human, only after her disappearance does she become divine. May be the poet was influenced by the other Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, and just as Kunti abandons Karna, Mandodari also abandons Sita, though for a different reason. There is overlapping and reverberation of the story of Lord Krishna who came to destroy Kansa as Sita comes to destroy Ravana. This story is found in many other Indian and international texts; all these versions may not be influenced by the *Mahabharata* but since this is a Kashmiri text such a possibility cannot be ruled out. If Sita has to destroy Ravana why does Mandodari abandon her in the first place, more so when she was also was a *Pari* or angel incarnated for the same purpose? It is possible these characters act in alternate roles, divine and human and keep forgetting their divine mission often.

So it can be said that there is no correct or incorrect version of the Sita Ram story as Tulsidas acknowledges the existence of a variety in the *Ramayana* tradition, obvious even from the Shiva-Parvati conversation, and that the story undergoes a change from time to time adapting itself to new locales and diverse tellers of the tale.

Works Consulted and Cited

Bumro Song in Kashmiri.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJ_uLBVBPKo&feature=related. Web.

Goswami, Indira. *Ramayana from Ganga to Brahmaputra*. Delhi: BR Publications, 1996. Print.

Grierson, George. *The Kashmiri Ramayana*. Srinagar: Utpal Publications, 2010. Print.

Grierson, A. George, tr. *The Kashmiri Ramayana*. Srinagar: Gulshan Books, 2011. Print.

Growse, F.S. *Eternal Ramayana: The Ramayana of Tulsidas*. Trans. Berkley: University of California Press, 1983. Print.

Krishnamoorthy, K. *A Critical Inventory of the Ramayana*, Vol 1. Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1991. Print.

Lutgendorf, Philip. *The Life of a Text: Performing The Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas*. Berkley, California: University of California Press, 1991. Print.

Mishra, Vidya Niwas. *Valmiki Ramayana Aevam Ramcharitmanas ka Tulnatmak Adhyayana*. Lucknow: Lucknow University Publication, 1999. Print.

- Pattanaik, Devdutt. Devdutt.com. "The Threshold of Chastity and Civilisation" *Indian Myths Ramayana*. Jan7, 2010. <<http://devdutt.com/articles/indian-mythology/chastity.html>> Web.
- Pattanaik, Devdutt. *The Goddess in India: The Five Faces of the Eternal Feminine*. Vermont: Inner Traditions International. 2000. Print.
- Pauwels, Heidi Rika Maria. "Three Ways of Falling in Love," *The Goddess as Role Model: Sita and Radha in Scripture and on Screen*. UK: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.
- Poddar, Hanuman Prasad. *SriRamCharitManas*. Gorakhpur: Geeta Press,1990.Print.
- Raina, Shibban Krishna, tr. *Ramavtarcharit*. Lucknow: Bhuwan Vani Trust, 1975. Print.
- Chakradhar, Ashok. "Khili Batteesi". Jaipur Literature Festival, Jaipur, Jan 20, 2012.Web.
- Sadasivan, S.N. *A Social History of India*. Delhi: APH Publishers, 2000. Print.
- Spain, Daphne. *Gendered Spaces*. USA: University of North Carolina, 1992. Print.

“I find thy cunning seeds, O million murdering Death”: Western Science, Indian Climes in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Calcutta Chromosome*

Sakoon N. Singh

Dept of English
DAV College, Sector 10
Chandigarh

Abstract: In *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), Amitav Ghosh redraws the contours of what is generally thought of as science fiction. Whereas science fiction is generally considered futuristic, this book goes back in time to unearth the goings on of a secret indigenous science clique in Colonial Calcutta. The book, by ascribing the discovery of a new chromosome to this gnostic secret organisation, questions the veracity of claims made by western scientists wherein they appropriated scientific research as solely their preserve. The book weaves in the story of Ronald Ross and his discovery of the vector of malaria. Creating a web of connections and cross connections, mixing fact and fiction with irreverence, the author makes a case for possible Indian connection to malaria research, a fact that has been pushed into a crater of silence. The book uses the conventions of science fiction to assert a political claim to scientific knowledge which is appropriated by the West not only to this end but also to make a wider justification for the rule of ‘west’ over ‘scientifically backward’ India. The story is told through the perspective of an Egyptian migrant scientist in contemporary New York who, though divided in time and space from Colonial Calcutta, is himself caught in the political machinations of the science organisation in which he works.

Keywords: Science fiction, colonial India, malaria parasite.

There have been sustained attempts within recent scholarship to highlight the sociological aspect of science and as David Arnold contends, it has now begun to evaluate science ‘less in terms of its self-declared aims and putatively objective interrogation of nature and more in terms of its internal ordering, social construction and cultural authority... it has become clear that science is a highly social activity, one that cannot be sealed off from the values of the society in which it is practiced’ (1). To further contextualize science in the matrix of the colonial milieu with its skewed power relations is to embark on a journey to unravel the dynamics of science and its intersection with socio-cultural, economic and philosophical underpinnings of the age.

This Day relenting God
Hath placed within my hand
A wondrous thing: And God
Be praised. At His command,

Seeking his secret deeds
With tears and toiling breath,
I find their cunning seeds,
O million murdering Death. (Ross “In Exile” 1-8)

These lines composed by Ronald Ross, the Nobel laureate British scientist and poet are inserted at the beginning of *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996). Sufficiently

packed with an underlying confidence characteristic of a Victorian scientist, these lines highlight his self ordained divine mission to take on the ills of disease and mortality. However Ghosh's choice in inserting these here has a twin purpose: one, to achieve an ironic undertone to the grandeur of scientific enterprise in the Victorian times; and two, to write the present book as a subversive foil to the pervasive genre of scientists' biographies. Claire Chambers in the essay "Historicizing Scientific Reason in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*" elaborates upon the nineteenth-century popular trend of the writing of scientists' biographies wherein these personages were depicted as hardworking, sacrificing figures toiling hard for the sake of humanity. This, in part, owed to the ascendancy Western science witnessed at that time and the corresponding sanguine regard science held in popular imagination. The present novel problematizes the convention by 'exposing' Ross as a fallible, ordinary man who stumbles into the profession quite by a quirk of fate. Additionally, all this plays out against the larger canvas of nineteenth-century colonial India when Western science was making inroads into India firmly predicated on the needs of ascending economic imperatives. As Gyan Prakash points out: '...science, in the colonial context was infused with a cultural authority as legitimizing sign of rationality and progress' (7). In many ways, science was thus, to become the most potent justification of the Empire itself. The Victorians were witness to the gradual shift from a romantic view of nature to a far more aggressive, utilitarian view that sought to extract material benefit from nature. It is this triptych that this essay explores by the means of a close textual analysis, with reference to the evolution of science as a discipline during Victorian times: the Colonial encounter, the utilitarian ethos and the 'clash' of two systems of knowledge.

The Calcutta Chromosome, recipient of the Arthur C. Clarke award for science fiction, conjures the milieu of Victorian times and explores the troubled relationship between Western and Indian science and scientists. Why the author chooses the genre of thriller to make his point about the existence of an alternate science could be essentially to ensure a level of involvement of the reader in the text so that Antar's and Murugan's quests inevitably become the quest of the reader. Towards the end, when in an appropriate dénouement the complex connections and linkages are resolved one by one, it does not give the reader a sense of satisfaction as expected, rather a feeling of gnawing fear of the possibility of such a cult being so close at hand that the possibility of the reader being unwittingly and unknowingly a part of the network is much too real.

Ghosh sets the story in a charged Victorian milieu and depicts a struggle around the owning and appropriation of scientific research. The book also hints at the existence of alternate science(s) that possibly existed around the time. It is fascinating that the book should move through three centuries to tell the story of the malariologist Ronald Ross. Creating a web of connections and cross connections, mixing fact and fiction with irreverence, the author makes a case for possible Indian contribution to malaria research, a fact that has been historically pushed into a crater of silence. The book uses the conventions of science fiction to assert a political claim to scientific knowledge which is appropriated by West not only to this end but also to make a wider justification for the rule of the 'west' over 'scientifically backward' India. However, amongst other objectives, the one aim in writing this book is Ghosh's intent in conveying the flip side of the import of Western science into India. Malaria research was a burgeoning field at that time and many eminent continental scientists

were engaged in the arduous task of researching its cause. According to Arnold, the epidemic of malaria was instrumental at this point in creating a negative representation of Bengal (78). A well-accepted theory tied malaria to miasmatic environmental conditions found in the tropical countries. As an illustration, F.P. Strong in the 1830s admitted that he could not ‘exactly explain how malaria was formed but he had no doubt it was produced most abundantly in those parts of Bengal which are not cleared of jangal (jungle), drained and kept clean.’ Aided by a ‘natural heat and moisture of the climate these generate a constant supply of malaria poison (quoted by Arnold 78). Additionally, Malaria was represented as a ‘emasculating’ disease that threatened reproduction, rendered individuals weak and sickly and so accentuated the division, already entrenched in colonial ideology and practice, between ‘manly’ and ‘martial’ races of the North and northwest and the ‘effeminate’ Bengalis’ (Arnold 79).

The book opens sometime in the near future where a New York based Egyptian scientist Antar, stumbles upon the remnants of the old disused I-Card of his colleague L. Murugan. An Indian yuppie, he is an amateur scholar on Ronald Ross, credited with the identification of anopheles as the vector of malaria. Given his deep knowledge of the circumstances in which Ross worked, Murugan senses that something is amiss in the British scientist’s laboratory. Building on cues collected and collated over a long span, he arrives at the conclusion that Ross was no genius but was pushed into the direction of this research by his petty laboratory assistants and menial workers. Ghosh’s Ross is not a genius but a pampered, gullible son of a General who tries his hand at poetry and sundry professions before being pushed into Indian Medical Service on his influential father’s insistence. The passages in which the life of Ross is recounted by Murugan are full of deprecating humour and show him to be rather “slow” in responding to the many cues that are spread out before him. In constructing Ross, Ghosh is creating a foil to the reverential scientist figure delineated in conventional biographies of the times. The author shows a possibility of the existence of an alternate system of science which is repressed and unrecognized. Ghosh conflates details from Ross’ memoirs which are true with a fictional subplot of the existence in this time of a gnostic cult, and worships silence as deity. The reader is ‘introduced’ to the cult paradoxically through a long paean to silence by the celebrated writer Phulboni:

The silence of the city has sustained me through all my years of writing: kept me alive in the hope that it would claim me too before my ink ran dry. For more years than I can count I have wandered the darkness of these streets, searching for the unseen presence that reigns over this silence, striving to be taken in, begging to be taken across before my time runs out. The time of the crossing is at hand, I know, and that is why I am here now, standing in front of you: to beg- to appeal to the mistress of this silence, that most sacred of deities, to give me what she has so long denied: to show herself to me...’ (Ghosh 28)

Mrs Aratounian, who is watching television in the presence of Murugan, a lodger in the guest house, later switches it off in disgust: “It’s one of those beastly functions where everybody makes speeches” (107). What follows is a queer ‘exchange’ between her and Phulboni, the latter beseeching the former to be accepted as a disciple through parts of his public speech being aired on television. All along

however, the situation is lost on Murugan. There are moments when Murugan is close to the uncovering her identity as the high priestess of the secret science cult. However is never able to comprehend it fully. The Vice President's unceremonious nap in the middle of the function is symptomatic of the larger ignorance to this alternate reality. Phulboni, seems to have had a brush with the secret organization as a young man and has ever since desired to be a part of it. His longing is like that of a desperate acolyte seeking the acceptance of a guru. Earlier, in an impulsive moment he had related his experience to Sonali's mother, a celebrated actress, his lover. This had done him in and through this speech he gives expression to this repentance and asks for forgiveness.

