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Power, Language and Context: A Sociolinguistic Reading of Bill Clinton’s Between Hope and History

UZOECHI NWAGBARA

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Priyada Kochukudy
From Humanism to Posthumanism: 
Emerging Contours of an Epistemic Shift

Dr. K. M. Johnson

“We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call Posthumanism” (Hassan, 843). Humanism is witnessing a serious crisis everywhere and in spite of the on-going debate among the critical theorists, the reign of “Man” is being called into question by literature, politics, cinema, anthropology, feminism and technology. Humanism by definition is an anthropocentric system of thought which prioritizes and essentializes man and his philosophy. It is founded distinctly on the European hierarchical oppositions and logocentric assumptions. Rene Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, the founding document of humanism, postulates that the human is rational and that rationality is a basic condition for being human. The Cartesian rationalism replaces God and enthrones the figure of Man, the cogitating “I” at the centre of existence. Rationality endows the subject with the power of judgment and a sense of alterity. Alterity underwrites the possibility of distinguishing the human from the non-human. This dualism of human non-human, rational/irrational, body/mind, etc - constitutes the fundamental assumption about the essential characteristics of the human beings. It assumes that each individual carries within him the whole of human essence and that human beings can be defined and understood in terms of this essential feature of humanity. As a philosophical discourse, it celebrates the essential human nature which categorizes and unifies the human from the non-human. It promulgates man’s capacity to logically and rationally arrive at truth and morality through human investigation, particularly, through the application of the special faculties of reason and judgment. Rejecting the role of any transcendental truth or local agency in arriving at right and wrong, humanism depends completely on the human capacity for rationalization and logical understanding. A universal morality depending on the universality of the human condition and essential human nature is the ultimate end of humanism.
However, in spite of its advocacy of a complete reliance on human reason, it has been used to establish hegemonies from the dominant groups in society by creating boundaries between men and women, nature and human, and human and non-human. According to Frantz Fanon, this Eurocentric thought has always imposed its partial world-view as a universal truth and has found its way to imperialism. The understanding of the human as white, European, propertied male is both essentialist and parochial. It makes a fundamental violation of the ontological and the epistemological reality of the greater part of the human existence and subscribes to a Eurocentric chauvinism. As an ethic and as a world-view, humanism is inherently limited. As an ideology, it is vulnerable to manipulation and parochialism. The recent American interference and aggression on Iraq and Afghanistan, its double standards in the Israel/Palestinian conflict, all in the name of humanism and anti-terrorism manifest how the grand philosophy of humanism can give way to power politics and neo-imperialist strategies. Judith Butler, in her book *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, examines the post 9/11 condition of the human existence and the American reaction to violence. The book makes a vigorous argument against the invisible censorship which America imposed on all dissenting voices after the terrorist attack. The censorship, according to her, functioned as “the line that circumscribes (not only) what is speakable (but also) what is liveable” (xix-xx). What is speakable is not merely a question of the message but is related to the question of who is regarded as human or whose lives can be regarded as human lives. The idea that certain people cannot speak, certain people cannot be seen and certain people cannot be mourned in public in America after 9/11 emanates from the notion that certain humans are not normal human beings. The American government’s decision to ban the mourning of the death or the tragedy of Arabs in the media works against our humanist understanding of the Other. It dehumanizes them as “the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a liveable life and a grievable death?” (xiv-xv). Butler, therefore, calls for a “condition by which a concrete and expansive conception of the human will be articulated,
the way in which parochial and implicitly racially and religiously bound conceptions of the human will be made to yield to a wider conception of how we consider who we are as a global community” (90-1). In this context, it is not surprising to understand that it was Humanism that provided the ideological and philosophical foundation for European colonialism in the world. Humanism has always acted as an essentialist ideology in its attempt at rationally categorizing everything through topology. The significant question today is whether humanism is able to embrace the “oceanic form” of human existence and account for the intersubjective relationships in a world of simulacra and cyborg heteroglossia. Still further, if the humanist figure of “Man” is purely a construct and is constituted at a particular historical moment; can the humanist philosophy validate its claim to an unchanging human essence that can withstand any epistemic shift? The various contemporary theories seem to seriously doubt and challenge the capacity of humanism to mediate through nationalism, citizenship, culture, colour, race etc. and the possibility of its deploying itself at various levels.

Humanism as an ethico-philosophical and cultural position thus seems to mark a paradigmatic shift in its understanding of the “human” and the human subject. This subversive understanding of humanism has the nature of a radical critique and a serious interrogation of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment humanist assumptions about the “human”. It re-examines humanism’s privileging of the human as a subject. This critique has no fixed point of origin. However, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud mark that “immense theoretical revolution” in decentering “Man.” (182). The Marxian attempt to question the natural human essence and to redefine man in terms of the economic, social and historical structures necessitates a critical understanding of the humanist philosophy. He makes a clear demarcation from the Hegelian understanding of the human as authentic consciousness and produces a history and a contingency for the human. The Freudian notion of the unconscious is a direct challenge to the Cartesian formulation of the subject as self-conscious cogito. Lacan’s revisiting of Freud further problematises the humanist notion of man because “the very centre of the human being was no longer to be found at the place assigned to it by a whole humanist tradition” (Lacan 114). The anti-humanist

As an alternative means to ethical globalization, Posthumanism radicalizes the notion of the constructedness of the human subjectivity and raises the fundamental question of the 'how' and 'why' of our centring the human as a subject of study. Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things* elaborates how the “human sciences” emerged when “man” was able to constitute himself simultaneously as the transcendental foundation of knowledge and as the primary empirical object of knowledge in the nineteenth century (345). Human sciences thus become bankrupt and fail to be objective. The Foucauldian archaeology therefore attempts to study “man” in a different and radical way unlike the human sciences. This does not imply that he wants to preserve man; rather he declares the end of man. He begins with the premise that man is a recent invention in European culture and that he is approaching his end too (386). Foucault also observes that man is not the perennial theme of the human sciences. According to him:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. . . . As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. (386-87)

The “end of man” implies that “man” is neither the transcendental foundation of knowledge nor the first and the most important object of empirical knowledge. Archaeology subverts the sovereignty of subjectivity by showing that it is only the result of particular discontinuities in the history of thought. His archaeology demonstrates that neither history nor “man” can claim any reference to a unifying principle. The rejection of unity in favour of discontinuity and multiplicity is the definitive characteristic of archaeology. As Foucault shows in *The Order of Things* and in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, this has great consequences for the themes considered central to Western culture, particularly for humanism.

Posthumanism formulates an alternative critical humanist perspective which can account for the ontico – ontological difference in the
human existence. Naturally, it joins the contemporary Poststructuralist and Postmodern theoretical perspectives in problematizing the very notion of Man. It centres on the crucial questions of the dichotomy between the macro-political and the micro-political understanding of the human; the destabilizing possibilities of the micro-political and their reconciliation. However, Posthumanism posits the human subject as relational; constantly being produced and positioned as subjects according to race, class, culture, gender etc. According to Antonio Gramsci, the question, what is man is not an abstract or objective question. It relates to man’s contingency and his complex constructedness. He observes: “Thus man does not enter into relationship with nature simply because he is himself part of nature, but actively through work and through techniques” (77). The postmodern thinkers and theorists like Donna Haraway and Jean Baudrillard approach the whole question of humanism from the perspective of technological organism. Cyborg, for Haraway, represents man’s break with teleology as it subverts the very notion of origin. By abdicating the story of origin in the humanist sense, the Cyborg radically alters the myth of man’s unity and the task of individual development and history. Consequently, while we are all ontologically human beings, the human subject becomes a ‘calculus of calibrated differences’. According to Haraway, “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics’, for this is not the ‘we’ of absolute knowledge and anthropology, of God and man, of onto-theo-teleology and humanism” (70).

The Derridian understanding of humanism, however, is very different from the other postmodern theorists and is closely connected with his notion of logocentrism. According to Derrida, a complete break with the humanist notion of man is an impossibility like the play of signifiers precisely because the death of man should be written in the language of Man. Every attempt to step outside the humanist notion of man is a reassertion of Man because every human gesture is an orchestration of humanism. A step outside humanism is a step outside the realm of language and the human. However, humanism always contains within itself the possibility of a “post” like the offing of that monstrosity of which Derrida is very much conscious of.
Posthumanism thus raises a string of serious questions like: Is humanism dead? How does one determine and respond to longue durée of humanism? Is it time to superannuate humanism with a sheer act of theoretical will if it is not dead? Can there be good humanism and bad humanism? Is it possible to sustain good humanism and eradicate bad humanism? Is humanism a world view, an ideology, an ethico-political programme? Is humanism universal, anthropocentric and unavoidably Eurocentric? What is the sexuality and gender of “the human”? What are the connections between humanism as an epistemology and humanism as cultural politics? How does humanism deal with the problems of selfhood and alterity? Does humanism participate in the brutality of a world structured in hegemonic dominance or does it seek a way out of the geopolitics of unevenness? How does the “human” dangle between ontology and epistemology, truth and power, between the everyday phenomenology and the density of specialist discourse?

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Con(temporary) Cultural Condition: 
Towards an Ethics of Com(promises)

Dr. Vincent B. Netto

Contemporary culture is Janus faced. It assumes complex configurations in the context of globalisation, shifting political concerns, and the rise of social movements focused on gender, green, ethnic or racial concerns. It is a valuable problematic in today’s world of hyper-reality and mass media, and of bio- and info- technologies, and credits and contingencies. Culture as a way of life specific to a particular community encompasses forms of thought, styles of speech, mode of actions, moral assumptions, gender identities political outlooks etc enforcing a certain restraint in dress, habitation and the like through gestures of approval or disapproval; and as a deliberate design of signifying materials into meaningful artifacts includes dance concerts, freeways, malls, movies, rap songs, television shows, virtual reality (VR), www etc., capable of changing the pattern of symbols, narratives and understanding of the world in which we live (Ryan, xv).

All is not glossy in the present world. Behind the effervescence, there is insecurity and fear. With the loss of imperial power, there are small and angry states, but with the rise of American imperialism, there is simultaneous growth of international terrorism. A cataclysm in any part of the world, even when it wreaks unprecedented havocs about the area, paradoxically, becomes a media event elsewhere. This is essentially a pathetic twist. I shall better borrow the Marxian observation to describe the situation, although in a radically altered context: “All that is solid melts into air”. This is not the prelude for Prospero’s genial magic intended to bring about reconciliation and harmony but an ominous foregone conclusion as to the pathological condition of contemporaneity.

Today’s world is characterized by a blurring of boundaries between high and low culture; the collapse of hierarchies of knowledge, taste and opinion; and the interest in the local rather than the universal
The motto “Learn from nature or natives” and the proliferation of discourses are pointers to the dethroning of logocentricism. Culture does not make sense without the society, for the cultural and the social are indivisibly and heterogeneously conjoined as in a rhizomatic assemblage.

Friederich Nietzsche, a postmodern avant la lettre inaugurated an era of religious skepticism by exposing the hollowness of “the Enlightenment hopes” with a view to assert the death of god. Morality, he feels, is a lie and truth fiction. Martin Heidegger shared Neitzsche’s philosophy but ventured a step beyond the latter to declare that “Being” and not truth should be the concern of the philosophers. Jean Francois Lyotard’s assertion of the incredulity towards metanarratives underscored the inadequacy of individuals to legislate while alluding to their competence in interpretation. Jacques Derrida seemed to say that with no God to guarantee, signifiers float, fragment and fracture. The humanity at large is in a hurry to bid farewell to eidos, essence, knowledge; and is instead willing to welcome circulating pliable discourses. Ironically, all that remains is a flexible network of language games. Michel Foucault pushed forward the paradox by arguing that the problem is a surfeit of freedom, of at least too many choices. Baudrillard’s hyper-reality has now become a site to dissolve the distinctions between objects and their representations; and to show how the simulacra blurs the boundaries between the real and the unreal, the true and the untrue, and the moral and immoral. And strangely simulation makes a mockery of meanings.

Capitalism creates a consumerist cornucopia while media makes or mars the market. Shopping has encroached on a widening spectrum of territories—airports, churches, railway stations, museums, casinos, theme parks, libraries, schools, universities, hospitals etc. Realms that were once thought to be protected are becoming available to commercial scrutiny. The consumers are subject to a panoptic surveillance as their movements, incomes, likes and dislikes are coded and analysed through credit cards, smart cards and other tracking devices, in the hope of increasing shopping activity. Shopping is being constantly reinvented, reinterpreted, refashioned, reborn, rechanneled and repackaged. All possible techniques are explored and exploited to modulate, mutate,
camouflage and sabotage the consumerist mental makeup. Beware or else there will be little else for us to do but shop.

The starkly antidemocratic implications and trajectory of the media systems have impinged the society (McChesney, 12). Though every new major new electronic media has spawned utopian ideals of democratic equality and freedom, the reality is that it has led to concentrated corporate control and the hyper-commercialization of media. Much discussion is premised upon whether one has a utopian or dystopian, optimistic or pessimistic view of technology and social change. It depends on if one is a technological determinist or if the determinism is of a utopian or Luddite variety. These discussions prove futile if conducted in isolation from social factors.

The belief in fair, rational and democratic capitalism is mythological. For every argument extolling the virtual community and the liberatory aspects of cyberspace, it seems every bit as plausible to reach dystopian, or at least troubling conclusions. Why not look at the Web as a process that encourages isolation, atomization and marginalization of society? In fact, can the ability of people to create their own community in cyberspace terminate a universal community?. In a class stratified and commercially oriented society, can’t the information high way sideline the already marginalized?. These are precisely the type of questions to be addressed and answered in which the market has no interest. It is for us to look and think before we leap.