Ghosh reveals that reading through Ross' memoirs, he has sensed the presence of a shadowy character, a permanent fixture in the backdrop of Ross' laboratory. (Chambers Interview 31). This man was identified as Lutchman - a lab boy who did innocuous jobs like maintaining lab equipment and sweeping the premises. He is first introduced as a lab boy pottering around in Ross' laboratory. He doubles up as a domestic help who runs errands for Ross and thus has access to his personal space. However Ghosh contends that Ross was naïve enough to admit at certain places in his memoirs of the bearing he had on the outcome of the research. Lutchman is a character who springs up in varied avatars as an important member of the cult. Through Lutchman and his many avatars, the book presents its critique of the Western idea of stable individuality. Individuality is an area sacred to the West and showing 'Calcutta Chromosome' as a facilitator of immortality at the expense of individuality is an important idea in the book. Lutchman's multiple identities exist not only across time periods, but his name Lutchman can be pronounced in a variety of ways. On a visit, one of Ross' friends, J.W.D. Grigson, a linguist, notices the fact that Lakhan is a variation of the name which is rendered differently depending on the dialect: so it could variously be articulated as Lakhan, Lutchman, Lakshman, etc, and this specialist knowledge gave him enough reason to believe that he the man is not from these parts. When he confronts Lutchman on this, he does not give a satisfactory reply, rather, gets cagey and aggressive. Later in his persistence to get to the bottom of the truth he follows him to the servant quarters and notices a gleaming railway lantern lying on the window sill of his room. When questioned about its presence, Lutchman asks him to follow him if he wanted the answer. He follows Lutchman on the railway track and is almost killed by the approaching train. So terrified is he with this incident that he decides to leave the matter and proceed to Secunderabad on the next available train. Through the incident what becomes clear is that there are forces at work that do not allow Grigson, at that point, to get to the bottom of the truth as far as Lutchman's identity and affiliation with the secret society is concerned.

Lakhan resurfaces later through the writer Phulboni's narrative – a set of stories called *The Lakhan Stories*. In one of these, he is presented as the Dalit orphan who finds refuge at the railway station and upon finding opposition from the upper caste manager is almost killed. He, however, turns the aggression back on the railway manager and kills him instead. Years later, when Phulboni visits the same railway station as a young trainee and chooses to stay there all by himself, he undergoes an almost surreal experience. Here Lutchman's gleaming lantern resurfaces and appears to move around supernaturally. The dust-laden mat which he finds there bears the imprint of a hand with one thumb missing. Lutchman, too has a thumb missing. Conflating the detail of the missing thumb with the fact that he is shown to be a low

caste is powerfully reminiscent of the story of Eklavya from the *Mahabharat*. The low caste tribal boy beseeches the guru Dronacharya, who is the guru of Pandavas to be his guru in the sport of archery. On his refusal, he makes his clay statue and takes him on as his guru. On getting to know of this, the guru asks to be paid his *guru dakshina* and would not settle for anything less than Eklavya's thumb, so as to render him powerless in front of his favourite *kshatriya* pupil Arjun. This story underscores the fact that it takes the sacrifice of a low caste Eklavya for a high caste Arjuna to emerge. Ghosh, by splicing in the reference of low caste Lutchman hints at the discrimination spawned by the power structures as far as dissemination of knowledge is concerned. Like Eklavya, they are not part of the mainstream Western knowledge systems and create their own parallel academy in the shadows. Whether it is Mrs Aratounian who is a white woman in Calcutta or the statue makers of Kalighat, these people exist on the fringes of the Calcutta society.

Lutchman makes yet another appearance as Lucky, in the part of the novel set in New York of the future. Here he appears as the companion of Tara, who is Antar's neighbour. He comes across as a constant companion, a fact that launches Antar into speculation regarding what really is the relationship that the two share. He does not have any clear answers until one evening a squall wreaks destruction in Tara's apartment. From his apartment window Antar sees Lucky cleaning the mess and later Tara performing an elaborate genuflection. It is at this point that the relation between them comes out clearly as one between guru and acolyte. Tara indeed is yet another *avatar* of Mangala, the high priestess of the cult.

However, as the narrative progresses this clutch of people at Ross' laboratory seem to be part of a bigger network and by the end such is its extent that all the principal characters are unwittingly in its grip. What Ghosh insinuates is the presence of a larger, organized reaction against Western science which has not only taken on an extremely instrumentalist orientation but also, in spite of its avowal of universalism, undertaken exploitation of the colonies as a collaborator of imperialism. The mention of societies like Theosophical Society and Spiritualist Society is a pointer in this direction. Both these were India-based societies, vehement critics of the culture of materialism that western science had ushered in at the cost of the spiritual dimension. They claimed that in doing so Western civilization was headed in the direction of crass materialism. They intended to right some of these vices and go back to ancient religions of Hinduism and Buddhism as sources of a holistic worldview. Even though these societies, despite their enthusiasm, remained marginal and esoteric, it is vital to consider them as representing some sort of a reaction to the excesses of western science and its astronomical ascent at this time.

Given Ghosh's antecedents and his rigorous grounding in Subaltern Studies, it is evident that his motive in writing *The Calcutta Chromosome* was to highlight the inequities inherent in the encounter of Western science and Indians. A nuanced understanding of this power play informs his depiction of scientist figures and situations highlighting this exchange. His subversion of the much celebrated scientist Ronald Ross is achieved through a caricatured, irreverent delineation. Murugan's is upheld as the narratorial voice as he is shown passionate in his interest in Ross but not completely eulogizing. In fact his many jibes and tongue-in-cheek accounts undercut the excessively laudatory vein of scientists' biographies.

Further, the presence of Indian laboratory staff points toward their contribution to colonial science of which there is very little acknowledgement. There are depictions of gory violence, incomprehensible customs, machinations and secrecy of the Indian cult, all of which have an obfuscating effect on the real purpose of the author. Ghosh chooses to pitch the people of the secret cult in utter silence. At one level it helps because the silence of the cult becomes a reason for its seeming absence. However, apart from imparting secrecy to the cult, he also somewhere makes them appear more 'oriental' than required. For instance the entire semiotic of blood and gore when it comes to the decapitation of the pigeons used in experiments by the cult which is in stark opposition to the 'gentlemen scientists from Europe' who seem to rely on well stained slides. The mix of chanting and elaborate religious rituals along with their practice of science and medicine is again playing to the western image of the orient.

In the episode where the American scientist Elijah Farley visits Cunningham's laboratory, he discovers the 'unnatural' behaviour of the laboratory staff. His conviction leads him to the discovery of this 'other science' being practiced in the anterooms while Cunningham is absent. His worst fears turn out to be true when their images are captured on the surface of a steel tumbler while he has his back on them:

...his eyes were arrested by a scene that was now unfolding behind him. The assistant, who had gone over to fetch a tray of slides, was whispering with the woman in the saree. It was soon clear that it was he, Farley, they were talking about: the distorted reflections of their faces seemed to take on a grotesque and frightening quality as they nodded and pointed across the room. (124)

It is this perspective of Farley looking at the images on the glass that Ghosh adopts to tell this tale. It is oblique, at times distorting, imparting a grotesqueness to the picture. While one can argue that this fits in wonderfully well with the thriller-suspense thread in the book, it can equally be claimed that it does some amount of damage to the political claim about the presence of science and rationality in pre-colonial India. The story of science in India is presented soaked in the imagery of blood and gore, antechambers and secret passages revealed in smoky prayer rooms filled with heartless acolytes on a mission. The by now ubiquitous question: Can the subaltern speak? is turned on its head because herein the equations change and the subalterns seem to be embracing silence rather than being forced into it. The anticipated struggle of Western science and Indian thus is never openly staged. Instead the book becomes escapist and further ventures into the territory of the supernatural thriller.

Perhaps it is unfair to subject creative writing to prescriptive designs. Nevertheless, the politics that the book rests on is undercut by obfuscation of these very pertinent issues. One can also surmise that it could be Ghosh's endeavour to take skepticism to another level and in his refusal to show the struggle he is advocating: the indirect subversion of the very standards of discipline set by the Western academy. The British are caught in a design they have no knowledge of and thus their stature is greatly reduced. Further, Ghosh's depiction of the subaltern too is fraught with skepticism. It does not stick to poor-brown-woman; instead in the various time frames, it also includes a diasporic white woman Mrs Aratounian and a rich builder,

Roman Halder. One can conclude that the book is replete with a consciousness of the power play in science; however, it presents the plot with skepticism to an extent that the seams of the narrative are undone even as they are being stitched together.

Works Consulted and Cited

Adas, Michael. *Machines as the Measure of Man: Science, Technology and Ideology of Western Dominance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989. Print.

Arnold, David. *The New Cambridge History of India: Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

Banerji, J. "Bengali Braid: Review of *The Calcutta Chromosome*." *Indian Review of Books*. 5.9 (1996): 2-3. Print.

Chambers, Claire. "Historicizing Scientific Reason in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*." *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion*. Ed. Tabish Khair. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003. 36–55. Print.

---. "The Absolute Essentialness of Conversations: A Discussion with Amitav Ghosh." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 41.1 (2005):26-39. Print.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery*. New Delhi: Penguin, 1996. Print.

Goh, Robbie B.H. "ThePostclone-nial in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*: Science and the Body in the Asian Diaspora." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*. 41. 3-4 (2011): 45 - 71. Print.

Prakash, Gyan. "Science between the Lines." *Subaltern Studies IX*. eds. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakarvarty. New Delhi: Oxford, 1996. 59- 82.Print.

Literature as Social Agenda: The Poetry of Temsula Ao

Neeraj Sankhyan and Suman Sigroha
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi, H.P.

Abstract: The French philosopher Louise Gabriel Ambroise once commented that literature is an expression of society just like the word is the expression of a human being. This especially gains enormous significance with respect to the literature from the North-eastern part of India which is often and unfortunately described with epithets such as terror, violence, fear, loss, “soaked in blood” (Misra xxiv) etc. This is mainly owing to the violence perpetrated by insurgency of the militant outfits fighting for ‘freedom’ of their land from Indian government and counter-insurgency operations of the latter. Besides, a deep sense of alienation and denial infests the area due to its landlocked geography and apathy of the Indian government. The endangering of the traditional/indigenous culture in the face of invasion of an alien culture marked by modernity and globalization coupled with the gross misrepresentation of the heterogeneous character of the region under the erroneous homogeneous ‘Northeast’ label further adds to the woes of this region. It is only natural hence that most of the literature emanating from this region carries a deep-rooted concern for the social issues that plague these areas. Temsula Ao, from Nagaland, is one such accomplished writer who strives to bring about a social change in her region by creating awareness about all the issues mentioned above. This paper is an attempt to explore and foreground such social concerns in her poetry collection titled *Book of Songs*.

Keywords: northeast, culture, modernization, identity, folk traditions, society

According to the French philosopher Louise Gabriel Ambroise, ‘Literature is an expression of society just like the word is the expression of a human being.’ This especially gains enormous significance with respect to the literature from the North-eastern part of India which depicts “perceptions of the traumatic experience of a people living in the midst of terror and fear and yet cherishing hopes that human values will triumph some day and new dawn of peace would emerge out of this trial by fire” (Misra xix). The region has suffered from a severe identity crisis as a consequence of “re-drawing of boundaries that began with the Partition of the Subcontinent...” (Misra xvii). The unfair representation of the region in the nationalist discourse has had an adverse effect on the psyche of the people who felt wronged by an indifferent Indian State. As Rakhee Kalita puts it, “The story of these people is the story of history’s accidents, of an arbitrary line drawing boundaries across geographically and culturally contiguous lands dismembering the natural and inevitable growth and movement of a community—a consequence of colonial ambitions, political battles and failed bureaucratic strategies” (17).

The fear of losing identity and of being ignored by the mainland gave rise to a false sense of ‘nationalism’ that transformed into insurgency thus creating a perpetual cycle of terror and violence. According to Ved Prakash, “In India’s North-East, insurgency is an ethno-cultural phenomenon, in the sense that perceiving their ethnic identity threatened, they seek political power to preserve it...” (33)

The Indian Government, instead of looking after the concerns of its marginalized people empathetically, has played the role of an oppressor so far through its repressive policies and draconian acts such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act that has further aggravated the alienation of the crisis ridden region. As Grace Pelly puts it in *State Terrorism*:

The rationale for AFSPA is that the armed forces need “special powers” to prevent terrorist activity in the region and to contain independence movements. In practice, however, the police and the military forces use the powers and immunity that AFSPA grants to deal with ordinary matters of criminal justice. This highlights that increased powers given to State actors results in increased violence against civilians, fuelling a mutual distrust (124).

The insurgency and violence coupled with the endangering of the traditional/indigenous culture in the face of invasion by an alien culture marked by modernity and globalization, coupled with the gross misrepresentation of the heterogeneous character of the region under the erroneous homogeneous ‘Northeast’ label further adds to the woes of this region. Quoting Samir Kumar Das in *Governing India’s Northeast*, “It is true that in scholarly circles Northeast continues to be dismissed as ‘an illusive construct’- with its wide divisions and remarkable differences that refuse to give unto themselves any generic and pan-regional character...” (20). Moreover, this fetishization or ‘the threat of museumisation’(xv) as G J V Pasad describes it in the introduction to *Book of Songs*, is a potential threat to the already endangered culture of the Northeast. Temsula Ao expresses this fear of losing of identity/culture in a 2006 article:

The cultures of North East India are already facing tremendous challenges from education and modernization. In the evolution of such cultures and the identities that they embody, the loss of distinctive identity does not bode well for the tribes of the region. If the trend is allowed to continue in an indiscriminate and mindless manner, globalization will create a market in which Naga, Khasi or Mizo communities will become mere brand names and commodity markers stripped of all human significance and which will definitely mutate the ethnic and symbolic identities of a proud people. (7)

This paper aims to read the poetry of Temsula Ao in the light of these concerns that plague the region and explore how she uses her poems with a motive to revive and vindicate a culture under threat of being lost forever. The paper analyses the role that Temsula plays, using the medium of her poetry, in resurrecting a history lost for want of documentation and fortifying a culture fast losing its moorings to commercialisation and becoming alien in its own land. In this manner, the paper also looks at the reworking of the oral traditions of the Ao-Naga culture in her poetry as a means of invoking “the past as a collective cultural memory and making meaning of it in the 21st century for the individual listener” (Naidu *Making Storytelling Work*).

Temsula Ao is a poet, writer and ethnographer besides being a retired professor of English from North Eastern Hill University. Besides being hailed as one of the major literary voices from the Northeast India, she has also proved to be a successful administrator as Director, North East Zone Cultural Centre as she tried her best to get the cultural richness of Northeast recognised at the National level. She has

also been instrumental in the construction of the Heritage Museum at Shangyu village in Mon district of Nagaland (Ao, "Once upon a life" 210). As an ethnographer, she worked on the oral tradition of her own community, Ao Naga, studying and recording their myths, folktales, rituals, traditions and belief system, which was published as the *Ao Naga Oral Tradition*. Her writings are replete with images and themes from Naga folk culture. As a representative of her people, she infuses in her poetry the voices and concerns of her people and her land. Referring to the poet in the introduction to the *Book of Songs*, Prasad remarks that 'she searches for the past that has disappeared into the mists of time, for it is in the very unrealisability of that history that her people's troubled present arises...' (xiv). All her poetry collections bear the word 'Songs' in their titles which is reflective of the oral tradition her poetry is rooted in: "poems are songs in oral cultures and Tamsula Ao sees herself as a Naga woman poet in search of tradition" (Prasad xvii). She makes her intentions clear in the introductory poem of her first collection titled *Songs That Tell*:

Songs
Which sometimes
Imitate
Greater bards
To indicate
Similar response
To corresponding chords. ("Songs Dedicatory" 14-20)

The poet in this free verse refers to her ancestors as the 'Greater bards' whom she wishes to emulate in order to continue the tradition of her community. These 'songs' for her are a way of reviving her kinship with her community, of experiencing and responding to their joys, pains and sorrows in a similar way as once her ancestors did. She aspires to uphold the tradition and merge her voice with it. She further reiterates this point later in the poem, stating that her songs:

... now vibrate
for a kindred heart
who knew and understood
long before I knew them (32-35)

'Kindred heart' is an allusion to her forebears and her poems carry the vibrations of the songs that have been sung in the past. She renounces her individuality for the sake of belonging to the tradition and in that merging alone does she revive her lost identity. This historical sense that the poet exhibits has been expounded by T.S. Eliot in 'Tradition and Individual Talent' where he says, "(T)his historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity" (Eliot 44).

"The Stone-people from Lungterok" is a poem about the creation myth of the Aos. According to Mark Bender; "The poem draws on tradition-rich imagery of assemblies of stones that mark sites associated with origins of the ancients" (112). A note attached at the end of the poem explains that the word 'Lungterok' in Ao Naga language means 'Six Stones'. It further adds that "according to Aos their first forefathers emerged out the earth from a place called Lungterok. There were three

men and three women” (Ao 111). In this poem, the poet conjures up a remarkable image of her ancestors. She portrays them as possessors of special skills for survival, well versed with the secrets and wisdom of nature and myriad of creatures, worshippers of the natural and the supernatural. Using oxymoronic adjectives such as “barbaric and balladic”, “the poetic and the politic” and “savage and sage”, the poet paints a larger than life image of her ancestors and eulogizes them while tracing to them the roots of the present Ao Naga traditions. This poem can be read as a means employed by the poet to locate and revive her lost identity especially in times when cultures seem to lose their grounds of existence and turn into objects of fetish and simultaneously to instil a sense of pride in the traditions of her community. The poet makes a reference here to the martial tradition of head hunting that was famous once in the Ao Naga culture. As described in *Nagaland* by Verrier Elwin, “The Practice of head hunting is based on a belief in a soul matter or vital essence of great power, which resides in the human head” (11). While the poet maintains a tone of certainty about the poet’s faith in her traditions, it ends on a sceptical note reflecting poet’s ambivalence: “Was the birth adult when the stone broke? / or are the STONE-PEOPLE yet to come of age?” (“Stone-People” 54-55).

In “Heritage”, the poet expresses the irony of having to witness artefacts belonging to her tribe being displayed in a European museum behind ‘glass cages’. Caught between opposing forces of close familiarity and stark alienation, she experiences helplessness and despair at watching her heritage symbols locked and displayed as in these lines:

They languish, these uprooted
treasures of my heritage
caged within imposing structures
in designated spaces (“Heritage” 1-4).

The poem comments on the exoticization of cultural artifacts that alienates them from their very source, ridding them of their true identity and reducing them to mere objects of display: “But artifacts wrenched from their origin / must, by reason / remain mute” (“Heritage” 11-13). The poet views this exhibition of her heritage icons as an insult and threat to her identity and having overcome her initial shock and feeling of helplessness, resolves to bring the “purloined treasures” back to their place of origin. This seems to her a way of redeeming herself of the identity crisis arising from this cultural alienation. As put by Jorn Rusen, “Identity is a matter of culture. Culture is the entire achievement of the human mind in interpreting and understanding the given world including oneself as living in this world and being a part of it” (144). This delicate relationship between identity and culture is threatened in this age of globalization, which despite having “increased the options for identification on a personal and collective level ... has also contributed towards the fragmentation of identity” (Servaes, Lie & Terzis 2000). The poet through her poetry attempts on a personal, and eventually a collective, level to revive the lost identity of her tribe by creating awareness about her cultural roots.