The communication giants cannot benefit unless they have an edge on selling. The archetype of the portal is America Online (AOL), an ISP that gears thousands of billion dollar business. All most all major media firms have significant web activities. The greatest war for market share is with regard to sports websites, where Disney’s ESPN, News Corp’s Fox, Microsoft’s MSNBC, Time Warner’s CNN/SI, and CBS’s Sports Line are in pitched battle. Time Warner produces nearly 200 websites designed to provide advertiser friendly environment. Disney’s vision of a digital future also sees a major role for advertising.

Thomas Paine’s observation as early as the 18th century holds true of the web: “The contrast of affluence and wretchedness continually
meeting and offending the eye, is like dead and living bodies chained together” (45). In the digital age, the affluent can construct a world where the wretched are unchained and out of sight—a communication world similar to the gated residential communities, to which so many millions of affluent Americans have fled (Turrow, 52). The digital world accentuates the antidemocratic tendencies of the border political economy (Dahl, 211).

A study of Japanese internet by Mark McClelland reveals that there are several thousand sites exclusively on queersex. The transgendered prostitutes crowd these sites hosted by clubs, bars, cabarets etc. Japan’s non-interventionist legislation regarding private sexual practice has enabled the Internet to offer a flow of erotic entertainment. Unfortunately, pretty large number of these sites are not pass-word protected, and do not require any proof of age. This is the case of all most all countries, though with variations. Added to this danger is violence that functions as fantasy and lure: and it must be held at bay and never too close.

Virtual Reality, one aspect of possible prosthetic extensions provided by technology, can be viewed as array of devices that together form a human–computer interface through which the spectator (or better yet, the participant) is immersed in electronically simulated sensory inputs. Even a cursory glance around popular run of critical responses to the possibility of identity formation in VR is largely a disastrous development. Anxiety is more the norm when it comes to speculations regarding powerful and intoxicating forms of identification. It is high time that we draw out of the murky twilight of the visual register and help cure the ills of the body politic. Sean Cubbit suggests that VR will not only enable but provoke forms of identification in which the glamour of images on screen will work bewitching spells on the psyche (237-245).

Our frequent encounters with VR interface result in a narcissistic regression with psychotic results. The boundaries of the self break down into fluid, polymorphous algorithms in which the mind somehow escapes the body to sail off into the smooth space of the matrix. Opposite to the narcissistic is the “heteropathic”—a condition where one
sees all that is ideal in the visual register as an aspect of all-consuming self and attempts to recognize the subjectivity of others who do not necessarily fit neatly within the parameters of normative codes of representation.

VR harbours iconoclastic hopes to escape from the irrationality of the visual register into the relative sanity of the symbolic; nourishes the narcissistic wishes to escape the responsibilities of intersubjective relationships by relating primarily to one’s own body; and moulds the cyborgian perspectives to escape from the confines of this fleshly world altogether. What is required is an ethic of spectatorship that channels such experiences and incorporates entertainment (entertainment and curtailment) for a collective search for happy life. We should use these technologies not to escape our bodies into the matrix, or to participate in the narcissistic fantasies of the “I contain all worlds” or to embrace the cyborg posthumanism, but rather to free ourselves from the confines of the normative ego that we may live with/for others with greater empathy and with less tyrannical collective relation to the world of images we encounter in VR.

The body that could be altered, mutated and moulded into any desired appearance has become a site of style in present day culture. Defining and experiencing the body in a consumer world has become less a matter of anatomical precision and unambiguous uniqueness, but more a matter of decision, doubt and debate. As the bodies become consumer items, pleasure is guaranteed to the consumer. Cybersex assumes a solipsistic cocoon with no uncomfortable or challenging situations. With boundaries blurring owing to medical, electronic or other means, the body becomes a contested terrain.

The cyborgs are technological transformations creating continuity rather than disjunction between machine and the body. Playing with a persona in the www is but a small step into the world of cyborg identity. Sex, gender and identity may be deconstructed —a human simulacra— though cannot be dispensed with. The cyborg multiplicities open infinite possibilities, defined in and through the technologies that construct our experiences and therefore “ourselves”. The boundary between science fiction and social reality is reduced to an optical illusion.
Dona Haraway’s cyborg is a creature of the “post”—postgender, postmodern, postnatural and posthuman (25). The polemical advantage of the cyborg is that it resists beings encoded as natural. The imbrications of the human and the machine have overarching advantages as also disadvantages. Heterosexuality is advocated in the form of gay, lesbian and bisexual practices. The cyborg performance art of Stelarc exemplifies the concerns with a techno-surrealist sense of transgression. The BwO (Body without Organ), according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, is an abstraction of subject annihilation. In standing against the telos of theology and the order of reason, it presents an absurd comic world of estranged and duplicitous manifestations.

The contemporary humanity lives in a world of images. Representations of reality are flawed and the reality itself becomes ontologically insecure making our experience real as images. All the day we are consuming images: McDonald’s and Coca Cola’s, music channels, reality TV or serials, and happy to vanish into images that appear to have no use at all. Voices and images offer to communities a disengaged and enclosed world of the home, the automobile and the mall. A banished reality is recreated as a phantom within elsewhere.

Freeways, malls and TVs are the locus of virtualization or an attenuated fiction effect resulting in a partial loss of the here-and-now. There is nothing discrete about TV, for its very nature is to annex pre-televisional culture and leisure time to itself. TV promotes a realm of nonspace that can be described as distraction. Distant events are made available in glory or gory technicolour across the globe. How the audience decodes TV in their living rooms is an issue in its own right?. To contour this terrain is to map an area of contemporary culture.

The humanity has become more or less morally, socially and spiritually bankrupt. Marshal Mc Luhan’s secular Pentecost of the global village and Gianni Vattimo’s emancipatory Babel are far removed from reality. It is an absurdist coincidence that the most popular sites on the Internet are either pornographic or religious. It is against this background that Zigmunt Bauman with his emphasizes on the need for an altered ethics becomes relevant. Following Emmanuel Levinas, he
advocates a moral responsibility for the other as the first reality of the self. Beyond the seismic social-cultural shifts, one has to decide between cynical resignation and realistic hope.

Despite the despair and angst, there is a jouissance about fragmentation, heterogeneity, development and social changes. The present condition is often equated with advocacy of the local, regional and the specific in opposition to the global, universal and total(itarian). It allows one to live without the illusions that modernity dangled before him/her. This is not to lavish one’s time pondering ads but instead help the people excluded by Coke, Crime and Cybersex. This modest attempt at critically theorizing the paradox of the contemporary cultural situation is premised on the belief that such a condition has to be contested and negotiated as to make space for a vision of renewed earth.

Works Cited


The Omnipresent Look: Lacanian Gaze in Kadamanitta’s *The Kannur Fort*

Alwin Alexander

Kadamanitta’s poetry is characterized by its raw energy and virile vitality. There the mundane world metamorphoses into the ethereal, enmeshed in fecund images. Private reflections are judiciously placed in public spaces to highlight the ubiquity of gravity in the ostensibly superfluous. Plebeian objects become significant subjects in his scheme of things. *Kannur Fort* is one such exercise of transmogrification. Here a neutral fort becomes an infested space. The subtle substitution of the identities of the fort and the poet is latent in the poem and yields itself only to rigorous scrutiny. The resulting investiture of identities is induced by the exchange of gaze. The scope of such an interpretation is explored in this study.

Human nature is social in its essence. Self-identity is not something with which we are born, nor does it appear ex nihilo. We know who we are by virtue of our relation with the Other, and this knowledge is both grasped and communicated through the gaze. The Kannur fort is already a “monument under the department of archeology” (*The Kannur Fort*; P. P. Raveendran’s translation) when the poet reaches the place. The act of looking at or gazing is inherent in the structure - the fort. For, a fort is built primarily to observe. Hence, by extension of the act, the fort itself was an observer/subject/gazer prior to its transformation. But the new status (monument) has made it an object of gaze/a gazee. This transmutation occurs in the poet too. He comes to the fort as a visitor/gazer. But later, as evident from the oblique references in the poem, he becomes a gazee, though inadvertently. According to Lacan, gaze is the uncanny sense that the object of our eye’s look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will. Although a synonym of the word look, in the realm of Lacanian psychoanalysis gaze stands for the feeling of being looked at. It reverses the roles of the subject and the object. This reversal of roles is realized in the identities of the poet and the fort. Both
the poet and the fort act as the gazer and gazee alternately, and at
times simultaneously.

The sights that the poet sees as a visitor, fabricates the new identity
of the fort. His gaze constructs the fort through his discourse (the
poem). The cannons and the thoughts of the past inspired by them
convey the changes induced, in the fort, by time. Here, certainly the
poet plays the preeminent role of a gazer(subject) having authority over
the object(the fort). The authority is that of creating a fort for the reader
through discourse. Posterity would see the fort as defined by the poet.
He denigrates the fort into a diminutive nonentity: “The fort today is
not a fort”. This however is not the material reality. The fort, hitherto
the object of gaze, regains the position of the gazer with the ‘notice’:
“Here a public notice”. Although literally, the notice is just an inanimate
warning to the visitors, metaphorically it could also be the ‘gazing eye’
of the fort, watching the visitors. The word “notice” also has the
implications of seeing. The public notice is the organ of the fort that
notices/sees the public. So, as the poet looks at the notice, he is also
looked at by the fort, unwittingly. The “gazing eye” of the fort is also
seen in the guard, who watches over the safety of the fort and warns
the visitors, just like the public notice does: “Now it’s time”. The guards
of the fort would do this to the coming generations too:

My children undisturbed by slumber
Will watch all this with interest.
But I feared
That the guards would
Gently pat on their shoulders too and say:
‘Now it’s time.’

The guards are an integral part of the fort. Their identity is their
collective function as a part of the fort. They are the eyes and the lips
of the fort. Severed from the fort they have no existence. The poem
is replete with such insinuations about the gaze back from the fort.
There are eyes everywhere in the fort: “Most eyes here are lazy”.

Every expedition of man contains a quest for identity; he seeks
or sees himself in what he sees. Imbued in the visit of the poet to the
fort, is this invariable search for the self. This answers his poser: “Why
have I come here?” The poet yearns to establish his own subjectivity through the fort, an image of fortitude that he has been inadvertently aspiring towards. He unconsciously desires a stable, coherent version of the self that does not correspond to the chaotic drives of his self. But he is disappointed to see volatility in the fort. He wails that the fort has changed: “The fort today is not a fort”. He sees his own inconsistent self in the fort. The fort is the Other to the poet where he sees himself. Though strong externally, it is decrepit inside. The sight is appalling to him – the vacuity of his object of desire! Any desire is a misrecognition of fullness, where there is really nothing but a screen for our own narcissistic projections. It is that lack at the heart of desire that ensures that we continue to desire. However, because the object of the poet’s desire (the fort/the other) is ultimately nothing but a screen projecting his own self, to come too close to it threatens to give him the experience precisely of the Lacanian gaze. Subversion is at the centre of this act of gaze. By having the object of his eye’s gaze look back at him, the poet is reminded of his own lack. The fort becomes a screen for the projection of the poet’s ruminations.

The act of being gazed upon is a frightening reality. At the same time its affirmative quality cannot be forgotten. It is also true that until we experience the gaze of the Other, our identity is not validated. As individuals we exist in a world that we recognize as our own, existing solely for us. When man discovers himself as the object of the Other’s gaze it is potentially the positive ground for self-identity. G.W.F. Hegel says:

“Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another selfconsciousness; that is to say; it is only by being acknowledged or ‘recognized’ (Phenomenology of the Mind 229).

This acknowledgement or recognition occurs through the look of the Other. Hegel’s theories about self-identity and awareness are concomitant with notions of the gaze. Without the acknowledgement of the Other, we do not discover ourselves as an individual among individuals. Our identities must be validated from outside of our own minds in order to affirm a position or status in the world. But despite the power of the Other’s gaze to bestow identity on us, ironically in
the look/gaze, we no longer exist for ourselves. As a gazer or a gazee, one ceases to protect one’s identity and becomes vulnerable to the eye of another. This is true for both the gazer and the gazee. Thus the fort suffers the imaginary, derogatory discourses promulgated by the gazer-poet to belittle it – obscene surroundings, the oppression of women, abuse of power, exploitation of the weak etc:

A place for roaming cattle to shit,
For gays to feel gay about,
And for pimps to scout around...

The whips of terrible oppression
Must have been cracked here.

Swords and daggers here must have consumed
Lots of poor men’s blood.

This active fort might have suppressed
Anxieties in the sultan’s palace. (P. P. Raveendran’s translation)

Similarly the fort also admonishes the poet in reciprocation:

Those who tamper
With this archeological monument
Will be prosecuted. (P. P. Raveendran’s translation)

And finally the poet is shown the door or banished from its interiors: ‘Now it’s time.’

In the mutual exchange of ‘gazes’ both parties (the fort and the poet) actively participate in what can be construed as a power struggle. It constitutes a simultaneous struggle for and against domination. The gaze initiates a power dynamic whose desired outcome would be the relegation of the “object” to a passive role and the gazer gaining power over the gazee. But in this poem the result remains inconclusive as both
the poet and the fort have their ways. The fort eschews the poet out while the poet perpetuates the defamation.

The sea plays a mediating role in the poem. It pacifies the poet with its apparent constancy. But it is common knowledge that the sea is volatile. This inconstancy of the sea can never be mistaken for stability. Yet the poet seeks reprieve in the thought of the sea’s stability:

The sea remains the same old sea

With crashing waves rising up as usual.
Strong and sturdy hands
Still row boats across her waters.
Black muscles become sterner.