“History” from the *Songs from the Other Life* is a poem that augments the discourse of reconstructing a history long neglected and on the verge of being forgotten. The folklore referred to in this poem as “songs” assumes a life of its own seeking expression through the poet’s words after lying silently in her being like

dormant seeds awaiting germination. The folklore constitutes an important part of the cultural heritage and is transmitted across generations through the medium of oral traditions. As such, folklore plays a significant role in constituting the identity of a particular people. As stated by Dr Soumen Sen:

When we talk of ethno-specificity of culture including folklore, we come to a related issue – issue of cultural identity which is in sharp focus in culture and politics of north-east India for last few decades. The important connection between identity and folklore can never be denied. Since the relationship between members of a group, or of a community, determines the collective identity, folklore is the most important source of its construction, articulation and perpetuation. This is because it prepares the cultural symbols, the essential features of an identity system. (37)

The poet wishes to keep this tradition of her folklore alive through her poems. As discussed in the poem “Songs Dedicatory”, she holds the tradition high above her individual self which becomes a medium for the tradition to continue being passed from oneself to another. The generations passing the traditions change and so do the words which carry them as each generation invents a new parlance to suit its needs and tastes; however the song remains the same.

They now resonate
In words of new
Discernment
To augment the lore
Of our essential core (“History” 9-13)

In another poem titled “My Hills”, the poet laments the loss of peace and verdure in her region. She reflects upon a sense of alienation that haunts her in the present and a longing for the bygone days. The poet draws on natural imagery to depict the once paradise like state that prevailed in the region marked by lines such as, “and happy gurgling brooks” (6), “the seasons playing magic / On their many-splendored sheen” (11-12) and “the hills echoed / with the wistful whispers / Of autumnal leaves” 14-16). However, the last three paragraphs bemoan the plight of this region, which having lost the serenity of the yesteryear has become synonymous with political turmoil and social unrest. Expounding the trouble in the Northeast, Subir Bhaumik says, “The North East has been seen as the problem child since the very inception of the Indian Republic. It has also been South Asia’s most enduring theatre of separatist guerrilla war, a region where armed action has usually been the first, rather than the last, option of political protest” (xiv). Referring to the violence in the valley, the poet says:

But to-day
I no longer know my hills,
The birdsong is gone,
Replaced by the staccato
Of sophisticated weaponry. (“My Hills” 19-23)

In “The Old Story Teller”, Temsula Ao reiterates her role as keeper of her cultural heritage, “I have lived my life believing / Story-telling was my proud legacy”

(1-2). Using flowing free verses, the poet starts out on an enthusiastic note acknowledging the responsibility that she shoulders of keeping her tradition alive. The poem begins in a casual style talking about how the poet inherited the legacy of storytelling from her grandfather and sidles gradually into its theme without much fanfare. A note appended to the poem explains the origin of the Oral Tradition of the Ao-Naga community. It maintains that in ancient times, the tribe possessed a script which was displayed on a hide for everyone to read and learn. However, a dog one day accidentally swallowed the hide and so the script was lost forever. Since then, the people have retained every aspect of their lives through the Oral Tradition (Ao 240). The poem makes reference to the traditional myths about creation of the tribe and commonality of humans and animals. However, the tone turns apprehensive toward the end of the poem as the poet laments the new generation's disbelief in the cultural history of the tribe:

The rejection from my own
Has stemmed the flow
And the stories seem to regress
Into un-reachable recesses" (47-50).

However, despite the despair of witnessing her tradition fade, the poet perseveres in resurrecting her legacy through her poetry. "Nowhere Boatman" is based on the Ao-Naga myth according to which the boatman is paid some coins to sail the souls of the dead from the Land of the Living to the Land of the Dead where they can continue their afterlife journey (Ao 245). The title "Nowhere Boatman" is a paradox, as one expects the boatman to lead the way; however, prefixing the 'nowhere' defies the very sense of direction it generates. The argument in the poem proceeds in a discursive manner with the boatman counter questioning his passengers and rejecting their answers one by one as in the following lines:

They even ask me
How old I am
As if knowing my age has anything to do with their being
on my boat for their last ride
.....
I shall send the pesky souls
To the tree-stump whose belly
Is now my boat, to tell them
How old is old? (6-10, 20-23)

Through her ingenious craft, the poet manages to trace the origin of the tradition to nature itself and express the existential dilemma with apparent ease as in these lines:

Anyway, what has age to do with dying
And of what use this irrelevant knowledge
When they are already pledged
On a one way journey
To their destiny? (24-28)

The tone of the poem turns sombre towards the second half with the poet empathising with the insignificant existence of the boatman. The boatman turns sceptical about his

own role of ferrying the dead to the afterworld and wonders if he'd ever be redeemed himself.

It is worth mentioning that the poet is not a blind supporter of her traditions and is candid about criticizing certain practices which have lost relevance in the modern times or are simply vainglorious. In "The Spear", the poet depicts the innate cruelty and predatory instincts of a hunter who mindlessly throws a spear at a moving figure which turns out to be a doe in process of giving birth to a calf. Realising his mistake, he is struck by remorse and fear lest any harm befalls his yet unborn child. This poignant narration tells of the evil of hunting and the havoc it causes to the natural world. Recognising this devilish instinct in his mind, the hunter says, "For now I knew / It was not the spear alone / That caused it all" (67-69). Similarly, "Trophies" exposes the inhumanity of the infamous Naga custom of chopping of the heads of slain enemies in warfare and displaying them publicly as symbol of bravery and social status (Ao 284). The poem is a feminine counter-discourse in the voice of a Naga woman who laments the bloody tradition that renders the Naga men intoxicated by wine and conceit completely oblivious of their familial responsibilities.

The study reveals that Temsula Ao is a poet who writes to give voice to her community. In the words of Preeti Gill, "(P)eople whose history and civilization had been pushed into the margins took up the task of recreating their past and reinventing tradition as part of the nationalist agenda of identity assertion." (Narratives of lived experience - writing the Northeast). Temsula is one such artist who writes with an innate responsibility to preserve her oral tradition that she as a tribal has inherited from her forebears. Her poems reflect a deep concern for the changing social scenario, especially in the face of the winds of change that appear to threaten the roots linking her with the tradition. Her poetry is an endeavour to revive a lost identity by reworking her cultural legacy and making it relevant for the new generation. By doing this, she also aims at redrafting the violent ridden image of the Northeast and portraying her region for the wealth of cultural history it possesses. In her own words:

The Northeast is so beautifully varied. It is like the different hues in the rainbow. Each of the seven states in the region brings out a different flavour. I think one should do justice in portraying these various flavours through their writing. That is what I try to do with regard to my state" (Ao, NELitreview).

Works Consulted and Cited

Ao, Temsula. "Heritage." *Muse India*. Muse India, n.d. Web. 1 August 2015.

---. "History." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013. 239. Print.

---. "My Hills." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013. 157-158. Print.

---. "Nowhere Boatman." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013. 245-247. Print.

- . "Stone People." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013.109-111. Print.
- . "Temsula Ao Recommends." *NElitreview*. Nelitreview, 2011. Web. 3 Aug. 2015.
- . "The Old Story Teller." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013.240-242. Print.
- . "The Spear." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013.277-279. Print.
- . "Trophies." *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013.284-286. Print.
- . *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013. Print.
- Bhaumik, Subir. Preface. *Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India's North East*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd, 2009. xiv-xxiv. Print.
- Das, Samir Kumar. *Governing India's Northeast*. New Delhi: Springer, 2013. Print.
- Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Sacred Wood and Major Early Essays*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1998. Print.
- Elwin, Verrier. *Nagaland*. New Delhi: Spectrum Publications, 1997. Print.
- Gill, Preeti. "Narratives of lived experience-writing the Northeast." *India-Seminar*. India-Seminar, n.d. Web. 3 August 2015.
- Kalita, Rakhee. "Readings from No Man's Land." Rev. of *Owlingor Jui* by Anuraag Mahanta. *Biblio: A Review of Books* May-June 2008. Print.
- Misra, Tilottoma. *The Oxford Anthology of Writings from North-East India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010. Print.
- Naidu, Vaiyu. "Making Storytelling Work". *Literary Landscapes: A Symposium on Language, Power and Recognition in Indian Writing*.n.p., Aug. 2009. Web. 20 July, 2015.
- Pelly, Grace, ed. *State Terrorism: Torture, Extra-judicial killings and Forced Disappearances in India*. New Delhi: Human Rights Law Network, 2009. Print.
- Prakash, Ved. *Terrorism in India's North-East: A Gathering Storm*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2008. Print.
- Prasad, GJV. Introduction. *Book of Songs: Collected Poems 1988-2007*. By Temsula Ao. Nagaland: Heritage Publishing House, 2013. Print.
- Rusen, Jorn. "Tradition and Identity: Theoretical Reflections and the European Example." *Taiwan Journal of East Asia Studies* 1.2 (2004): 135-158. Print.

Sen, Soumen. *Folklore Identity Development: In the Context of North-east India*. Kolkata: Anjali Publishers, 2010. Print.

Servaes, J, Lie, R & Terzis, G. *Introduction: International Communication from Media Imperialism to Cultural Globalisation*. Study Guide for Paper 1 of the Masters Degree of Arts in International Communication. Pretoria: Department of Communication, University of South Africa, 2000.

The Cyborg Prophecy: Reading between Isaac Asimov's Lines

Rudrani Gangopadhyay
Jadavpur University, Kolkata

Abstract: Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" describes the Cyborg as a conjunction of technology and discourse. It argues that a prosthesis becomes a cyborg element when it is integrated with the identity of an individual, and a cyborg is created by the almost symbiotic union of robotic and organic elements. Isaac Asimov, in his short story "The Bicentennial Man" for example, narrates the story of such a remarkable union of robotic and human parts and asserts, at the end, that the resultant system is, essentially, human. A cyborg, therefore, is 'meta-human', being somewhat enhanced (by the use of technology) in certain ways in comparison to a human being. There is a mass cyborgization of the global population taking place today. The kind of blurring of boundaries between exogenous and endogenous parts within the system of a human being that one had, so far, only come across in science fiction, is fast coming to life. The obvious example of prosthetics aside, gadgets like cellphone headsets, touchscreen phones and similar electronic devices have been rendered extensions of the human system, merging seamlessly with the organic identities and consequently, making cyborgs out of everyone. The relevance of literature featuring cyborgs, which have, in a way, acted as prophecies for human civilization, therefore cannot be emphasized enough. This paper explores the cyborg identity in select works of Isaac Asimov and reflect on the fast occurring cyborgization of the (meta-)human race in reality.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Isaac Asimov, Cyborg, Cybernetics, Body Studies

Donna Haraway, in the famous "Cyborg Manifesto," describes a cyborg as a conjunction of technology and discourse (Haraway 149). A cyborg, in other words, is created by the almost symbiotic union of organic and mechanical elements. It is, therefore, a sort of 'meta-human', its human state having been enhanced by the incorporation of an external technological entity into its organic system. This incorporation of technology and its resultant enhancement in the functioning of the human species has transformed from a miracle of science to a fact of life in present times, thus resulting in a kind of mass cyborgization of the global population. The blurring of boundaries between man and machine is something that was first noted in the pages of Science Fiction texts, and has, since then, come to life, thus altering the course of history to resemble something out of these texts. This paper aims to explore the Cyborg Identity in select works of the prolific scientist and science fiction writer, Isaac Asimov, and reflect on the fast-occurring cyborgization of the (meta-)human race that human beings seem to have evolved into, as well finding points of interaction between Asimov's fiction and reality.