Shall I turn my face to the sea?
The sea is the same old sea,
The endless expanse of the blue.
Always keeping its counsel. (P. P. Raveendran’s translation)

The poet does not find in his object of desire (the fort) the fortitude that he expects. He only finds himself/the Other there. Hence he looks to the sea. But he looks at the sea from the fort. So, by implication both the fort and the poet look at the sea. It may be noted that the word ‘sea’ and ‘see’ are homophones. And as they see the sea, the sea sees them! Here gaze comes full circle. (In the original poem in Malayalam the word kadal for sea rhymes with kaanal for seeing and the title has the word kannur which could be very liberally read as kannu – eye + ooru – land = Land of the Eye). The gaze at the sea is a struggle to establish equilibrium. The fort and the sea have been gazing at each other and buttressing each other’s identities for centuries. Then the poet incorporated in the quest. Without each other and the Other’s gaze, they do not exist. The gaze functions in a very complex arena. The gaze is not merely about exchanging power or control, but serves as a pathway to true identity. The objectifying gaze of the poet is finally
transmogrified into a mutual exchange of vulnerability, acceptability and enlightenment. The initial struggle to define boundaries and positions peters out at the end of the poem as the transience of life becomes clear. The concluding thought about the generations emanates from the compulsion to always return to the eye, the gaze of the Other.

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Nihilism and Transcendence in Samuel Beckett and Simone Weil

Mohammad Maroof Shah

The problems of nihilism and absurdism as presented in the works of Samuel Beckett which presuppose a bleak view of the world without transcendence are effectively solved by turning to Simone Weil’s philosophy which appropriates key absurdist premises in its transcendence-centred interpretation of knowledge and experience. Weil’s rereading of religion appropriates important criticisms from existentialist-absurdist writers like Beckett and critics of traditional religion. It is possible to transcend absurdist impasse by turning to Weil. Notebooks of Weil are here read as providing important insights to answer the absurdist nihilist pessimist vision.

Beckett’s extremely influential *Waiting for Godot* has been much heard and commented upon but relatively little attention has been paid to another masterpiece *Waiting on God* by his contemporary which challenges and moves beyond the impasse in Beckettian depressing or nihilistic work. Simone Weil, one of the most significant names in the history of modern mysticism and mystical philosophy, has dealt with the unique problems that modern man faces vis-à-vis his faith. Weil encounters similar problems that occupy absurdist writers but her response and conclusions are very different. In this paper it is proposed to compare and contrast Beckett and Weil to show how transcendence as it figures in Weil’s mysticism dissolves the problems associated with nihilism in modern thought that plague Beckett’s depressing work.

Robert Cohen has read Godot as a “dramatic companion-piece” to Simone Weil’s *Waiting for God*, without, however, the postulation of faith. Both situations are set upon the site of the crucifixion where, in Simon Weil’s belief, man was farthest from God. Salvation is possible only through extreme affliction. But if Weil shows and not merely believes in the eventual coming of God, Beckett gives no answer. Where Beckett ultimately depresses Weil shows grace ultimately unsurpassable by
man leading him to the other shore where time’s reign is no more. Nihilism is overcome successfully in Weil but unconvincingly in Beckett’s works.

Similarities are various and profound. Nihilistic diagnosis of human condition as ordinarily it appears is caught up in the world of necessity the world of time, of appearances, evil and absurdity. If we take the world of time or creation apart from God the reality, then they have similar diagnosis of its illness and a similar remedy but while the one sees impossibility of cure for the sickness of existence and suggests some desperate half measures that give man a semblance or illusion of salvation the other asserts ultimate victory for man over himself and over time. They have no use for personality; it is the obstruction to our meeting the Beloved. Both are as far as possible from humanistic individualism, perfectionism, anthropocentrism, utopianism, rationalism, scientism, progressivism and the like. Both assert difficulty of salvation and pervasive power of gravity to drag man back to earth. Creation as it appears independent or cut off from transcendence is a sort of abdication of God. Creation is in a state of disequilibrium. It is the fallen world in need of redemption, for both of them identify creation with the world of autonomous beings and creature with autonomous being as appears in First and Last Notebooks. “God created because he was good, but the creature itself be created it was evil. It redeemed I by persuading God through endless entreaties to destroy it” (F, 123). Material things, are in perfect continuity with God; and This continuity will be broken only at the moment when autonomous beings assume an independent, and thus separate existence: it is a crime to be other than God, a crime shared by all those who will use their free will, thereby dissolving the bond Creator-creature (N, 539). “Evil is the distance between the creature and God, and if it disappears, creation itself will disappear also” (N, 342). Our sin consists in wanting to be and our punishment in believing that we exist. Expiation is wanting not to be, and salvation for us consists in seeing that we are not (F, 218). When one encounters pain or privation, the subtle mechanism of our autonomy starts to hide it with a consolation.

However despite profound similarities there are more profound differences which arise from positive appropriation of transcendence in
Weil. Weil asserts, in contrast to Beckett, that we have access to God/eternity/Self/grace.

For Weil, even belief in the immortality of the soul is a mechanism of filling the void and can be only a sublime consolation devised by our autonomy, giving meaning to a phenomenon of which the very essence... is the absence of meaning (N, 492). One should stand completely stripped of everything, every mask, every protective mechanism and face the void and absence of all meaning and not encourage the reappearance of supplementary energy by supplying oneself with a new motive. One should suffer without intent on a reward or ultimate goal which all pertain to the realm of time so that one in a way lives always in an eternal present. Weil expresses it thus: “I must not love my suffering because it is useful to me, but because it is” (N, 266).

In the mystical perspective God is joy and awareness of God is joy and thus awareness of reality in which all association with the self, is put aside. If it is possible to access Reality or God, nihilism is overcome. Weil has an ingenious argument to show that awareness of reality is joy and despair or sadness is a loss of contact with reality. This is her expression of old mystical/metaphysical viewpoint which identifies God as ananda, bliss. Weil expresses the identity of joy with the awareness of reality. Since beauty is manifest in appearance, the striking sign of reality, joy can only be a feeling, an awareness of reality. Weil describes sadness as a loss of contact with reality. Through sadness we cannot fulfill our vocation – to understate misery of our condition and to accept our reduction to what we truly are: nothing. The memory of the revelation of reality through joy keeps us from plunging into despair, and the joy felt in our nothingness can be inscribed in our sensibility only by suffering. “Joy and pain are equally precious gifts both of which must be savoured fully, and each in its purity...” (WG, 132). In Beckett there is nothing of this sort. For him pain may have some positive function of making us aware of reality of Void or Nothing that Self is Encounter with reality is terrifying and Reality is not the substance of Joy though occasionally his characters attain great joy in experiencing a sort of Nirvana.
Weil privileges suffering over joy as the former is more effective in removing the obstruction to our contact with reality. Here Beckett will agree though he has other reasons to believe that it is suffering that constitutes human vocation on earth. Suffering, for Beckett, is not, generally speaking, a means to joy but to the blankness of Nothing. Man needs something painful to shun his complacency in self-forgetfulness. Beauty will not perform this miracle so efficiently. In awareness of the beautiful, the self is only forgotten and suspended, whereas in suffering it is tormented until death. It therefore appears that suffering has prominence over joy (N, 222).

It is the question of time that forms the key to the thoughts of both Beckett and Weil. All important theological concepts of Weil’s revolve around her conception of time. For Beckett time has nothing positive about it. Life in time is suffering, bondage, exile. It is the punishment for being born. Time is not the moving image of eternity; it knows no stop. No perfection in virtue, no goodness comes out of living in time. Monotony has nothing to recommend itself. Eternity in Beckett is not the same as it is in traditional mysticism, It is bad eternity. Monotony is simply a sign of our life in time: “we have been thrown out of eternity, and we must really go through time painfully, minute by minute.” Monotony can also be beautiful if it is a reflection of eternity. Nihilism presupposes that the world of time is the only world we are condemned to live in. As the world of time is the world of suffering no redemption is possible. Weil shows how transcendence breaks through the phenomenal and is accessible and retrievable from the abysses of evil and absurdity.

Time is self’s environment where it pursues its goals of self-expansion. Time is not only the essential element of personal existence; it can also serve as a chosen instrument for transcending it. Time is also the Cross, the weight of necessity making the soul feel how vulnerable and profoundly subject it is to the mediation of time. The time shown to be the instrument of expiation (N, 268) is the consequence of original sin; As Milkos Veto puts it: “the eternal is reconciled with itself only by time that eliminates itself.... The seed of eternity bears fruit in time, according to the progress, the flow, of time. The earth in which this seed is planted is the uncreated part of the
soul, but the rain and warmth that make it grow are time. Time is therefore in some way a party to eternity” (Veto, 1994:114). The entire life of the self is directed towards the future because its substratum is supplementary energy, “produced” only by motives whose ends are in the future (or in the past) (N, 184). One should live in the present breaking the ties with the future and the past. “If we contemplate ourselves at a specific moment – the present moment, cut off from past and future – we are innocent… Isolating a moment in this way implies forgiveness. But this isolation is detachment” (N, 216).

Beckett finds circular activity intolerable but Weil doesn’t. Amongst all sorts of movements, the circular movement is the most perfect, because it is the spatial image of the motiveless state. If there must be a movement in the world, it must be the nearest possible thing to repose (N, 406). This is the case with circular movement, at the end of which one is precisely at the point of departure; it has no goal, unlike rectilinear movement that only exists with a view to its goal. Movement in a straight line is an image and expression of self-expansion, whereas an action closing back upon itself represents contemplation, which doesn’t touch its object (N, 423). The beauty of circular movement is that it is directed towards nothing (N, 406).

Weil is at her best in showing how one creates the meaning in life by renouncing all personal meanings, by complete acceptance of submission to the order of the world. One loves the order of the world by renouncing all personal interests. This is, in practice, close to Spinoza’s view of love of God by renouncing every vestige of personal interest. Freedom lies in recognizing our utter dependence on Totality, on God and in fact giving up sense of illusory autonomy or freedom that we associate with a separate individuality. We are not asked to do something against which our heart or head rebels but just shift to the perception in accordance with the nature of things. One is just asked to accept or recognize the obvious fact that there is the order called necessity, which exists prior to us and not necessarily comprehensible in human terms. Reality transcends all our estimates, evaluations, desires and constitutes the given and man has no choice but to accept it by renouncing – the sense of individuality and freedom outside God. For Weil consent is always a consent to the good, and, as such, it is
the good itself. Faith is itself this faculty of submission or consent according to her. Absurdism rejects this notion of consent as a species of bad faith.

Beckett caricatures the values of life as love and friendship. There are two kinds of friendship, as a reciprocal relationship between two egos or two persons with mutual complementary interests. This friendship doesn’t involve love which is born of self-denial or transcendence of ego. This friendship is hurt when other party doesn’t take enough care for other’s dignity, self-respect, etiquettes. This is friendship not in God but outside God. This friendship is laughed away by Beckett and Weil.

Weil has a beautiful interpretation of the experience of waiting that sharply contrasts with Beckett’s. Waiting in Weil’s perspective is imitating God and not waiting for God. “Attention without distraction,” choiceless awareness, absolute openness to experience, absolute vulnerability, waiting without expectation of any thing happening in future, the pure experience of waiting for nothing. Humility is a certain relation of the soul to time. Waiting lacerates ego if it is waiting without any purpose. Contrary to what Beckett would have us believe waiting is key virtue that has great role to play in life. To quote Weil.

Art is waiting. Inspiration is waiting

Humility partakes in God’s patience. The perfected soul waits for the good in silence, immobility and humility like God’s own. Christ nailed on the cross is the perfect image of the Father….

God is attention without distraction.

One must imitate the patience and humility of God (F, 141).

It is clear from the above observations that though there are important points of convergence between Beckett and Weil they ultimately differ and these differences result from their different understanding of what Stace calls “positive divine”. Both are more or less mystical thinkers but Beckett’s is a reading influenced by certain currents of thought which run counter to millennial intuitions of mystics of different traditions. Beckett could better be called an ascetic and a
cynic than a mystic. Weil takes full cognizance of the negative divine or absence of God from the world – absurdity and evil in all its terrifying forms – and this makes her relevant to contemporary experience which is suffused by negative experiences. One can proceed beyond the Beckettian impasse through the mysticism that Weil advocates. Beckett is an artist of failure and Weil is a mystic who finds in the abyss of absurdity, evil and gravity, time that which redeems the world. We can’t move forward with the vision that concludes with ‘perhaps’ it is hard to go on in allegedly incomprehensible hostile world. Beckett finds life meaningless but continues to hold on to some meaning that justifies the will to go on. Weil shows how to find meaning in meaninglessness and move with “purposiveness without purpose.”

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Power, Language and Context:  
A Sociolinguistic Reading of Bill Clinton’s  
*Between Hope and History*  

Uzoechi Nwagbara

A sociolinguistic reading of *Between Hope and History* unpacks the thrusts of the book that are couched in Bill Clinton’s overall political and ideological philosophy as well as the achievements of his first tenure of office as President of the United States of America. The book also states the hallmarks of his campaign manifestoes for his second term through the use of apt linguistic and sociolinguistic elements. The acknowledgement of language as a medium for acquiring power is integral in all communicative situations aimed at rhetorical or sociolinguistic value. An outstanding feature of Bill Clinton’s *Between Hope and History: Meeting America’s Challenges for the 21st Century* is its attention to the demand of sociolinguistics, which is amply demonstrated in the book to be an effective method achieving political and ideological ends as well as reaching out to the electorate. *Between Hope and History* is a panoply of President Bill Clinton’s political apparatus, his campaign rhetoric for winning presidential election of 1996 or “a snapshot of President Clinton’s ‘New Democratic’ philosophy as he segues from his first to (he hopes) second term” (Toner, 1996: 1), Clinton’s “the age of possibility” language is couched in the triumvirate: opportunity, responsibility and community – which are the three main divisions (chapters) of the book. It is on this tripod of political, philosophical and ideological ethos that Clinton’s second term rests. In substantiating this, Clinton makes the same point in his acclaimed autobiography, *My Life* (2005). The book “highlighted the policies of my first term through stories of individual Americans who had been positively affected by them, and articulated where I wanted to take our country in the next four years” (Clinton 2005: 722).

The theoretical frame work of sociolinguistics that deals with the effects of context, expectations, norms and mores among others impact on language use in a particular social setting is the tool of the study.
Downes (1984) defined sociolinguistics as “that branch of linguistics which studies just those properties of language and languages which require references to social, including contextual, factors in their explanation” (1984: 15). In the same way, for Coulmas (1997), “the primary concern of sociolinguistic scholarship is to study correlations between language use and social structures” (1). The foundation of sociolinguistics is to interrogate the effects of contexts on language use. This is crucial in analysing the book is being investigated.

In the preface to Between Hope and History, Clinton takes cognisance of the visionary failure of the preceding administration; he also comments on the moral, economic, political and leadership deficits of Republicanism, which is enmeshed in trickle down economics that constantly holds the populace down in political calculus. To this end, Clinton makes allusion to the Bible for sense of vision and morality to shepherd Americans out of their economic and political stalemate. Therefore, by understanding the need for inclusive and populist-oriented government that takes full responsibilities of its citizens against the backdrop of “Reagan Revolution”: the precursor to Bush administration that preaches “less government is almost always better than more of it” (89).

Thus, Clinton's understanding of the social and political context of that period is needful in making apt statements relevant to the occasion as exemplified in the book. It is a type of government that stands between responsibility and opportunity – the one that brings about community, what Nigel Hamilton calls “society as community” (2003: 228). Clinton makes this attempt in recognition of the mistakes and inaction that permeate political sloganeering in projecting electioneering manifestoes and vision:

In the last four years, we have pursued this responsibility in four broad areas: first, strengthening individual and community responsibility through, among other things, welfare reform and crime prevention; second, meeting public responsibilities better by reinventing the federal government; third, encouraging businesses to take more responsibility for the welfare of their workers and their families; fourth, working at all levels of society to address our
responsibilities to future generations by improving how we protect our natural environment. (65)

Language is a major means for the transportation of ideology and power. Simpson (1993) sees ideology as “ways in which what we say and think interacts with society” (5). The definition of ideology offered here has strong relationship with the use of language in the context of power acquisition. Clinton exemplifies socio-linguistic based words to convey power and ideology. Clinton’s appropriate, effective use of words engrained in well tailored expressions for political and ideological effects are quite illustrated in the book. As an ideologue, Clinton asserts:

that words matter that they have a power that can change men and their worlds, sometimes dropping the scales from their eyes or shackles from their hands. Ideologists believe in the power of the idea as vested in the word. (Gouldner 1976: 27)

In supporting the above, Clinton believes that people are open to persuasion capable of changing political culture by appealing to their ideals and political attachment through appropriate language use.

Thus appropriate use of language within the right context places premium on sociolinguistic elements capable of ideological persuasion that foregrounds power. In this connection, Anton Pelinka says that

Language reflects power structures – and language has an impact on power structures. Language can be seen as an indicator of social and therefore political situations – and language can also be seen as a driving force directed at changing politics and society. Language is an in-put as well as an out-put factor of political systems: It influences politics – and is influenced by politics. (in Wodak 2007: 1)

Thus, the language of Between Hope and History is mainly about discourse of power and ideology mediated through recognition of what word is capable of doing if applied in the right sociolinguistic setting.

The use of appropriate vocabulary in a given sociolinguistic setting or context is an important step in determining the meaning, attributes and value that are attached to a people, and, which therefore impacts
on the subject positions being set up. In the statements to be analysed here, there are diverse ideological based lexes that carry different meanings as well as political positions which are coded in vocabularies used. Accordingly, the use of right vocabulary is a form of persuasion that is ideo-politically motivated. This is even more crucial as we live in the present order that Fairclough calls era of “linguistic turn” (1992: 2), a period in American history where there is “a pitched battle for the hearts and minds of U.S” public (Kopperud 1993: 20). The battle referred here is the one aimed at ideological dominance and power acquisition.

Talking about community, in the third segment of the book, Clinton warns that for the American people to live as a community, they must know that it is a function of responsibility and opportunity. After acknowledging that “The most fundamental responsibility of any government is to protect the safety of its citizens” (75), he goes ahead to assert that responsibility is a duty every citizen owes: the government, parents, churches, civil society, among others (71). And in corroborating the opportunities that his administration has made available to the American people, Clinton uses the right vocabulary to articulate a major aspect of the opportunities. This aspect deals with education, a focal point of Clinton’s administration; Clinton sees this area as a driver of other facets of opportunities, especially in the present global economic order: a period Peter Drucker dubs “knowledge worker” (1999) age. Clinton states downright that

we have moved into a world where knowledge, which has always been a key to individual opportunity, is now the key to the success of the whole society and is literally the dividing line between those who can continue to do well for a lifetime and those who risk being left behind. (50)

Regarding diction, for stylistic felicity, appropriate use of words couched in texts whose various parts are semantically balanced demonstrates coherence, balance and symmetry. Such textual arrangement calls for appropriate locution that has direct relationship with the context. Thus, the use of required diction – choice of words – enhances the sociolect adopted as well as brings the situational constraints responsible for the textual variation used in the context.
In considering how apt expressions could galvanise support as well as provoke right political thinking, Clinton places premium on good language choice (diction) that wrings out the saliency of his politics. His idea here is similar to Edward Sapir’s when he reasoned that

Language is not ordinary thought... it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for the society. (1929: 29)

The significance of relevant words for communicative effectiveness and sociolinguistic appeals are what the above quote depicts. The sociolinguistic tradition which consigns contradiction resulting from using the same expression for different situations for power is what Alvin Gouldner tagged “paradoxical linguistic liberalism” (1976: 52). In recognising the pitfalls of this sociolinguistic pattern, Clinton uses language nuanced with apt diction that agrees with the social condition of his readers or voting public for maximum political ends. In advancing this,

in the face of bewildering, intense, sometimes overpowering change, people react differently... And there are those who embrace the future with all its changes and challenges and engage in what Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once called “the action and passion” of our time... F. Scott Fitzgerald, said we grew up “to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in man shaken”. In the tradition of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, we embraced a view of ourselves and our democracy that Franklin Roosevelt described as “built on the unhampered initiative of individual men and women joined together in a common enterprise”. (15-16)

Through the use of appropriate language choice based on relevant metaphors as well as references, Clintons takes a peep into the sociolectal importance of word choice. Thus, by referring to past distinguished American Presidents – even Theodore Roosevelt, who is not a Democrat, Clinton’s statement transcends party line as well as adumbrates the realities of his credential regarding contesting for the
second term. In another instance, Clinton uses the right diction for effect: “We have been expanding our vision of a ‘united states’ ever since the failure of the Articles of Confederation caused the states to agree on a national Constitution...” (88). Clinton’s use of such phrases like ‘united states’, ‘vision’ and even ‘failure of the Articles of Confederation” portend his idea about community and “big government” (88) ideal that is couched in re-inventing “America’s oldest democracy” and making the people the reason for governance.

This study is based on how the agency of language verged on socio-linguistically conscious expressions could galvanise power, appeal and ideological persuasion given varying contexts. Thus, this is crucially important in order to appreciate the imports of President Bill Clinton’s Between Hope and History: Meeting America’s Challenge in the 21st Century. Also, it has been stated that a sociolinguistic reading of this text that runs within the axes of diction, semantics, power and contexts will bring the essence of the book within the parameters of Clinton winning the second term as well as gaining the trust of the American people. This is achieved by Clinton’s use of appropriate words to suit the contexts in which they are applied.

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Stylistic Effects in Rilke’s Duino Elegies and Alfred Tennyson’s In Memoriam: A Comparison

Bibhudutt Dash

Comparing two texts, which stand polarized in linguistic, cultural, spatial, temporal terms, necessarily involves translation, which is why translation plays an important role in comparative studies. This essay makes a critical and comparative study of the stylistic effects in the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s Duino Elegies (1923), translated from the German Duineser Elegien (1923) by Stephen Mitchell and Alfred Tennyson’s In Memoriam (1850). The rationale behind taking up the texts lies in finding a great deal of similarities between the two not only in terms of themes but in style as well. This essay studies the stylistic effects in the texts, achieved by a deft appropriation of style to drive home the points.

In Memoriam, written in four-line abba stanzas of iambic verse, though not metrically unusual, given the length of the work, creates a delicate tonal effect. The unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable creates a flow in each line. The stressing of the syllables also allows for the reader to get a particular feel for the words being read; specifically the feelings of the poet. The rhyme scheme gives each stanza a sense of its own completion or the sense of being a complete thought. The scheme also emphasizes the long reach of the outer rhyme of each line, also helping to create a smooth flow for the poem. In contrast to its constant and regulated metrical form, the poem encompasses many different subjects: profound spiritual experiences, nostalgic reminiscence, philosophical speculation, romantic fantasizing and even occasional verse. The poem demonstrates a style that is pure, direct and masculine. In Memoriam varies from section to section as it embodies or alludes to a range of genres. Consequently, some of the sections employ plain style with simple, everyday diction, whereas others, which draw upon Spenser and Keats, emphasize lush, sensuous language. Manipulating its simple stanzaic form with astonishing virtuosity, the
poem has some sections consisting of one or two long sentences and some others having very short sentences. Some sections adapt the style and diction of sonnets, others resemble pastorals, yet others take the form of dialogues, and so on. Throughout, Tennyson weaves his extremely varied styles and allusions to various genres together with chains of images and motifs, which combine the simple and the complex. In isolation, most images, like most of the sections in which they appear, seem fairly simple and straightforward, but their participation in a network of repeated and often contrasted images almost makes every one of them resonate with additional meaning and complexity. As Louis Cazamian writes, “His art retains a sufficient sincerity of tone, it is supported by a sufficiently vigorous truth of feeling, to render acceptable the elaborate elegance of his style” (1164).

One of the greatest stylists and artists among German lyric poets, Rilke was very conscious of the paramount importance of craftsmanship in poetry. In his early poems, the forms employed by Rilke were in general use in German poetry of the nineteenth century, with the exception of all classical forms and metres, such as the ode, the sonnet, hexameters and the like. Rilke’s later style becomes markedly individual, very distinct and personal, which he achieves by a permeation of all the elements of contemporary language and form and with his maturing craftsmanship and personality. By perfecting his style, Rilke considerably extended the range of language and its possibilities of expression. Rilke's poetic technique is combined with strict economy, and his compressed thought stands out in the extreme condensation of his language. Commenting on Rilke's style, H.W. Belmore writes:

Rilke’s style is characterized by its shadings, those delicate overtones for which German poetry before did not possess the means of expression: from his exceptionally wide and quite unbiased vocabulary, the poet supplies exact, i.e., the profound and poetically fitting word, and strengthens its effectiveness by surrounding it with significant affinities of association and sound, and by two specifically musical devices: contrast and repetition. The resulting compact mass of word texture moves along in an apparently natural, though in fact carefully regulated, rhythm, imperceptibly changing with every line, the lifts and dips occurring
in obedience to musical necessity, and at the same time helping to express the meaning by their accurately distributed stresses. There is, in this movement, a supple, elastic quality that is new not only to German lyrical poetry, but to the language as well (221).

Admittedly, no translation can fully bring out the beauties of the original. Though the text taken up for comparison is Mitchell’s translation, undoubtedly beautiful, there is still bound to be a gap between the original and the translated. For example, the syntactic suspension, heightened by the explosive sound repetition of “Wer, wenn ich schrie...” (The First Elegy) may not be exactly reproduced in translation. Rilke’s locution is natural, and the key to Rilke’s particular tone, so far as the first sentence of the elegy is concerned, is encrypted in a small adverb: “denn” (horte mich denn). An anguished dialogue of self and soul is seen in the lines, making visible the poet’s profound recognition of his isolation. Rilke’s words are “Engel / Ordnungen” (angels’ / hierarchies), with stress on Engel and the line break between the two nouns accentuating the subordinate status of Ordnungen. The relation of possessive to noun is marked in the expression. The harsh, guttural, heavily stressed, and all but onomatopoetic sound of the two-syllable “schrie” is somewhat lost in translation. However, Mitchell’s translation reproduces to a great degree the majesty of Duineser Elegien.

The Duino Elegies demonstrates Rilke’s dense and intricate verbal texture, his use of unusual vocabulary, his fondness for exotic rhymes with esoteric rhyming words and his love of tight forms like the sonnet. A central feature of his style, rhyme, with its sound value, is an element in the general form of his poems. As Susan Ranson views, “Rilke has a particular ear for language in that his vocabulary and syntax are, in the main, of everyday simplicity but work to unusual aural effect” (xxxvi). Rilke’s rhythm makes us feel the perceptible cadence and melody. A hypotactic structure and a predominantly abstract language characterize his poetry. Judith Ryan, in her book Rilke, Modernism and the Poetic Tradition (1999) comments on the elegies’ penetrative power.

The sheer abstraction of their language brings these elegies closer to allegory, and yet it resists any kind of simplistic decoding that would yield an easily articulated message. It seems to speak to the
deepest and most primitive layers of our consciousness, and yet to go beyond any merely human conception of reality (121).

The language of Duino Elegies is not only highly connotative but abstract enough to allow for multiple denotations as well. Scott Abbott sees Rilke “stripping words down to their root meanings, to the original gestures from which they grew” (432-446). He further writes, “By emphasizing etymological relationships, by bringing words together into familial clusters, he reverses what he sees as an historical trend away from original metaphor toward the deracinated destruction of contemporary speech” (432-446). The lines of the elegies are more of a monologue, if not strictly a conversation, where the speaker engages himself and a cross-section of the audience in profound existential questions. There is no dialogue in the poems, rather an address without any corresponding answer from the other side. This part of the chapter, which compares the styles of Rilke and Tennyson in the two texts, does not make a line-by-line stylistic analysis of the texts, but highlights in broad terms the main peculiarities of their styles by which they achieve their poetic purpose. The style of Rilke and Tennyson are surely different and this is because of the different backdrops which necessitate it.