In 1976, Isaac Asimov wrote the novella "The Bicentennial Man," focusing on this issue of robotic and human union. In the text, Asimov writes about the journey of a robot who gradually, with the use of technology, comes to resemble a human being. His transformation is so complete that when he finally wants a fatal surgery so that he can have the ultimate human experience – death – the robotic surgeon refuses him the surgery by saying that it would be a violation of the First Law of Robotics (*The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories* 110). The First Law states that a robot cannot

harm a human, and the robotic surgeon, assuming Asimov's protagonist Andrew Martin to be a human, cannot perform a fatal surgery on him. While this story is an exception to most Cyborg Fiction because it shows the gradual incorporation of human parts into a robotic entity, Andrew Martin is ultimately recognized as a human being at the end of the story, albeit one with mechanical enhancements. Andrew does, therefore, fit well within the definition of a Cyborg. He is, in a sense, both meta-robotic as well as meta-human, since he is more than both identities individually. Asimov's brilliant portrayal of Andrew Martin occupying a strange twilight zone between human-ness and robot-ness won him both the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award for Best Science Fiction in 1976.

Marisa Olson, in her essay "Viva Cyborg Theory," comments on cyborgization by mentioning that "there were no [longer] separations between bodies and objects. Our life force flows through us and out into the objects we make ..." (Olson). This directly relates the cyborg identity with the act of creation. The Bicentennial Robot-Man's journey into cyborghood also begins with an act of creation. Andrew's master notices a pendant that the entirely robotic Andrew has carved out of wood, and decides to begin his partial humanization. Andrew's artistic skills, or his ability to create, is what sways his master's mind about creating a more human identity for him. His transformation, therefore, is triggered off by a certain "life force" - not unlike what Olson talks about. This force flows from his robotic identity into the creation of art he claims to "enjoy doing" (*Bicentennial Man* 112). Olson continues that "there ought to be no distinction between the so-called real or natural organisms that nature produces and the artificial machines that humans make" ("Viva Cyborg Theory"). There is a certain creator-creation balance that is intrinsic to the human identity which blurs the line between nature and machine. Even before any of the more humanoid features are added to Andrew's system, he becomes more than a robot the moment he finds himself a part of this creator-creation set-up. While his creations begin with woodwork, it is by no means restricted to it: his first trip to the library is made with the intention of writing "a history about robots" (*Bicentennial Man* 123), and he devotes himself to extensive research in an attempt to build, or create for himself human-like biological functions as well as organs, and largely succeeds in doing so. The process of creation, therefore, is something that accompanies him every step of the way in what may be called his journey towards (meta-)humanization.

As a machine, it was when Andrew created art that he was first identified as something more than a robot, something more akin to human beings perhaps. On the other hand, human beings themselves fail to create art without machines. Artistic creations these days are very heavily machine-dependent. Whether it is Photoshop or Installation art which makes extensive use of machines or HD Cameras or 3D films made using a Green Screen. It would seem that technology is, in a way, what enables us to create art, which is supposed to be a deeply personal expression of a human individual. Even a basic tool like a paintbrush or a pen performs basic mechanical function. Humans, therefore, achieve the fruition of what is a natural impulse - that of art - through machines, which can, therefore, be called an extension of the human identity in these cases. A perfect example of this is the work of sculptor Tim Hawkinson known for making detailed installations which make use of technology. In 2005, a special exhibit of Hawkinson's art was on display at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The exhibition curator, Lawrence Rinder, elaborated on Hawkinson's style by saying

Tim Hawkinson's fantastical works suggest the profound strangeness of life, matter, and time. Interweaving images of bodies and machines, at scales that vary from the monumental to the nearly microscopic, Hawkinson conjures a world that teeters on the cusp between the real and unreal ("Tim Hawkinson").

Hawkinson's style, therefore, incorporates machines as well as organisms to create a blurring of real and unreal, of the exogenous and the endogenous elements that unite to create cyborg entities. It may be argued that his art is Cyborg art in itself. Keeping in mind Andrew Martin from Asimov's tale, who first became meta-robotic through his creation, it may also be argued that Hawkinson becomes meta-human through his art that blends man and machine so seamlessly.

"The Bicentennial Man" is also a perfect example of what could be called the fictional origin point of Cybernetics as a field. Cybernetics may be defined as a transdisciplinary approach for exploration of regulatory systems, structures, and possibilities, that is significant for the study of mechanical, physical, biological, cognitive, and social systems ('Cybernetics'). In Asimov's story, the creation of one cyborg includes many approaches, which bring together fields of science, arts, law, etc. Andy Clark, in his book, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies and the Future of Human Intelligence*, writes that

...the human brain is nature's great mental chameleon. Pumped and primed by native plasticity, it is poised for profound mergers with surrounding web of symbols, culture and technology. (197)

By this logic, the infinitely adaptable human brain is inclined to cyborgization and is, ultimately, the true seat of cybernetics. In fact, Asimov himself wrote that "it is the brain, then, that is the sticking point in going from human organism to robot" ("Cybernetic Organism"). For Asimov, then, the brain is a versatile instrument that can transgress and retain the authenticity of human-ness simultaneously. Asimov, in his essay, brings up the subject of "The Bicentennial Man" where, even though Andrew Martin works increasingly hard to achieve a state equivalent to – and perhaps, even superior to, at times – human beings, he has trouble making himself "accepted as a man" ("Cybernetic Organism"). Ironically, at the end of Asimov's story, Andrew had trouble in making himself accepted as a robot by the robotic surgeon, indicating that the cyborg exists in a liminal third space of its own.

Like cybernetics, cyborgs too originate in the pages of fiction, but have come to life through technological advancements. As early as 1879, Edward Page Mitchell wrote the short story, "The Ablest Man in the World," about a clockwork brain put inside the skull of a retarded man, thus turning him into a genius. The idea of using machines to enhance human functions, therefore, dates back to a century before Asimov wrote "The Bicentennial Man." Haraway, in her Manifesto, wrote that a prosthesis becomes a cyborg element when it is integrated within the identity of an individual. Like Baron Savitch in Mitchell's story, who would have been restricted to a vegetable existence had it not been for the intervention of his doctor, modern medicine too has given life to many who were perhaps not retarded like Savitch was, but whose genius would have remained untapped had it not been for the timely inclusion of technology into their lives. The most notable example of this is Stephen Hawking, who was diagnosed with a motor neuron disease when he was only 21

("Stephen Hawking"), when he was given two years to live. It is what can only be called a miracle of science that has kept him alive till date, despite having lost the capacity to move or speak or write. He is now 71 and communicates by using a machine where he can select the words by a twitch of his cheek muscles. While this takes a very long time, it is without a doubt a better alternative than losing the brilliance of Stephen Hawking to illness. Hawking's wheelchair, equipped with technologies for most functions that he would have needed to perform had he not been ill, is so completely a part of his identity that it makes him a meta-human in many ways.

Hawkins is only one example, albeit an illustrious one, of what modern medicine is achieving through what can only be called cyborg technology. People are kept alive on life support systems, robotic arms with incredible functionality are used both to perform surgeries and as implants on people who have suffered the loss of limbs, pacemakers are used to make a heart function properly, hearing aids and lenses are incorporated to heighten failing senses. In short, technology has transcended the boundaries of fiction and reality simultaneously as it transgressed the borders between man and machine. Haraway, in fact, goes on to write in her Manifesto about how

Contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs - creatures simultaneously animal and machine, who populate worlds ambiguously natural and crafted. Modern medicine is also full of cyborgs, of couplings between organism and machine. (149- 150)

Her words are a reflection on the curious relationship between science fiction and medicine, where what the former imagined is being made feasible by the latter: the cyborg is now truly "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (Haraway 149). In an age where prosthetic arms, hearing aids, contact lenses, machines which measure how many calories we burn while we run are but an extension of our organic bodies, her words hold very true. The older idea of the Cyborg, not very unlike what was found in the pages of science fiction novels, might not hold good, but a newer, perhaps improved breed of cyborgs were coming into being:

The word cyborg once conjured visions of wires and implants, but as we have seen, the use of such penetrative technologies is inessential.... What matters is our obsessive, endless weaving of biotechnological webs: the constant two-way traffic between biological wetware and tools, media, props and technologies (Clark 198).

It could be argued that the idea of a cyborg comes from our age-old fantasy to be superhuman, to go beyond the weaknesses that we associate with being fragile and human. Whatever it might be, we have, today, arrived at a point where almost none of us are simply human, our existences being augured or enhanced by technology in one way or the other. It is undeniable that on some latent level, the inspiration for cyborgs comes from works like those of Asimov, where for the first time the boundaries of elements outside and inside the body were so easily transgressed long before one was equipped to do so in real life.

However, as such 'assimilated' entities composed of robotic and human parts become more and more common in our times with the advancement of technology, certain questions are bound to come up and they are, in the field of Body Studies.