In Duino Elegies, Rilke employs the subjunctive in conjunction with other modes like the imperative and the interrogative that escape the dichotomies of truth and falsehood. One of the specialities of Rilke’s poetry lies in the use of the subjunctive mood in his dense metaphors and similes by which, writes E. Horst, Rilke “creates a mode of existence outside the categories of truth and falsehood, presence and absence, being and non-being” (308-328). As Horst sees, “All three modes create a state that hovers between being and non-being, real and unreal, joining and disjoining. The subjunctive mood in particular, reflects both the (thematic) tension between the desire for transcendence and the rejection of the divine, and the (linguistic) joining and disjoining of the two terms (i.e., “tenor” and “vehicle”) created by metaphor and simile” (308-328). Rilke’s use of metaphor in the elegies generates a simultaneous contradiction, when the speaker at certain points in the poem longs for transcendence and at other points condescends to accept the limitations of earthly existence, which he deems to be the poet’s task to preserve and celebrate. Rilke’s metaphors, while highlighting
the tension between the desire for and the impossibility of transcendence, enact the warring of antinomies.

The Duino Elegies starts with a note of supposition and the use of “if,” “even if” suggests a wishful longing with foregone frustration. The use of the past subjunctive with an underlying uncertainty or non-factuality is furthered by the use of the conjunction and the adverb: “Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels’ hierarchies? And even if one of them pressed me / suddenly against his heart: / I would be consumed / in that overwhelming existence.” In most cases, the lines of the poem begin with conjunction, adverb, exclamation, pronouns, imperatives, and such examples galore: “who,” “if,” “even if,” “for,” “and,” “ah,” “not,” “perhaps,” “oh,” “whom,” “all,” “but,” “sing,” “begin,” “listen,” “restrain,” to name a few. Rilke’s studied choice of words and the opportune line breaks heighten the desired effect, achieved by precision and lockstep verbal rhythm. As an instance, the following lines exemplify the salient features of Rilkean style:

Oh and night: there is night, when a wind full of infinite space gnaws at our faces. Whom would it not remain for—that longed-after, mildly disillusioning presence, which the solitary heart so painfully meets. Is it any less difficult for lovers? But they keep on using each other to hide their own fate.

Don’t you know yet? Fling the emptiness out of your arms into the spaces we breathe; perhaps the birds will feel the expanded air with more passionate flying.

(The First Elegy)

Besides displaying many essential characteristics of Rilke’s style, these lines and many other lines in the Duino Elegies manifest Rilke’s predilection for and mastery of the hypotactic style. A hypotactic style is one in which the temporal, logical, and syntactic relations between members and sentences are expressed by words (such as “when,” “then,” “because,” “therefore”) or by phrases (such as “in order to,” “as a result”) or by the use of subordinate phrases and clauses. Unlike Rilke’s, Tennyson’s diction is simple, marked by a deft application of sound and sense and the subtle and pervading employment of alliterative vowel-
music. As for aural dexterity in terms of alliteration, both Rilke and Tennyson are connoisseurs.

The original German exemplifies, more than the translated text, perceptible aural effect in Rilke’s use of alliteration: “Wer, wenn ich schrie, horte mich denn aus der Engel / Ordnungen? Und gesetzt selbst es nahme einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem starkeren Dasein.” Here is Tennyson’s:

He is not here; but far away
The noise of life begins again,
And ghastly thro’ the drizzling rain
On the bald street breaks the blank day. (section 7. Lines 9-12)

The words “bald,” “breaks,” and “blank,” each contributing an essential element to the meaning and each accentuated and linked with the others by alliteration, come at points where the metrical pattern leads to an expectation of slack, or unstressed syllables. As a result, this last line drags and halts, and the baldness and blankness seem to invade the entire prospect.

Again, in section 64:

Who breaks his birth’s invidious bar,
And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
And breasts the blows of circumstance.

The subjunctive mood of the speaker in Duino Elegies runs in line with the interrogative since the elegies are full of questions of various sorts. Rilke’s questions are interrogative in form but directive in meaning as they exact immediacy and attention from the listener. The questions asked in Duino Elegies and In Memoriam are largely philosophical in nature but they voice the anguish of the poetic personae as well. Asking questions in succession is an important poetic device of Rilke, and in Duino Elegies, they serve a great purpose. A comparative study of the questions in Duino Elegies and In Memoriam reveals the poets’ use of the interrogative as a tool to drive their point home. If not exactly a figure of speech as such, the interrogative is one of the
prominent techniques employed by Rilke and Tennyson. While Rilke’s interrogatives are outward, that is, they are directed toward others, in Tennyson, these are inward since the poet asks these questions primarily to himself, which evinces metaphysical speculations and self-inquiry.

In Duino Elegies, we find more than two scores of questions asked by the poet to different audiences—in fact, to us. A look at some of the questions in the elegies highlights the nature of the interrogative: “Ah, whom can we ever turn to / in our need?,” “Is it any less difficult for lovers?,” “Don’t you know yet?,” “But could you accomplish it?,” “Shouldn’t this most ancient of sufferings finally grow / more fruitful for us?,” “we for whom grief is so often / the source of our spirit’s growth—could we exist without them?,” “Who are you?,” “Does the infinite space / we dissolve into, taste of us then?,” “lovers, are you the same?,” “Who has not sat, afraid, before his heart’s curtain?,” and others. There are also questions which do not end with question marks. Again, to cite some examples from In Memoriam: “What is it makes me beat so low?,” “Is this the end of all my care?,” “What words are these fall’n from me?,” “but what am I?,” “Are God and Nature then at strife, / That Nature lends such evil dreams?,” “Who show’d a token of distress? / No single tear, no mark of pain: / O sorrow, then can sorrow wane? / O grief, can grief be changed to less?,” a perceptible difference is marked between the questions in the two texts.

Rilke’s questions elicit answers that are either affirmative or negative in implication but they are not actually answered. The speaker is aware of the answers; his interrogation is, in fact, an attempt to reawaken in us our petrified consciousness, the capacity for realization thwarted by our limitations and divided consciousness. Rilke’s question makes the respondent powerless and catches him off base: “Weren’t you always / distracted by expectation, as if every event / announced a beloved?” On the other hand, Tennyson’s line, “What is it makes me beat so low” does not exemplify the rigour and rancour of the Rilkean question; rather it is a placid inquiry into the nature of “private” grief.

Again, when in section 55, Tennyson takes up his wish that “not one life shall be destroy’d” (section 54) ands asks whether our hope of eternal life does not spring from what is most nearly divine in us,
his interrogation takes a different turn. He inquires if God Himself inspired this hope and expectation, how can it be that Nature, which seems so careful of each species, should seem so careless of the individual. This initial questioning leads to a single complex sentence which extends from the second stanza to the end of the fifth and last stanza of the lyric:

So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life;

That I, considering everywhere  
........................................

I falter where I firmly trod,  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar-stairs  
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.

Though the subject of the sentence emerges in the third of the lines quoted above, the main clause is kept in suspense while adjectival phrases evoke the poet’s anxious and gloomy ponderings. Completed in the first line of the penultimate stanza, it is followed by a second main clause which is likewise held back until the beginning of the last stanza. These delays create a syntactical and rhythmical equivalent of the frustrations which justify the main verbs, “falter” and “stretch” and the kinesthetic suggestions of these verbs are developed in the rapid sequence of main verbs in the last four lines, “stretch,” “grobe,” “gather,” and “call.” There is melancholy inevitability about the adverb “faintly” which modifies the final main verb, “trust.”

A comparison of the diction of Rilke and Tennyson shows differences in their selection and organization of words which suit to the moods of the speaker and the setting of the poems. Their choice
of words, the phrases, syntax and figurative language provide important clues to the meaning of the texts and give a great deal of information about their attitude to the subjects. In so far as diction reveals an author’s intentions and helps us establish such things as attitude, temperament, and context, the diction of Rilke and Tennyson can be analyzed under such categories as the degree to which the vocabulary and phrasing is abstract or concrete, colloquial or formal, technical or common, literal or figurative. Abstract vocabulary represents the subject matter in general or non-sensuous words; the concrete represents its subject matter with striking particularity and sensuous detail. Rilke’s expression: “For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure, / and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us,” (“The First Elegy”) combines the abstract and the concrete, which while referring to the nature of beauty, demonstrates the poet’s conviction as to the inextricable association of beauty and dread. This expression displaying simple diction reveals the fact of our being, our disqualification, even in annihilation. Further, in the “Fifth Elegy”, the phrasing is technical but not formal, showing Rilke’s recondite philosophical musings:

Ah and around this
center: the rose of Onlooking
blooms and unblossoms. Around this
pestle pounding the carpet,
this pistil, fertilized by the pollen
of its own dust, and producing in turn
the specious fruit of displeasure: the unconscious
gaping faces, their thin
surfaces glossy with boredom’s specious half-smile.

The metaphorical content of the expression, “boredom’s specious half-smile” is built on the personification of ‘boredom’ in order to highlight the ennui beneath the meretricious exterior of gratification, intensified further by Rilke’s repetition of the word “specious.” Mostly, the diction of Duino Elegies is colloquial, yet insinuating and complex, which accounts for Rilke’s hypnotic wordplay: “O smile, where are you
going? O upturned glance: / new warm receding wave on the sea of the heart... / alas, but that is what we are.” Geoffrey Hartman finds in Rilke the introduction of “a new idiom which would neglect the anthropomorphic for the physical basis of language. The commonplace sense of words is neglected for their seeming origin as signs signifying weight, direction, and invisibly-oriented gesture” (95).

Tennyson’s diction is colloquial and forceful; there is no periphrasis, no indirection—rather a force attained by realization:

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,
   At last he beat his music out.
   There lives more faith in honest doubt,

Believe me, than in half the creeds. (Section 96. Lines 9-12)

Tennyson’s language often has a moving, austere precision where the “measured language” intensifies the poignancy of feeling:

But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
   A use in measured language lies;
   The sad mechanic exercise,

   Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.”

Coming back to repetition, which is a significant feature of diction, we see a dexterous use of this device by Rilke and Tennyson to reiterate salient points. A simple, reasonably straightforward device, repetition occurs when a word or synonym, phrase or line is repeated, and the most obvious effect it has on a text is that of emphasis. A comparative analysis of the use of repetition by Rilke and Tennyson reveals the matter, the manner and the effect of repetition in Duino Elegies and In Memoriam. For instance, Rilke’s exploitation of repetition in the use of the words “not only” emphasizes his stance and shows a progressing exclusion that pinpoints the poet’s stated direction:

Not only all the dawns of summer—, not only
   how they change themselves into day and shine with beginning.
   Not only the days, so tender around flowers and, above,
around the patterned treetops, so strong, so intense.
Not only the reverence of all these unfolded powers,
not only the pathways, not only the meadows at sunset,
not only, after a late storm, the deep-breathing freshness,
not only approaching sleep, and a premonition…
but also the nights! But also the lofty summer
nights, and the stars as well, the stars of the earth.

(“The Seventh Elegy”)

The first two stanzas of section 6 of *In Memoriam*, cited here as
an example of Tennyson’s use of repetition, which while suggesting
different layers of significations of the word “common,” emphasizes the
inevitability of death and the irreplaceable absence of the lost ones:

One writes, that ‘Other friends remain,’
That ‘Loss is common to the race’—
And common is the commonplace,
And vacant chaff well meant for the grain.

That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter, rather more:
Too common! Never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.

Again, in this section, there is an example of parallelism that
expresses the similarity between his future and the young girl’s who
has lost his beloved: “O what to her shall be the end? / And what to
me remains of good?” Another instance of parallelism is marked in the
use of three apostrophes where Tennyson compares his grief with others:
“O father” (line 9), “O mother” (line 13), and “O somewhere, meek,
unconscious dove” (line 25). There are other instances of repetition in
*Duino Elegies* and *In Memoriam* and the examples cited above are the
representative sections of the poems on this score which highlight the
poets’ choice of words to emphasize matters of consequence.
Another important aspect of the discussion pertains to the use of the imperative by Rilke and Tennyson and the poetic purpose fulfilled by it. Where the mood of the verb used to express commands, requests, warnings, offers, and entreaties, sentences with an imperative as the main verb require the person(s) addressed to carry out some action. Hence, the subject of an imperative sentence is typically the second-person pronoun you, which is however normally omitted, but appears in the emphatic in the cases warranted by the situations. The imperatives in Duino Elegies are of different types, that is, when an imperative apparently seems to be in the nature of a command, it is, in fact, an entreaty.

The imperatives further serve the purposes of requests and warnings. Some examples of the Rilkean imperatives like, “Fling the emptiness out of your arms / into the spaces we breathe,” “Sing of women abandoned and desolate,” “Begin again and again the never-attainable praising,” “Listen to the night as it makes itself hollow,” “Restrain him……,” “Don’t think that fate is more than the density of childhood,” “Be astonished, Angel, for we / are this,” “Praise this world to the angel, not the unsayable one,” “Look, I am living,” and others suggest a note of urgency or immediacy in Rilke’s entreaties. When Rilke says, “Fling the emptiness out of your arms / into the spaces we breathe,” he extends a veritable entreaty to us in order that it may impel us to be expansive and lift us from the void into a state of fulfillment.

To cite some examples of imperatives used by Tennyson in different sections such as “Forgive” in the Prologue, “Be near me” in section 50, “Behold, we know not anything; / I can but trust that good shall fall / At last—far off—at last, to all” in section 54, “come, wear the form by which I know / Thy spirit in time among thy peers,” and “Come: not in watches of the night. / …Come beauteous in thine after form, / And like a finer light in light” in section 91, “Descend, and touch, and enter” in section 93, “Ring out” and “Ring in” in section 106, and others reveal an undertone of impassioned entreaties than commands.