Bruno Latour, in his book *We Have Never Been Modern*, discusses the “proliferation of hybrids” (1). This problematizes body politics to a great extent. It raises questions of when it is that we start being more robotic than human, and how that affects the laws that determine our existence. If we are to look at Science Fiction once again – since it almost takes on a soothsaying capacity in so far as cyborgs are concerned – there might come a time when we would need laws to separate humans from robots, perhaps depending on the percentage of machines or organic parts in a cyborg entity. Where do we place these assimilated entities in the human-robot spectrum? Do we recognize the cyborg population as a different species, which is multiplying in number every day? Do we give them rights? Asimov’s writing predicted these and other problems that would come in with the advent of the cyborg population, making his work prophetic in more than one ways. How does a cyborg offer proof of his humanity? Asimov asks:

The easiest way for a cyborg to offer the proof is for him to demonstrate that he is not bound by the Three Laws of Robotics. Since the Three Laws enforce socially acceptable behavior, this means he must demonstrate that is capable of human (i.e. nasty) behavior. The simplest and most unanswerable argument is simply to knock the challenger down, breaking his jaw in the process, since no robot could do that. (“Cybernetic Organism”)

Asimov, in fact, uses this exact principle in one of his own stories, “Evidence”; set in 2032, the story hinges itself upon this exact crisis of how to prove whether an individual is a robot or a human, or something else altogether. The story starts with Francis Quinn, a political king-maker, who wants to discredit a mayoral candidate by the name of Stephen Byerley. At this point in Asimov’s fictional universe, robots are not allowed on Earth. So, Quinn decides to spread the rumour that Byerley is a robot, which is strengthened by the fact that the latter is never seen eating or resting in public and has had an accident in the past from which he was known to recover rather slowly. Amidst the debate of trying to prove Byerley’s human-ness, it is said that “Robots are essentially decent” (*I, Robot* 87), indicating that their laws forbid them from indulging in violence. However, it is when robotic elements combine with the human capacity for destruction that trouble begins. As military warfare advances everyday, and soldiers are fitted with more and more mechanical parts, rendering them into efficient killing *machines*, the words of Asimov’s 1947 stories are prophetic to say the least.

The story continues debating the nature of proof that Byerley can produce to define his human-ness: it can be proved only if he harms somebody. If he refuses to do so, he could either be a robot, or a decent human being. Eventually, after being insulted at a political rally and instigated, Byerley hits a man (*I, Robot* 271), thus proving himself to be a human being whose acts are in violation of the First Law. The story concludes without any other real evidence, but Asimov’s brilliance lies in the fact that he points out certain facts for the reader’s benefit: that Byerley could have hit the person at the political rally if he had also been a robot, that Byerley was atomized after death leaving no way to conclusively prove whether he was man or robot, and that he was an excellent leader and the first World Co-ordinator when the Machines were helping to run the Earth (*I, Robot* 305). The ambiguous ending of the story only serves to heighten the curiosity. Perhaps Byerley was a robot, perhaps he was a man, or perhaps he was both. After all, Asimov’s story does mention that it is possible to

grow some cells over a robotic interior. Perhaps then, Byerley was also one of the early cyborgs in Asimov's fictive realm.

This story also echoes the kind of uncertainty of attempting to categorize a cyborg. Until the debate over Byerley's identity is cleared up, there is chaos among people. And the moment he hits a man at the rally – proving himself, at least for the sake of public memory, to be a fallible human being – problems cease, and he is elected mayor. Living in a world where cyborgs are increasingly becoming a part of our everyday life, questions of being targeted for not being human enough are very much a possibility. Asimov himself writes that he suspects that “the cyborg will still have his troubles. He'll be *different*. No matter how small the difference is, people will seize upon it” (“Cybernetic Organism”). While this crisis has yet to arrive, the visionary nature of Asimov's works makes one wary all the same, given that the essay “Viva Cyborg Theory” reminds us that “The future is already here” (Olson).

Here, one must take a look at another Asimov story, “The Segregationist,” written in 1967, where a robotic surgeon (who is not revealed to be a robot till the end of the story) operates on a man who is getting a robotic high-performance heart. The surgeon tries to persuade the man to get a semi-organic heart but the latter refuses, instead picking a metallic heart (*Nightfall and Other Stories* 282). The patient insists that metallic hearts have been known to work for a longer time, and the semi-organic “cyber-hearts” (281) are relatively new hybrid technology and using them would be a greater risk. The doctor accepts his decision. After the patient leaves, he discusses the patient's decision with a medical engineer robot. The medical engineer discusses how humans and robots should be allowed to approach each other and be allowed to use advantages of both existences and become a combination of both (283-284). The doctor calls this “mongrelization” (284) and asks why someone would want it: “Isn't it logical to suppose an individual would be too proud of his structure and identity to want to dilute it with something alien?” (284) His colleague calls him a segregationist for this sentiment, and it is eventually revealed – again, through Asimov's mastery at showing but not telling – that the doctor is a robot.

These questions of segregation are yet to arise in reality, although one must wonder how long till they do. Perhaps we are heading towards a society where there could be a new form of racism amidst the races of men and that of the ‘mongrelized’ cyborgs. The advent of cyborgs lead, as Clark points out, some people to fear a post-human future. They predict a kind of technologically incubated mind-rot, leading to loss of identity, loss of control, overload, dependence, invasion of privacy, isolation and ultimate rejection of the body (198).

At the rate the man-machine divide is being obliterated, it is only a matter of time before human beings are too robotic to be humans any more. They would, however, still fit in within both meta-human and meta-robotic categories, being neither as well as being more than any one category. It is, however, a future that is yet to be realized. For now, however, Haraway's words serve as a premonition for such a future: “The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics” (Haraway 150).

In conclusion, it must be noted that Asimov's texts are all from the first half of the last century and are now rather dated. This is, perhaps, because Cyborgs are no longer restricted to the pages of science fiction and thus, can no longer be used as fodder for futuristic writing. Today's science fiction must strive to cover newer

grounds, make newer prophecies like Asimov made in his time. Within Asimov's texts as well, the readers can note a changing sensibility towards cyborgs, perhaps borne out of the realization that they are increasingly closer to our reality. Now, cyborgs are material for medical journals or military reports or even, simply day-to-day existence, wherein a GPS dictates our movements, headphones or Bluetooth physically attach themselves to our bodies as we go out into the world every day. In a way, our time has become a cyborg, incorporating nature with machines, allowing the two to interact and create a new entity. On this note, one must return to Haraway's Manifesto, wherein she predicts that

By the late twentieth century, our time... we are chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.(Haraway 150)

And now, a decade or two later, we have perhaps arrived at the point where we are all cyborgs.

Works Consulted and Cited

- "Cybernetics," *Wikipedia*. Web. 14 Nov 2015.
<<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cybernetics>>
- Asimov, Isaac. "Cybernetic Organism," *Robot Visions*. New York: Roc Books, 1990. Print.
- . "Evidence". *I, Robot*. New York: Gnome Press, 1950. Print.
- . "The Bicentennial Man," *The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories*. New York: Doubleday, 1976. Print.
- . "The Segregationist". *Nightfall and Other Stories*. New York: Doubleday, 1969. Print.
- Clark, Andy. *Natural-born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. New York: Routledge, 1991. Print.
- Latour, Bruno. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.
- Mitchell, Edward Page. "The Ablest Man in the World". *The Crystal Man: Landmark Science Fiction*. New York: Doubleday, 1973. Print.
- Olson, Marisa. "Viva Cyborg Theory". *Rhizome*. 21 Nov. 2008. Web. 14 Nov 2015.
<<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2008/nov/21/viva-cyborg-theory/>>
- "Stephen Hawking." *Wikipedia*. Web. 14 Nov 2015.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_hawking>

“Tim Hawkinson.” *Traditional Fine Arts Organization*. Web. 13 Nov 2015.
<<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/4aa/4aa590.htm>>

Sexual Innuendoes in *Little Red Riding Hood*

Harpreet Kaur Vohra

Asst. Prof. of English

Panjab University Regional Centre

Ludhiana

Abstract: Fairy tales have maintained an endearing relationship with society and the tropes and leitmotifs used in them have become subjects of common discourse. The story of *Red Riding Hood* has been read for centuries by children, and various versions of it exist around the world. On the face of it, the tale presents the story of a little girl who meets a ‘bad wolf’ who, disguised as her grandmother, tries to eat her up. However, this tale, like almost all fairy tales has subterranean messages that go beyond the ‘once upon a time’ and ‘they lived happily ever after’ configuration. This examines the many messages that the story presents, proving that fairy tales go beyond the story to ‘depict metaphorically opportunities for human adaptation and the conflicts that arise when we do not establish civilizing codes for society’ (Zipes). Sexual messages are replete in the story and the red hood that she wears has often been interpreted as a symbol of sexual awakening. The dangers of sexual predators to young women, sexual barricades for the female, sexual experimentation (Red Riding Hood going to the forest in the dark after disobeying her mother) and the sexual act itself (the wolf swallowing her and the dialogues (“what big eyes, big hands...you have”)) have been variously interpreted by critics over the centuries. This essay examines these and other sexual cues in order to understand that there is much more to the fairy tale than its apparent innocence.

Keywords: Fairy tales, sexual messages, cautionary tale, sexual initiation.

Fairy tales have been the staple diet of children when they are bored, before they go to bed or just anytime. Arthur Frank insists in his highly stimulating book *Letting Stories Breathe: A Socio- Narratology*, that stories have “lives of their own, which we then embody” (Zipes xii). The fairy tale cannot be examined as something that possesses a one-dimensional meaning; “adults have always read, censored, approved and distributed the so-called fairy tale for children” (Bacchilega 3). Fairy tales have risen above merely being a genre and have transformed themselves into commentaries on life, socialization of children, sexuality and perpetuation of “values”. Jack Zipes in his book *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* says that as long as there is discontentment with the civilizing process, there will be fairy tales that will project “alternatives to the status quo or that will reconcile us to social conventions and religious beliefs” (xii). A fairy tale therefore has a life that goes beyond the chimera it presents to the little and not so little readers. It allows them to construct a reality of their own based on the perceptions that the tales build around the incidents and characters of the story. Until the 17th and 18th centuries, fairy tales were centres of civilization. In Europe they used to be the chief form of winter entertainment. In agricultural populations, telling fairy tales became a kind of essential spiritual occupation.

One may ask why the story of *Red Riding Hood* is suitable for “little” children. A young girl is attacked by a wild beast and is saved just in time. The animal has already eaten her grandmother. “Does this present an antique parallel to modern media violence?” (Douglas 3). The more interesting part of Charles Perrault’s story is

the poem that comes at the end of it which points to the real message of the story which is not related to little girls but to adolescents perhaps:

The Wolfe, I say, for Wolves too sure there are
Of every sort and every character
Who tame, familiar, full of complaisance
Ogle and leer, languish, cajole and glance;
With luring tongues, and language wondrous sweet
Follow young ladies as they walk the street
Ev'n to their very houses, nay, bedside
And artful, tho' their tru design they hide
Yet ah! These simpering Wolves! Who does not see
Most dangerous of Wolves indeed they be. (Perrault 25)

The message of the tale echoes in the poem. Ogling, leering, cajoling of young ladies by 'Wolves' on the street and into their houses and not to forget in their beds form a forewarning to young ladies. So sexual messages are replete in the story and the 'teaching' and 'socializing' of a young woman is evident. In a similar vein, Jack Zipes in his famous book *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* talks of stereotypes enunciated in the story. He says that the tale reinforces the notion that "women want to be raped" (4). He also points out that when his book first appeared it caused a great deal of "commotion" because the study was based on the premise that literary fairy tales were consciously cultivated and employed in 17th century France to "reinforce the regime of sexuality in modern Europe" (xi, xii). He makes a strong statement when he says that because rape and violence are at the core of the history of the tale, it is the most widespread and notorious fairy tale in the Western world, if not in the entire world.