At times, Rilke’s entreaties are tantamount to injunction. A comparative study of the imperatives of Rilke and Tennyson highlights the distinction between the two: whereas Rilke’s imperative is more
forceful, addressed to the general mass battered by limitations, Tennyson’s imperatives, on the other hand, are not addressed to the multitude but to Hallam. However, Tennyson’s public display of private grief is a definitive statement on the critical, disconcerting issues of the times, which of course, gathers momentum by the employment of the imperatives. Again, the rhythmic insistence coupled with beautiful imagery, which is an important aspect of Tennyson’s style, can be compared with Rilke’s complex imagery in *Duino Elegies* that conjures up strange but exquisite mental pictures. Imagery, apart from visual sense qualities, does also include qualities that are auditory, tactile, thermal, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic. In section 101 of *In Memoriam*, for example, Tennyson’s imagery encompasses not only things that are visible, but also qualities that are smelled or heard, together with a suggestion in the adjective “summer,” of warmth:

Unloved, the beech will gather brown,…
And many a rose-carnation feed
With summer spice the humming air,…

Further, Tennyson’s imagery signifies descriptions of visible objects and scenes, where the description becomes vivid and particularized and it functions as a major factor in poetic meaning, structure, and effect. The following extract of the poem highlights a combination of the aspects of imagery beautifully employed by Tennyson and transports us to a beatific realm of happiness:

Now rings the woodland loud and long,
The distance takes a lovelier hue,
And drown’d in yonder living blue
The lark becomes a sightless song.

Now dance the lights on lawn and lea,
The flocks are whiter down the vale,
And milkier every milky sail
On winding stream or distant sea. (section 115. Lines 5-12)
In *In Memoriam*, there is an example of monetary imagery even though Tennyson may not have thought in this light:

But who shall so forecast the years
And find in loss a gain to match?
Or reach a hand thro’ time to catch
The far-off interest of tears? (1, 5-8)

“Forecast,” “loss,” “gain,” and “interest” are business registers employed in unison to underscore the poet’s thoughts on the compensatory nature of loss that makes the “gain” rise with perceptible accrual.

Rilke’s imagery is sharp, abstruse and at times it produces onomatopoeic effect: “And so I hold myself back and swallow the call-note / of my dark sobbing.” “But listen to the voice of the wind / and the ceaseless message that forms itself out of silence,” “The eternal torrent / whirls all ages along in it, through both realms / forever, and their voices are drowned out in its thunderous roar.” At first, the expressions confound the readers but a careful observation shows Rilke’s persuasive argument affecting our consciousness. The poetic persona represents the anguish of the multitude and this is quite empathic of Rilke to evoke from the readers the sense of participation with the pose, movements, and physical sensations of the persona described. The feelings of the poetic persona are essentially our own and this sense of empathy is related to the concept of “Einfühlung” (“feeling into”) developed by German theorists in the nineteenth century. In the Second Elegy, Rilke’s imagery gives a picture of comparison and makes one actually experience the sensation: “No more...”; you who beneath his hands / swell with abundance, like autumn grapes,” or as in the Third Elegy, “All at once new, trembling, how he was caught up / and entangled in the spreading tendrils of inner event / already twined into patterns, into strangling undergrowth, prowling / bestial shapes,” and “Loving, he waded down into more ancient blood, to ravines / where Horror lay, still glutted with his fathers.”

The rich array of poetic devices and figures of speech employed by the poets produce the intended stylistic effects which move in
consonance with the gravity of the themes. The similarities and differences in the use of tropes, which might seem to be coincidental, do never fail to underscore the lines of thought.

Works Cited


Alternative Representations of the Female ‘Others’: A study of Sarah Joseph’s Short Stories “Mother Clan” and “Black Holes.”

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In any attempt to resituate postcolonial theory in relation to feminism, it is now de rigueur to address blistering controversies about radical reconceptualizations of the ideas of nation, gender, culture and ethnicity that have a major cultural/political significance for recent postcolonial thought. In order to examine the discursive nature of postcolonial studies in relation to gender, one should analyse feminist theorisations vis-a-vis those specific historical, personal and geographical circumstances and practices. Such a view envisaged in Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s essay that suggests the possibilities for a ‘cross-cultural feminism that is as theoretically attentive to the historical complexities and struggles of the Third World as it is to those of First World women’, therefore, continues to preoccupy the efforts of the proponents of feminism within the postcolonial sphere. (Mohanty, 2003: 51).

It may be quite surprising to note that in spite of the heated debates on postcolonial feminist writings that have been going on for almost three decades now, there appears to be no consensus about the representations of the ‘doubly effaced’ subaltern women in the mainstream postcolonial narratives. Indeed, ever since the African-American feminist scholar bell hooks in her essay Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory vigorously challenged the very notion of a common oppression of women. The interlocking systems of race, class, and gender have become central aspects to both feminism and post colonialism. In a similar vein, scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Trinh T. Minh-ha have also attempted to document and theorize African American experience and social activism as a way of developing distinctive interpretations of black women’s oppression, and validating alternative ways of knowledge creation in feminist discourse. (Wilson-Tagoe, 2010:123). At the same time, drawing on Gramscian concepts
of class and race, a group of Indian researchers headed by Ranajith Guha conceived the notion of ‘subaltern studies’ as an endeavour to transform the writing of colonial and nationalist history by assembling a counter-history of popular forms of action and culture that had been excluded from previous historiographical traditions. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak attempts to refocus on the ‘central’ yet ‘marginalised’ figures in mainstream narratives including the epics, have demonstrated that the process of marginalisation has a wider emblematic status in the production of female subjectivity in Subaltern Studies.

Responding to this climate of Subaltern Studies, many regional writers as well as Indian writers in English have tried to access the other women’s voices, particularly those from the epics of India, to counter the generalisation of women as passive victims of patriarchal oppression and to establish them as active agents in socio-political struggles. The Malayalee writer Sarah Joseph’s fictions have also given voice to the ‘outsider’ represented by female mythical characters via the exploration of themes such as gender marginality, social invisibility, domestic abuse, and inviolability of patriarchal system in Indian society. Her writings inscribe the negotiations of Indian female subjectivity and subaltern identity within a tradition of postcolonial writings, thereby, establishing an important feminist poetics of literary and cultural representation in Indian literature. The short stories “Mother Clan” and “Black Holes” in the collection Puthu Ramayanam have mapped and explored complex transformations in the meanings of gender during Aryan colonisation demonstrating how socio-political changes can generate corresponding shifts in gender and power relations.

Articulating the histories of subaltern resistance and agency that are subtly encoded in textual and mythical sources, “Mother Clan” illustrates the way in which subalternity denotes different forms of social and political marginalization, including gender and clan oppression. The story throws new insights into the changing dynamics of gender and power in the Rakshasa community when it posits the indigenous Rakshasa laws and traditions against an aggressive Aryan colonial modernity. At a major thematic level, it locates the beginning of women’s subordination in the Dravidian matriarchal community by a new interpretation of marriage that separated the old fluid concept of
‘woman’, from a new and restricted definition of ‘wife’. As Soorpanakha articulates the traumatic experience of sexual mutilation inflicted on her as a punishment for her ‘uncontrollable and threatening’ sexuality, the readers can identify an equally new interpretation of the suppression of a woman’s sexuality that can nullify her ability to think, feel and imagine. Her wailing confirms this oppressive situation:

Yet, when I stood before them, my heart filled with love, my breasts full and swaying, treacherously they drew the sword. To this day no one has ever done such a deed. In my forest, no man has shown such cruelty to any woman. Filled with passion, if a woman approaches a man and he is unable to fulfil her desire, he should speak to her as he would to a sister and show her another direction. King Ravan had never lifted his sword to turn a woman’s body into a barren land. No one in my clan has posed as a hero after destroying a woman’s shape and form. (Joseph, 2005:118)

Hence, ‘sex’ and ‘race’ are not separate discourses in the story but imbricated ones, in which an aboriginal woman’s sexuality is perceived as a constant threat to Aryan society.

Soorpanakha’s story opens in medias res with her proclamation “Claws that spread like sieves must be shaped and sharpened. Eyes as soft as flowers must be scratched and slit. Cheeks fluffed like fresh butter must be pierced and torn”- a statement which gives the whole text a tone of revenge and impending tragedy. Grief motivates a flood of personal memories, as she begins to remember intimate details of her passionate life in the forest that had been prematurely curtailed by her sexual mutilation. It is interesting to consider how the figure of Soorpanakha transcends social marginality when she embarks on a solitary journey in her love-forest redefining her subaltern subjectivity. Her monologues in the forest further testify to the reinscription of a female Dalit subjectivity within a politics of exclusion that calls for radical re-evaluations of Ramayana and its patriarchal and elitist baselines. The alternative subjectivity of Soorpanakha made visible through her passionate sensibilities, her spirit of independence and her ability to do hard labour flows in the face of the expected patterns of Dalit female obsequiousness. Yet, this short fiction continues to illustrate
how the violence of colonisation is often brutally inscribed on the material body of subaltern women. More urgently, the story “Mother Clan” contrasts the monstrous Surpaneka myth in Ramayana with the pathetic description of a mother’s chopped off breasts which were the ‘roots’ of her clan and blood and have fed ‘three or four generations’, thus embodying the specific material ‘oppression of the gendered subaltern’ (Spivak, 1987: 267).

While Soorpanakha’s monologues stress the social, political and cultural marginalisation of her clan by the Aryan invasion, it also makes clear the traditional world-view of an ethnic community through a form of storytelling that the critiques have described as an alternative epic, “Sarayanangal”. The use of an aborigine’s language and storytelling mode privileges Soorpanakha’s point of view as an adivasi woman and the perspective of the community she represents. Furthermore, the chronological order of the character’s life experiences is constantly interrupted, fragmented, or anticipated in the narrative making her story not one single text, but consisting of many texts overlapping one another. Her privilege of using ‘tribal Malayalam’, which no political coercion obliges an educated Malayalee to know, could be seen as a sign of textual enigma, whose agency lies in the refusal to confess her meaning and story completely to the reader of elite scholarship. In many instances her questions such as “Who are these people walking in Dandaka forest, carrying weapons?.... In our Dandaka forest, that does not foster war and revenge, who walks around, their bodies covered with weapons?” effectively reverse the subject positions of the conqueror and the conquered, and so work to challenge the authority of the ruling elite (Joseph,2005:119). Therefore, one can trace the linguistic and rhetorical nuances in the text where the tribal subaltern woman articulates an embodied knowledge that cannot be accounted for in the dominant terms of Aryan knowledge and representation.

Ultimately, the roaring laughter of Soorpanakha traverses the timelines of Subaltern women’s history establishing their subjectivity as creative and politicized reinvention of Dalit womanhood by negotiating gender liminality, even within models of Aryan colonial documentation. This unexpected laughter juxtaposes the inexorable surge of traumatic and messy memories of a Subaltern woman which cannot be entirely
dispelled or wholly assimilated by any mainstream discourse. It is cluttered with inchoate signifiers that resonate with interconnected discourses of racialised sexuality, even in an endlessly reframed picture of postcolonial feminism.

The story “Black Holes” deals with Manthara’s escapade from Ayodhya on the night of Rama’s coronation. One of the main characters of the *Ramayana* story, Manthara who was considered as a spy and scandal-monger, has been re-invocated here as a typical subaltern and a victim of power and intrigue. All the same, even though the battle for female individualism in the story plays itself out in the larger project of patriarchal governance and social control as both Manthara and Kaikeyi become figures produced by the axiomatic of patriarchal aristocratic power, Manthara realizes Ayodhya as a stage set for a game of power. Thus there are moments in the story that reinterpret the mythical representation of Manthara and Kaikeyi who were framed in the terms and interests of the ruling power, or dominant social class. In the historical archives of the Aryan colonisation the lives and political agencies of such women were subordinated to the material ambitions of men. Through Manthara, the hunch-backed dalit woman, Sara Joseph problematizes a representativity that can touch both the Dalitness and femininity of a marginalised subaltern woman. Indeed, Manthara offers elements of an assessment or reassessment of the legacy of colonization from a feminist perspective. The fate of Manthara in the story resonates against this background:

Avoiding the light and the guardian spirits of light, the old woman walked, stooping, keeping close to the stables. At the slightest movement, the wounds on her body opened their mouths. The swift and cutting wind rubbed chilli powder to them. The heat creeping down from her forehead to her eyes was the warmth of blood. The old woman spat blood-salt contemptuously. Manthara had not chosen to be a spy to back off every time she saw blood. (Joseph, 2005:97)

It soon emerges that the central theme of the story is the cultural isolation and marginalisation of a Dalit woman in Ayodhya and her encounter with various social, political and psychological constraints.
In the story, the first-person narrator Manthara articulates the traumatic experience of caste discrimination from the standpoint of a Dalit woman and, in this respect, the work is an example of the testimonial genre because it draws on personal suffering to convey the shared historical experiences of oppression. Having no control over her life and her body, she essentially fails to attain any sense of dignity and autonomy. Manthara presumes that her exodus from Ayodhya will remove all forms of inequity and oppression and create a more just social and economic order for her and her family. She realizes that power politics of Ayodhya operated very differently for women and for men, when women like herself and Kaikeyi were subject both to gender discrimination and specific caste oppression. Women lived in Ayodhya with distinctions of social hierarchy as well as distinctions inherited from, or recast by Aryan colonialism, including not just ethnic distinctions but also those between male and female and young and old. Dasaratha, Aswapathi and the ascetic Vasishta were not free from this kind of gender bias, and the constructions of the traditional laws were heavily inflected by a masculinist bias that falsely represented ‘native’ women to be quiet and subordinate. Although Manthara was not directly used as part of a transgressive sexuality, she was frequently the site of a power discourse of a different kind.

In these stories, Sara Joseph, by making her protagonists narrate their own stories endow them with not only the capacity to tell stories but also invest them with the power to interpret and shape their realities. For instance, Manthara pities Bharatha who ventured to kill his mother:

Didn't anyone teach him the saying, ‘Mother is equal to God?’ The sword that he raised against his mother must be piercing his own throat now. A world of fathers ordering their sons to raise their axes and swords against their mothers’ necks to preserve power! Ho! (Joseph, 2005:101).

The same holds true for Manthara’s treatment of the coronation, or more precisely the conspiracy to which it has given rise, scenes that at moments, appear unchallengeable and unchangeable. This issue starts to come into focus when she describes how Dasarathan, Aswapathi and Vasishtan, having manipulated all the scenes, return at the earliest
opportunity to the work of grabbing power with their pretentious faces. When she says “All figures of clay made in the same mould”, she feels an ironic distance and contempt for a superannuated power-packed discourse that has become ossified and sanctified.

The bathos of the last section of the story that echoes a queen’s mourning and a maid’s brilliant escapade points to the gulf between heroic decisions of a subaltern woman and the sometimes banal royal lineage to which it has been compared. This image serves to challenge and recast those commonplace conceptions about Dalit women that concomitantly counters Manthara’s misrepresented agency and constrained or disguised identity in the Aryan version of the myth. It also says something about Manthara’s perceptions of Ayodhya and its rulers, about her own self, about her limited role for manoeuvre within a given cultural text and particular tradition and also about the possibilities of expressing agency and individuality in the forms available to her.

Sara Joseph’s use of the Ramayana stories serves to show that as cultural artefacts, they are not reducible to the contexts from which they emerged and in relation to which they are understood. Thus discussing various themes as cultural identities, status of minorities and women’s relations to the complexities of Aryan colonisation, these stories point to the ways in which history mediates the relation of the realistic to the real, thereby revealing the ideological thrusts in vague characters, scenarios and narratives.

**Works Cited**


Nadine Gordimer’s Novels as Apartheid Chronicles

Dr. P. Nagaraj & Miss. Anupama A.

In Afrikaans the term “apartheid” means ‘apartness’. This system of racial segregation brought by the Afrikaner National Party in 1948 was the culmination of the intense political situation experienced by South Africa for the last few centuries. The blacks were cornered into “homelands” and left without a choice other than living in their own country like foreigners. Those who did not own a passport were deprived of even the limited liberty to enter the white inhabited area. When the world politics grew sophisticated in the second half of the twentieth century, the persisting savagery in South Africa caught world’s attention.

Among the revolutionary writers of the apartheid, Nadine Gordimer has produced an oeuvre that is considered as a historical record. Her literary career runs parallel to the apartheid and post apartheid era and she has nothing to transmit to the world other than the traumatic experiences of individuals under the regime. It is in this aspect that she differs and elevates herself from the traditional historians. Hers is not a cold account of the sequence of events of history. She lived right within the society traumatized by the system, resisting the intimidation of the authorities when other writers sought the safety of exile. She considered herself as a plant conditioned to live in the South African soil (Cook 533).

Gordimer is a self-acknowledged Communist but her works cannot be labeled as purely political. Political discourses appear very rarely except in Burger’s Daughter. Her focus is on how people’s lives and their very personalities are influenced and moulded by the extreme political circumstances. She chose the territory where the public and the private merged, and witnessed individuals of flesh and blood executing wild experiments to cop up as well as to liberate themselves.

In 1950s, from the very beginning of apartheid regime, a new idea of multi-racialism surfaced resulting in a social and political opposition
to apartheid. A awareness that the blacks and the whites live under the same sky but remain strangers to one other and that it can be countered effectively only through a cross-racial front ended in the creation of her novel *The World of Strangers*. The demise of this new idea in 1960s is reflected in *An Occasion for Loving*. The 1970s again brought a transition from silence to sabotage on a large scale as expressed by Gordimer through *The Late Bourgeois World*. The Black Consciousness resulting in Soweto Uprising in 1976 and its aftermaths provided her with enough material to produce one of her classics, *Burger’s Daughter*. *July’s People* predicts a bloody revolution bringing an absolute reversal of the social condition presenting blacks in power and the whites subdued. The prediction does not materialize but a comparatively peaceful democratic revolution puts an end to the apartheid in 1994. *None to Accompany Me* is the personalized historical account of the time of transition. The politics and the problems did not end with apartheid. *The House Gun* portrays the aftermaths of the political transition through the eyes of individuals resisting and coping with the new reality.

Each of Gordimer’s novels updates the major events of the period it belongs to, both in history and literature. “We must write for our own time”, says Jean Paul Sartre in his essay titled ‘We Write for Our Own Time’(151). What he meant is not mere passive reflection of the contemporary events but a writing with a will to change or maintain the situation keeping a perspective of the future(151). Gordimer’s fiction reflected the contemporary reality. She does not suggest any solution to the dark reality presented in her works. She rather presents the intense situations and leaves the questions to be answered by the reader. During an interview with Hermione Lee, Gordimer expresses her worries regarding those writers who write about the past. She finds the post-apartheid present so interesting that there is no need for anyone to cling to the apartheid past(5). The writer and critic in her are still kept alert and alive by the strange events in the half-formed society she lives in.

The history that evolves through Gordimer’s novels can never be considered holistic. Closeness brings vividness but too much closeness often results in blindness especially in certain aspects that emerge with completion only when it is viewed from a distance. Her being part of
the system and their pattern is a factor that in a way prevents her from producing a panoramic view. According to Clingman; she is both an “observer” and a “participant”, and it is a privilege as well as a confinement(2). Being a white middle class woman the black experience is alien to her. With the help of her liberal humanism, she can only assume how it feels to be a black woman living in filthy shanties, doubly oppressed by the whites as well as the black men. The focus on the white class in a good number of her novels proves it. Her political orientation towards Communism leads to an absence of objectivity in her observations. She is thus limited by her historical position as a white and a Communist.

But a closer analysis proves that she is able to wade through her limitations to a great extent. She says, “…in the writing I am acting upon my society and in the manner of my apprehension, all the time history is acting upon me” (qtd. in Clingman 13). Her ideology never remains solidified; it develops, and is modified by the past and the present. The continuous self-assessment and reassessment in connection with the current events help her to cross class, colour, and political boundaries. Non-white characters find a place in the mainstream of her later novels. Her own association with the Communist movement does not seem to hinder her from unleashing severe criticism of it. In *Burger’s Daughter* and *None to Accompany Me* the reader finds Communists failing to provide humanistic concern to the people among themselves. *Burger’s Daughter* projects the pathetic picture of the children of Communists victimized for their parents’ political agenda. *None to Accompany Me* reveals how the party has to adopt inhuman methods to deal with the moles inside the movement. She also observes comrades who were once an integral part of the movement being marginalized in the new power politics inside the party. Even the communists who eventually adopt bourgeois mentality do not escape from Gordimer’s severe criticism. *The Pick Up* is written in the new era of equality and is the least political. The communists of the past who has now given up politics to turn to business and other ways of bourgeois existence are carefully placed in the peripheries of the plot.

Nadine Gordimer Weilds her pen to penetrate into the intense socio-political issues of her country. Her oeuvre brings out a
personalized history of apartheid by assessing the turmoil it created in the lives of individuals. The end of apartheid do put an end of her writing as the apartheid aftermaths continue to prevail. Her attempts to break through the limitations to attain objectivity in her assessments are never ignored by the critics.

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The Way of Salvation: Paulo Coelho’s *The Devil and Miss Prym*

Jeena Ann Joseph

“The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back. A week is more than enough time for us to decide whether or not to accept our destiny” (*TDMP* x).

The Brazilian novelist, Paulo Coelho was a nonconformist, a seeker after the new, who salvaged faith from the horrors of his own life. Religion has always been a part of Coelho’s fiction as he combines the fictional and the spiritual, and this accounts for his worldwide success. Born in 1947 in Rio de Janeiro, Coelho grew up in a deeply religious household and was educated by the Jesuits. He detested the obligatory nature of religious practices and avoided praying and going to mass. Coelho’s own turning point came when he made a pilgrimage along the Road to Santiago, an ancient Spanish route still walked by many. It was an important rite of passage and the theme of spiritual journey is central to his works. Coelho says: “I think my spirituality came from curiosity and, later, by understanding there is a silent presence around myself and I don’t try to explain it but I try to live my faith according to the things I believe” (Interview, *Sunday Times Lifestyle*). Coelho, a practicing Catholic, embraces all religions, and for him each and every religion, if chosen with sincerity, leads to the same God. His ability to go beyond any one dogma or belief system earned him an appointment as a special adviser to the UNESCO programme on spiritual convergences and intercultural dialogues.

Coelho’s books are undoubtedly aphoristic — autobiographical novels written to edify its readers. The use of simple and direct language makes it more appealing to the common people. The specialty lies in the story like form of his narratives and his narrative simplicity close to the universal language of fairytales and myths accounts for his international success.
Though he writes in Portuguese, his prose lends to easy translation and this has made him a bestseller in almost all the countries. He observes:

My idea is to share the symbolic language of human kind – like angels and devils, dark forests, high mountains and wolves, gold and buried treasure. For this I have to have a story – a fable – because then you can read it at different levels at different times and it will touch another part of your soul...it is something very primeval in our soul. There is a part of everyone, whatever their cultural background – that connects with symbols. (qtd. in Interview, The Independent on Sunday)

This defends the parable-like story form of Coelho's books. This is precisely the method used by Jesus, the son of God Himself to spread his message to save humanity. Coelho's novels transmit strong life messages into magical stories that fill his readers with light, especially, The Devil and Miss Prym, the third and final book of the trilogy And on the Seventh Day.

The very act of creation took place within seven days; similarly Coelho proclaims that the profoundest changes take place within a very short time frame. As he invites the readers to make a deep introspection about life and its purpose, he sprinkles religious insights on it. Though he makes no distinction among religions, his catholic inclinations are very much visible in the texts. It is not because Catholicism is the best religion, but a religion close to his heart. He felt he needed something more than atheism in his life and he chose Catholicism as a way of communing with the mystery. Each and every book can be given a religious outlook; He seems to evolve a unique genre by combining the religious, fictional and revitalizing elements together.

The Devil and Miss Prym throws light on the innate nature of human beings; in fact it deals with the question: Are human beings essentially good or evil? Coelho directly refers to the story of Adam and Eve which demonstrates man as an instrument of evil.

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom He had formed…

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

The disobedience of God by Adam and Eve initiated man into the struggle between Good and Evil. Finding Eve alone, Satan took advantage of the opportunity and tempted her. In the shape of the serpent Satan approaches Eve and convinces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Thereafter the human race has been condemned to exist within the eternal division of Good and Evil. Coelho tries to tackle this everlasting question. The very same temptation scene is recreated in *The Devil and Miss Prym* as the stranger puts forward his various options before Chantal. He wants to prove that given the right circumstances, every human being on this earth would be willing to commit evil. He wanted to see whether he could make the people of Viscos break a few of the Ten Commandments. He had come to the village with eleven gold bars, each weighing two kilos which he hid in the forest. He shows the gold to the lonely barmaid, the only young person left in the village, and asks her to pass on this message to the other inhabitants of Viscos. He offers one gold bar to Chantal but the irony is that she has to steal it thereby breaking the commandment “Thou shalt not steal”. And he offers the remaining ten gold bars to the villagers if they will break the commandment “Thou shalt not kill”. He wants the villagers to commit a murder within one week to prove his theory about the nature of human beings. Thereby the stranger tempts Viscos to break the Ten Commandments. This again parallels the temptation of Jesus by the devil for forty days.

The Devil said to him, “If you are God’s Son, order this stone to turn into bread.”

Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Man cannot live on bread alone.’”
Then the devil took him up and showed him in a second all the
kingdoms of the world. “I will give you all this power, and all this
wealth,” the Devil told him. “It was all handed over to me and
I can give it to anyone I choose. All this will be yours, then, if
you kneel down before me.”

Jesus answered, “The scripture says, ‘Worship the Lord your God
and serve only him!’” (Luke 4.1-8)

The presence of good angels and bad angels trying to win over
the souls of the characters are again based on Christian beliefs. The
inner conflicts of most of the characters, especially Chantal’s and the
stranger’s are portrayed as being controlled by the angels and devils.
For example as they argue on the justness of God, the devils of these
caracters senses danger as the angels begin to shine with intensity.

The man’s devil noticed that her angel was beginning to shine with
greater intensity, and everything was beginning to be turned inside
out.

‘Resist!’ he said to the other demon.

‘I am resisting,’ he replied. But it’s an uphill struggle…

‘Do something,’ said Chantal’s devil to his colleague. ‘Even though
she’s saying no, her soul understands and is saying yes.’

The stranger’s devil was feeling humiliated because the new arrival
had noticed that he wasn’t strong enough to get the man to shut
up.

‘Words don’t matter in the end,’ the devil said. ‘Let them talk, and
life will see to it that they act differently.’ (TDMP 121-2)

It is very common with people that they tend to find fault with
God when they are disappointed in life. Coelho pacifies us stating what
a German philosopher has said: “Man needs what’s worst in him in order
to achieve what’s best in him” (TDMP 120). We sometimes think of God
as our enemy for putting us through everything we have suffered. And
that is why the stranger thought solely in terms of revenge. Even Chantal
thinks why the stranger chose her, and her village? Just like the stranger and Chantal, we always think, why does this happen to me? But Coelho conveys that this has nothing to do with God’s justice; the problem is that we always choose to be a victim of circumstances. Coelho appears to “justify the ways of God to men” as he heralds a life of hope and faith (Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book 1: 22).

The priest in *The Devil and Miss Prym* plays a crucial role in conveying that Evil has to manifest itself so that Good could prevail. If there was no betrayal, there could be no cross; the words of the scriptures would not be fulfilled. The priest was transferred to Viscos by the new bishop who envied his growing popularity. But he had made a vow to serve God set off to Viscos full of humility. Despite his efforts he did not succeed in bringing any new believers into the church even after several years. The village was haunted by the teachings of Ahab. He even thought that if he had left priesthood at the right moment, he could have served God better. One day, out of despair he opened the Bible at random, searching for an answer to his desperate situation. He came across the passage regarding the Last Supper where Christ tells the traitor to hand him over to the Roman soldiers. He thought, why did Jesus ask the traitor to commit a sin? That was just a means for the Evil to manifest itself and fulfill its role, so that Good could prevail. It was when Miss Prym spoke about the wager he realized that his prayers had been answered. It was or the first time since the priest had come to the parish of Viscos, he had seen the church overflowing with people.