Fairy tales and their subterranean messages have been the subject of much debate and research, with critics arguing ceaselessly about how much and how far one can go while unmasking these "innocent tales". In the interview "Are Fairy Tales still Useful to Children," Jack Zipes says that on an unconscious level, fairy tales bring together "subjective and assimilatory impulses" that dispassionately mimic a social milieu, thus intriguing readers and allowing latitude of interpretations in keeping with one's ideology (*The Art of Storytelling Show – Brother Wolf Storytelling*). Again, Zipes also says in *A Fairy Tale is more than just a Fairy Tale* that fairy tales are closer to real life experiences and are filled with desire and optimism... brutality, bluntness, violence and perversity. They expose untruth, and the best are bare, brusque and concise (96).

The story of *Little Red Riding Hood* has been dismembered countless times, each dissection throwing up a new element at every instance. Several versions of the story exist around the world but most versions in modern popular culture are based on the classic literary tale published by Charles Perrault in 17th century France. In fact, the story is so popular that Barnes and Nobles sells more than hundred different editions including one diagrammed in American Sign Language (Orenstein 4). Charles Dickens famously said, "I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss" (Orenstein 3). It is widely believed that Perrault based his text on an old folktale known simply as *The Story of Grandmother*, versions of which have survived in the oral traditions of rural France, Austria and

Northern Italy (Tehrani 7). Just as there are many versions of the story around the world, there are also multifarious ways of reading the tale. Tellers have consciously and subconsciously “manipulated the plot to portray a seduction by a temptress, the rape of a virgin or the passage of a young girl into womanhood” (Orenstein iv). *Little Red Riding Hood* like *The Little Mermaid* is often read as a story of sexual initiation replete with cues that convey this subtext.

Red as a colour is known to have sexual connotations. Red has been used across time and culture to symbolize female sexuality in ritual, folklore, and literature; red means “open for business” in red-light districts...these societal uses of red are posited to emerge from and extend a biologically-engrained propensity, shared with our primate relatives, to link red and sex (Elliot and Pazda 1) The red colour in the story appears to have symbolic and sexual significance. The red colour which the girl wears on her cape refers to menstruation and her journey into the forest has been interpreted as a journey of sexual initiation. Although it is not clear why Perrault added the red hood, we know that red was generally associated at that time with sin, sensuality and the devil (Zipes 26). Fairy tales often act as warnings to children about exacting standards of behavior expected of them. Red Riding Hood is sternly warned by her mother about wolves and strangers, in other words, men who could rape and men who could violate the female body. But Red Riding Hood wishes to take risks and talks to a stranger, thus exhibiting risqué conduct for which she is “adequately punished”. Jack Zipes, in his book and subsequent essays repeatedly posits that “Little Red Riding Hood” is a “rape tale, one in which the heroine survives or dies after violation – a cautionary tale about dealing with predatory males in animalistic form”. Zipes traces the origin of this literary fairy tale to violent male sexual fantasies about women (Reid 10). The common notion that women often invite being raped is strongly advocated in the story as Red Riding Hood stops in the woods to look at the beautiful flowers and in doing so disobeys her mother. While she is tempted to stop, she encounters a stranger who happens to be the wolf. Colleen Ward in her book *Attitudes towards Rape - Feminist and Social Psychological Perspectives* points at an instance of an American woman’s guilt towards her rape, “Maybe it was my fault. See that’s where I get when I think about it. My father always said whatever a man did to a woman, she provoked it” (3). Red Riding Hood is also warned but she does not listen and so it implies that she deserves it.

The references made to the size of the grandmother’s body parts are significant. “What big eyes you have, what big hands, what big teeth you have...” Red Riding Hood goes on until the Wolf replies “Better to eat you with.” The act of eating or swallowing is also seen as a sexual act in which the girl would be eaten by the wolf – the man – and in the process loses her virginity. Fairy tales that have sexual overtones do not deal with sex per se, but with precocious sexuality - “sex before its time”. The messages are indirect (Cashdon). For example *The Little Mermaid* never makes explicit the connection between the heroines’ lack of legs and the absence of the vagina, even though this constitutes the underlying dynamics of the play. So to explore sexuality and gender in the fairy tale is to probe more general questions of how the genre represents the “real” (Seifert 12). To explore what a fairy tale means in and to modernism, the history that had influenced their status has to be acknowledged. While these tales are often read as “the character of a people” or “collective truths,” individual stories often reflect historically specific versions of gender, class and sexuality (Martin 13). Red Riding Hood has often been used as a tale of firm warning;

thus unwittingly exposing a child to the dangers of sexual assault and sexual predators who violate virginity and destroy the innocence of a child.

Red Riding Hood has been used in advertisements and pornography to represent a seductive woman all in red luring her victims. She has the features of the femme fatale oozing passion and deception. Disneyfication of the story has not taken place yet and whatever little charm of the story that remains would be miserably sanitized because of the fact that the story is essentially about violence. “The strong appeal of Little Red Riding Hood for so many contemporary authors and illustrators is no doubt explained partially by the fact that ...she does not owe her cult status to Disney...with the result children are likely to remember it more accurately than other popular fairy tales that have been “contaminated” (Beckett vii), (read sanitized, rarefied and brutally Americanized). Perrault has often been criticized for making the “sexual parable” too explicit in his version of the tale although the “sexual innuendoes” in his version are not limited to the moral. Bettelheim, the psychologist who worked on Red Riding Hood accused Perrault of “turning a naïve little girl into a fallen woman” (Beckett 11).

An interesting fact of the story is that Red Riding Hood’s mother allows her to go into the forest despite the fear of wolves. Wolves were common predators in those times and instilling a fear in the minds of children against them was not uncommon. Several stories had a fearful wolf which could devour children, and mothers warned them not to wander into lonely places. Perrault probably had something menacing in mind when he sends Red Riding Hood all alone into the forest that day. Her journey can be seen as an initiation into sexual life and her ability to risk her honour. Red Riding Hood stops to see some beautiful blooming flowers (like her own blooming youth?) and the beauty of the flowers ironically act as a trap for her to be accosted by the wolf. She is punished for giving into her desires and she knows she has to be good if she wishes to be treated as good. The quest for the chaste woman has been an age old pursuit and fairy tales have always looked at the “good woman” for the perpetuation of incorruptibility. If a girl is not chaste, she will be chased and that’s what happens to Red Riding Hood. Charles Perrault had no trouble explaining his tale to the readers:

From this story one learns that children
Especially young lasses,
Pretty, courteous, and well-bred,
Are wrong to listen to any sort of man. (Tartar 39)

For generations, parents have used the story as a cautionary tale. Several other cues in the story have also been noted for sexual interpretation. The butter which melts in the pot has been appropriated with semen and the filled basket of cakes and butter is the gift of virginity that a girl carries with her in her “youth and naiveté”. Some critics swear by the veracity of such interpretations while others pledge by their inadequacies. *Little Red Riding Hood* has been the favourite of such bastardization (read improvisation) and Red Riding Hood is now a porn star too with all her oomph and snazzy razzmatazz. In fact, a book *Little Red Riding Hood Eats the Wolf* published by a Chilean writer Pablo Quintano in 2012 was banned in 2015 as it attempted to show erotic stories with Red Riding Hood as the main character. Fairy tales continually modernize themselves and replace older cultural features with more

recent ones (Bottigheimer 4) and *Little Red Riding Hood* continues to attract and intrigue readers of all ages. The plain and simple girl trotting along the forest is just one of the many tropes of the story, while the meta-narrative and the hypertext go far beyond, flooding the researcher's mind with their numerous interpretations.

Works Consulted and Cited

- Bacchilega, Cristina. *Postmodern Fairy Tales- Gender and Narrative Strategies*. Philadelphia:University of Pennsylvania. 1997. Print.
- Beckett, Sandra L. *Recycling Red Riding Hood*. New York: Routledge. 2002. Print.
- . *Red Riding Hood for all Ages: A Fairy Tale Icon in Cross-Cultural Contexts*. Michigan: Wayne State University Press. 2008. Print.
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B. *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*. Pennsylvania: Univ of Pennsylvania Press. 1986. Print.
- Cashdan, Sheldon. *The Witch must Die- The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales*. New York: Basic Books. 1999. Print.
- Douglas, Mary. "Folklore- Red Riding Hood: An Interpretation from Anthropology". The Thirteenth Katharine Briggs Memorial Lecture. 1995. Print.
- Elliot, T Andrew and Adam D Pazda. "Dressed for Sex: Red as a Female Sexual Signal inHumans". *PLOS ONE*. 7.4 (2012): 1-20. Print.
- Franz, Marie Louise. *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales*: Boston: 1996. Print.
- Martin, Ann. *Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in Bed- Modernisms Fairy Tales*. Canada: University of Toronto Press. 20017. Print.
- Orenstein, Catherine. Introduction.*Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale*. New York: Perseus Books. 2002. i-xx. Print.
- Perrault, Charles. *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*. New York: Calla Editions. 2012. Print.
- "Pornographic *Little Red Riding Hood* banned from Chilean Schools". 31 Nov 2015. Web.01 Jan, 2016.
- Reid, Tina Louise. "From Cap to Cloak: The Evolution of Little Red Riding Hood from Oral to Film". Diss. U of Kansas, 2012. Print.
- Seifert, C Lewis. "Fairy Tales, Sexuality and Gender in France", *Nostalgic Utopias*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1996: 9-24. Print.
- Tatar, Maria. *The Hand Facts of the Grimms Fairy Tales*. Oxfordshire: Princeton. 1987. Print.

Tehrani, J.J. "The Phylogeny of Little Red Riding Hood". *PLOS ONE* 8(11): e78871. Web. 02 Jan, 2016.

Ward, Colleen A. *Attitudes towards Rape- Feminist and Social Psychological Perspectives*. London: Sage. 1995. Print.

Zipes, Jack. Introduction. *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*. Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press. 2012. i-xiv. Print.

---. Interview. "Are Fairy Tales still useful to Children?" *The Art of Storytelling Show- Brother Wolf Storytelling*. Web. 16 Feb, 2016.

---. "A Fairy Tale is more than just a Fairy Tale". Anglia Ruskin University. *Book 2.0.2:1&2*. 2012. Print.

---. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*. New York: Routledge. 1993. Print.

---. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. New York: Routledge. 2006. Print.

BOOK REVIEW

T. S. Eliot: Poems

Edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue

Faber and Faber, 2015

ISBN Volume I: 978-0-571-23870-5.

ISBN Volume 2: 978-1421420189

Each £40

Whisper Music

“Complimenti, you bitch. I am wracked by the seven jealousies,” wrote Ezra Pound to T.S. Eliot with his characteristic unhinged vigour, in a letter at the end of 1921. Pound’s compliments, and his jealousy, were earned by Eliot having finished a draft of ‘The Waste Land,’ which Pound called “the longest poem in the English Langwidge”. Anyone who picks up the new two volume, 2032 page edition of Eliot’s *Poems*, edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue, without much acquaintance with the poet’s work might be forgiven for thinking that this was literally true, rather than just Pound being Pound.

The monumentality of the new editions—with, in the first volume, almost a thousand pages of annotations to 346 pages of poems—does, however, show something of what Pound was getting at. The density of ‘The Waste Land’, its attempt to sustain a lyric compression without any transitions or expository material, much of which was ruthlessly excised by Pound himself, as well as its shoehorning in of almost the entirety of Western (and some of Eastern) civilisation, gives it the quality of a work many times its size. Cut into it almost anywhere and you will find the intensity of anthology excerpts:

—yet when we came back late, from the hyacinth garden
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

...

Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair,
Spread out into fiery points
Glowed into words then would be savagely still

...

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
and fiddled whisper music on the strings...

This is just to take some lines that mention women’s hair. It is not a completely random sample; Eliot seems to be particularly excited by women’s hair. Think of the soft down of the women’s arms in ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’, or the mermaids “Combing the white hair of the waves blown back”. Think, too, of the “hair over your arms and your arms full of flowers” of ‘La Figlia Che Piange’, or the lines from ‘Ash Wednesday’: “Blown hair is sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown,/ Lilac and brown hair”. Laying aside, or rather embracing, the

slight creepiness of Eliot's trichological interest, you might feel the bodily jolt that I feel, what Frank Kermode called Eliot's "shudder".

To create so many memorable lines, especially as some of them were stolen, seems to have demanded a collector's ear, something that can be seen in the way Eliot uses excerpts in his own criticism, and something which this edition of Eliot's *Poems* reveals as we move from the poems themselves into the book's vast scholarly hinterland. Each poem is given a surprisingly gripping textual history, complete with extracts of interviews and letters from Eliot and his contemporaries, such as the one from Pound quoted above. Every line in every poem is given the full Ricks (and McCue) treatment, established in the former's edition of Tennyson, and of Eliot's juvenilia, *Inventions of the March Hare*. Glosses are offered from statements by the poet himself in letters, criticism, and conversation, and echoes are found or suggested from a diverse body of other writers. We are even given pronunciation guides for some words based on recordings Eliot made. Thus do we find out that 'Preludes' was pronounced "Pree-ludes" by Eliot, and that estaminets in 'Gerontion' should properly be pronounced "estaminés". Eliot's life, from his Missouri childhood to Harvard; coming to Oxford then abandoning his thesis on the philosophy of F.H Bradley; moving to London; his unhappy marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood; his anguished conversion to the Anglican Church; his position as editor of Faber and Faber; "the pope of Russell Square", and his final conjugal happiness with the much younger Valerie Fletcher are all worked back into this famously 'impersonal' poet's verse by Ricks' and McCue's commentaries.

This last chapter of Eliot's life also proves to be the source of several previously unpublished love poems. First, however, comes the expected procession through the first volume: the nervy poignancy of *Prufrock and Other Observations*, the controlled nastiness of *Poems, 1920*, the nervous devastation of *The Waste Land*, the sparse anguish of *The Hollow Men*. There are the ugly and irresistible fragments from *Sweeney Agonistes*, which have as much dramatic menace as anything by Pinter. Onward through the desperate conversion poem *Ash Wednesday*, past the *Ariel Poems* and the unlovable *Choruses from the Rock*, through to the hard-won dignity of *The Four Quartets*, where at last Eliot, who wrote so many hells and purgatories, writes his *Paradiso*

All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of flame are enfolded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

The procession is a short one; I don't wish to make any particular contrarian claims about it here, and when it's finished the achievement is impossible to diminish. After this ascent to heaven, however, are the 'new' poems. Several of them are addressed to Valerie Eliot in the guise of 'The Tall Girl'. We are told 'How the Tall Girl's Breasts are', and 'How The Tall Girl and I play together'. How they play together, if the poems are to be believed, is stilted. These have the feel of the weakest moments of the *Four Quartets*, (memorably parodied by Henry Reed 'As we get older we do not get any younger...') and are, in every sense of the word, turgid:

When my beloved stands tall and naked
Proud and rejoicing, not in her own beauty

But in the knowledge of the power of her beauty
To quicken my desire (as I stand erect before her
And quiver with the swelling of my concupiscence)

The final poem of *Volume One* is however, slightly more interesting. An argument with Blake's 'The Clod and the Pebble', the poem ends

Love that seeketh not to please,
And for the other has no care
But joys in taking its own ease
Builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.

It's hardly great stuff, but it is interesting that a poet whose best work often came out of the horror-show that self-consciousness can make of sexual relations ended his days writing about the mutual satisfaction in unheeding sexual selfishness. Considering the carnage of Eliot's previous marriage, and his callousness at its end, Eliot's versified happiness with a woman thirty years his junior may seem more queasy than touching, but as a narrative arc for the 'lifework', it feels strangely redemptive.

Whether or not the reader needs the new poems, the commentaries just about justify the price tag (£80 for the two volumes). They are a testament to the labour and erudition of both the editors and Eliot himself, even if sometimes, in the case of *Old Possum's Book Practical Cats*, it feels as if they might be breaking a Jellicle cat upon a wheel. This dutiful completism, however, allows one to enjoy the deadpan tone of comments such as "For failure to appreciate allusiveness in T.S.E, see headnote to *Macavity, the Mystery Cat*".

No one could accuse Ricks and McCue of failing to appreciate allusiveness in the poet. One way of reading their edition of the poems is as a lengthy critical argument about Eliot's allusory practices. Ricks has form on this front, as the author of *Allusion to the Poets*, and here we see Eliot as Ricks sees him, in the echo chamber of poetic tradition. Ricks and McCue show that it is precisely this allusiveness that gives Eliot's poetry much of its extraordinary power. There will always be quibbles about certain echoes. I was curious as to why the notes about the Hyacinth girl point us to Poe's Helen, with her "hyacinth hair" but not to Adam in *Paradise Lost* with his "hyacinthine locks", though McCue and Ricks may well have a good reason. Through these annotations we can come to see part of what gives Eliot the density of which Pound was so jealous. John Berryman once remarked that modern poetry began with the third line of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock':

Let us go then you and I
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient, etherised upon a table

He meant the shock of the image, deliberately and harshly unexpected. Ricks and McCue point out that it is not simply a question of being modern. They note Eliot's obvious debt to Laforgue:

Le couchant de sang est taché
Comme un tablier de boucher;

Oh! Qui veut m'écortcher!
[The setting sun with blood is stained
Like a butcher's apron;
Oh! Who wants to skin me!]

But we are told, too, that in Eliot's old stomping ground of Boston there is an Ether Monument (it was here that the use of anesthetic was first pioneered), and they point out the possible wrenching effect in a deliberate mistranslation of Gautier's description of "une Aphrodite éthérée" [an ethereal Aphrodite]. Without any interpretation, or criticism as such, they suggest something of the way the lines compress tradition and personal experience into the statement of a very modern sensibility. At the same time, they show how this works at preserving a ghostly, 'ethereal' form of the softer, more 'poetic' and numinous qualities that hover over the poem. The etherized patient is sedated, yes, but she also still belongs to the ethereal realm to which poets claim special access.

The vast elucidatory apparatus may not be for everyone. Randall Jarrell famously wrote of Eliot, an assessment that was deeply sceptical of Eliot's criticism, and of Eliot criticism:

Won't the future say to us in helpless astonishment: 'But did you actually believe that all those things about objective correlations, Classicism, the tradition, applied to *his* poetry? Surely you must have seen that he was one of the most subjective and demonic poets who ever lived ... but for you of course, after the first few years his poetry existed under sea, thousands of feet below that deluge of exegesis, explication, source listing, scholarship and criticism that overwhelmed it. And yet how bravely and personally it survived, its eyes neither coral nor mother of pearl, but plainly human, full of anguish.'

This perhaps did more to legitimize the psychoanalytic concerns of America's next generation of poets than it did to shine a light on Eliot's anguished eyes. It does, however, suggest something of the way that Eliot gets under the skin of all of his readers, something which has to do with his handling of his sources, but which cannot be contained by that. If he was the consummate intellectual and craftsman, conducting what I.A. Richards called "the music of ideas", what purpose did the ideas themselves serve? After reading through the sources Ricks and McCue reveal, what strikes me is that the compression of so much learning into lines, on the edge of what Eliot himself called "a ridiculous amount of erudition", is rarely argumentative. Rather, the lines unsettle what has gone into them. They are, while clearly not less than, much thinner seeming than the sum of their parts. But it is in this way that they become so sharp.

Eliot's poetry sets ideas spinning to give us not the peace, but the disturbance that passeth understanding. This is the same thing still seen in John Ashbery's occasional burlesquing of the philosophical rhetoric of the *Four Quartets*, making erudition ridiculous, or in the stringent interrogation of the lyric form in a poet like Jorie Graham, or, of course, Geoffrey Hill. These poets, with the exception of Hill, are not 'Eliotic', but they write out of the hollows of thought that he perhaps most brilliantly articulated. Aside from providing an ideal resource for study, Ricks and McCue have proved that the "deluge of exegesis, explication, source listing,

scholarship and criticism” could never even begin to bury Eliot. For this, they, and he, deserve the highest praise.

Hugh Foley
Exeter College, Oxford