Just as Judas, after betraying Jesus understood what he had done, the villagers would also take refuge in the church out of remorse, thought the Priest. For that he decided to become the instrument of evil and he convinced the villagers to sacrifice Berta to save the whole of Viscos. He kept on repeating to the villagers that the only thing he knew well was his religion in which the sacrifice of one individual (Jesus) saved all humanity. The priest, during his sermon steered the minds of the people to sacrifice one individual for as the Gospel says: “*None is good, save one, that is, God*” (*TDMP* 126). To convince the people more, he narrates the beginning of one of the sacred books that together comprise the Bible, the Book of Job (Old Testament). God punishes Job,
the man who loved Him the most. After great suffering Job rebels against God and, only then God restores him to prosperity. The priest suggests that the lifeless condition of Viscos might be a kind of divine punishment for their stoic acceptance of everything that happened. So he says that, like Job, God might be requiring them to rebel against Him. God might be punishing them for committing the sin of pride in believing themselves to be better than they were. The priest advises them to stop pretending to be good and accept their faults. Thus indirectly he made sure that they understood his stand in the wager.

The basic question discussed in the Book of Job is: why do the righteous suffer if God is loving and all powerful? Suffering itself is not the central theme rather the focus is on what Job learns from his suffering. The Book of Job concerns the transforming crisis in the life of a great man who lived perhaps four thousand years ago. Job’s trust in God changes to complaining and growing self-righteousness but his repentance leads to his restoration. The trials bring about an important transformation. The Book of Job comprises into three parts: the dilemma of Job, the debates of Job and, the deliverance of Job. Job is not a logical candidate for disaster because of his moral integrity and selfless service to God. Behind the scene, Satan charges that no one loves God from pure motives, but only for material blessings. To refute Satan’s comprises three parts accusations, God allows him to strike Job with two series of assaults. In his sorrow Job laments the day of his birth but does not deny God. Although Job’s comforters reach wrong conclusions, they mourn with him in seven days of silent sympathy. However, after Job breaks the silence, a three round debate follows in which his friends say that he must be suffering because of his sin. He first accuses his friends of judging him, and later appeals to the Lord as his judge and refuge. Job makes three complaints: that God does not hear him, God is punishing him and, God allows the wicked to prosper. The oversimplified solutions offered by Job’s three friends are simply inadequate. Elihu’s claim that God can use suffering to purify the righteous is closer to the mark. Elihu tells that Job needs to humble himself before God and submit to God’s process of purifying his life through trials. Later God Himself speaks to Job and reveals his power and wisdom as Creator and Preserver of the world. Job accepts his
mistake with a repentant heart and when he acknowledges God’s sovereignty over his life; his worldly goods are restored twofold. Thus Satan’s challenge becomes God’s opportunity to build up Job’s life. Similarly in *The Devil and Miss Prym* the stranger’s challenge helps Chantal to build up her life since the stranger offers her the entire treasure in the end. She overcomes her inner conflicts and leaves Viscos to fulfill her dreams. The most important experiences take place in a very short period although sometimes we need time to understand this. But the outcome is decided within this short time span. “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11).

In order to show that good and evil have the same face, the stranger in *The Devil and Miss Prym* narrates the story regarding the picture of the Last Supper painted by Leonardo da Vinci. The story reveals that the model used by da Vinci for both the faces – to depict good in the person of Jesus and to depict evil in the figure of Judas – was the same. Once when he was listening to a choir he saw in one of the boys the perfect image of Christ and invited him to his studio and made sketches and studies of his face. Three years later he came across a prematurely aged youth, in rags lying in the gutter. The beggar was taken to his studio and Leonardo da Vinci copied the lines of impiety, sin and egotism so clearly etched on his features. But when the beggar sobered up he claimed to have seen the picture before. He said that three years ago when his life was full of dreams, the artist had asked him to model for the face of Jesus. Coelho conveys: “Good and Evil have the same face; it all depends on when they cross the path of each individual human being” (*TDMP* 37).

As we have seen, the very old question of good and evil is brought into focus in *The Devil and Miss Prym*. The eternal fight between the angels and devils for the soul of mankind is put into the form of an intriguing allegorical story. Here, Chantal and the stranger are Coelho’s tools in making people aware that Good and Evil exists in all of us. It is all a matter of control and choice. Besides, for Coelho, knowing the “self” is significant in fulfilling one’s destiny and in illustrating this “way to salvation”. Coelho fuses the spiritual and the fictional.
angels, devils and a whole lot of references to the Bible make it more religious in content.

Just as we have problems in our physical lives we also experience problems in our spiritual lives. Facing and conquering difficulties cause us to grow and be strengthened, whether those problems are physical or spiritual. Some of the problems that we face are sin, temptation, suffering, and doubt. The dismissal of doubt and strengthening of faith are best accomplished by reading and understanding the word of God. Nikos Kazantzakis once in his letter to a friend wrote: “‘What is the right path?’ an Indian proverb asks. ‘The path of God’. ‘And what is the path of God?’ ‘The uphill path!’ Humanity will once again take the uphill path, like Sisyphus” (qtd. in Owens). Coelho too believes in an “uphill path” which will lead posterity beyond nihilism and despair. So Coelho imparts a religious design to his fictional works thereby assisting his readers in strengthening themselves. He reminds them to keep in contact with God, realizing that they need added insight to see the road up ahead. For “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:15).

Abbreviations used: TDMP for The Devil and Miss Prym

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Man’s Rejection of Violence and Acceptance of Love as a Unifying Phenomenon in Christopher Fry’s Thor, With Angels

Dr. T. Sasikanth Reddy

Christopher Fry is a great playwright and a revivalist of poetic-drama. He has been an enigma to his critics. He was applauded as a ‘word-smith’; a ‘word-juggler’; a ‘word-fancier’; a ‘poetaster’; a ‘relishing rhetorician’; and a ‘varnisher of our language’. He has made great contribution to the poetic drama of the present century by inventing ‘Comedies of Mood’, ‘The Theatre of Words’, and ‘Seasonal Comedies’. J.C. Trewin speaks with undisguised appreciation, “He is a dramatist who writes in free verse and who has the most abundant flow of epithets and images in the modern theatre.” (Drama 1951, 26)

He wrote religious plays, seasonal comedies, tragedy and history plays. Despite such varied production, his works display a remarkable unity of the themes: ‘exploration into God’, and ‘exploration into the mystery of life and death.’

Fry is a playwright with a philosophical bent of mind. He achieved harmony by blending the poetic and the realistic to provide aesthetic delight and emotional gratification. He attached considerable importance to the practice of Christian qualities, on account of his intimate knowledge and association with Quakerism and the corresponding philosophy of life. Denis Donoghue has rightly observed that, “he saw a world in which we are all poised on the edge of eternity, a world which has deep shadows of mystery in which God is anything but a sleeping partner.” (The Third Voice, 1959, 181)

Fry offered mystery instead of a deterministic universe and verse instead of the naturalistic language of the stage. He had asserted the claims of diminutive man’s freedom to think and will on his own without worrying about predestination. (Experimental Drama 1963, p 61)

Fry’s drama is inseparable from God and His creation. It fuses drama, poetry, religion, faith and philosophy together. Laughter and
tears, Man and God, Mystery and Revelation, this-worldliness and other-worldliness go hand in hand in his plays. He enables us to discover a correspondence between appearance and reality. The quests for love and death in Fry are intertwined ambivalently, taking apparently contrasting forms which complement one another. All of Fry’s plays approach a potentially tragic crisis near the end, a point of ritual death. Considering Fry’s greatness and success as a dramatist, Derek Stanford quoted. “In a universe often viewed as mechanistic, he has posited the principle of mystery; in an age of necessitarian ethics, he has stood unequivocally for ideas of free-will.” (Christopher Fry, 1971, 5)

Thor, with Angels, presented in June at the Canterbury Festival play of 1948, is set in a Jutish farmstead, A.D. 596. In this play Fry is at pains to express his dissatisfaction with Christianity that is merely institutional, impersonal, and nominal. The play is about the confrontation between Christianity and Germanic paganism at the time of the mission of St. Augustine to England in A.D. 596. Fry takes as his subject the early history of Canterbury, at the point in A.D. 596 when St. Augustine arrives from Rome to reconvert Britain to Christianity. The play shows how this affects a pagan Jutish household in Kent. Thor, with Angels is still one more attempt by Fry to deal with the problem of how Christianity, now the half-forgotten faith of an embattled minority, is to be restored to a dominant spiritual position in society. Just as in The Firstborn, the death of an innocent young man fully enlightens the protagonist Cymen. A defeated warrior who is opposed by a muttering clan, he is at war within himself, attempting to reconcile his deepest instincts toward death with love of his fellow man.

Fry has succeeded in introducing the Christian teaching in a more organic manner in this play. It is actively concerned with specific Christian virtues: with mercy and the value of sacrifice, understood in the light of Christ’s example. Thor, with Angels also marks an advance on pantheism and the idea of what we may perhaps term an evolutionary universe. The play reveals the conversion of Cymen, the heathen-chieftain to Christianity, showing the triumph of Christianity and the conception of the One God over the pagan deities, Woden,
Loki, Thor and Valhalla. It is a mature play which presents forcefully between primitive vengeance and Christian mercy. Gerald Weales was moved to argue, “the play’s chief defect is that the death of Hoel is so completely symbolical that the audience is not given time to feel any regret for the destruction of an embryonically likable character, the death is metamorphosed too quickly into a text for Cymen’s last speech”. (Religion in Modern English Drama, 1961, 214) Fry had inclined his efforts at the recognition of the new values in life, experienced through Cymen. In Thor, with Angels, Fry’s ultimate objective is concerned with man’s rejection of violence and acceptance of love as a unifying phenomenon. The contrast between the advent of Christianity which extols love and subjugation of the Pagan Gods, who represent violence and death, forms the core idea of the play. In Fry’s organisation of the play, God’s work within the heart is of primary importance, the human response to the work within the heart is of secondary importance, and preaching is of tertiary importance. Fry shows God working in human hearts independently from preaching.

The anxious household of Cymen prepares itself for the glorious homecoming of its pagan war – heroes in an exalted mood, celebrating the success of their violence perpetrated in wars, attributing them to the consanguineous victories of Thor, Woden, Valhalla, Loki and so on. They are seen accompanying a Briton as a prisoner of war – a young mercenary of the Saxons called Hoel. The former are rough Jutish adventurers, who have settled themselves by conquest in Kent, and divide their time between farming and marauding.

Cymen is the one, who experiences the ‘staggering light’ that broke his sword and prevented the catastrophe of inevitable death, which is to be meted out to Hoel, the Briton.

For his past Cymen is brusque, affectionate and witty, desperately trying to cover a confused anxiety with an exaggerated camaraderie. He wants to keep Hoel alive to find out what force is sapping his will, dissipating his strength into meditation. Curious to learn of the mysterious forces which averted Hoel’s inevitable death, Cymen enquires: ‘you can tell me’,
What flogged away my strength,
What furtive power in your possession
Pulled the passion of my sword? Name that devil!
I'll have our gods harry him through the gaps
Between the stars, to where not even fiends
Can feed. Name him (111)

To Cymen, there is an increasing tendency to imbibe Christian affinities and affiliations through his attempt to torture Hoel. In a mood of hilarity he throws Hoel to the ground and puts his foot on him. Cymen's cup falls from his hand and he stands trembling. Everyone including Cymen himself stands is flabbergasted at this amazing turn of events. He can find no suitable or plausible explanation either to himself or for the benefit of resolving this mysterious transformation he is undergoing to the others. Blinded in frustrated rage, he raises his sword making a bid to kill Hoel, but by a queer quirk of destiny finds it deflected and pointing square at the breast of his own elder son, Quichelm, who shrieks in absolute mortification. All the others are dumbstruck at this moment, which elicits a helpless, hapless cry of despair. In a trance, Cymen mumbles apologetically, more to himself:

All one, it seems at one. There's no distinction
Which is my son? (115)

The overpowering thrust of the increasing Christian faith which is settling in Cymen's mind seems to register this enormity of truth, where absolute faith has no distinction. When his wife and others pursue him to retire to take rest, he accedes, but strictly warning them not to dare anything against the Briton. Handing over Hoel to Colgrin, Cymen retires uneasily to bed. After they depart, Fry provides a brief conversation between Colgrin and Hoel in which Hoel narrates his life. He is content to be still alive after two near grazes with death. He thanks his stars, and he heaves with a sigh of relief. He lapses into a mood of recalcitrant disposition expressing his disillusionment and vexation for life. Meanwhile, Cymen's daughter, Martina enters the barn and a lengthy discussion on the subject of religious inclinations as Martina ensues between her and Hoel. Unable to suppress her curiosity, as
Martina enquires Hoel about his Gods, he answers that he only knows that there is only 'One God'. He exclaims,

When I was a boy I was only
Allowed to have one, though in that One, they said,
There were three. But the altars are broken up. I’ve tried
To pick away the moss to read the inscriptions
But I’ve almost forgotten our language. I only know
The God was both father and son and a brooding dove. (117)

According to Christianity though God is one, they are three, actually Holy Spirit, Father and Son. This inclination is found in the above passage.

In this play Fry has denoted the degeneration and depravity, which presupposes an occasional broad reminder of the lofty purpose for reaffirming faith in Christianity. The tragicomic effect of *Thor, with Angels* is derived more fully on the basis of symmetrical and striking contrasts, in the gradual humane enlightenment of Cymen, weighed against the wrong-headed and superstitious relatives claiming normally. Fry has achieved a marvelous distinction in the character portrayal of Merlin. His message is a rankling reminder of an apocalyptic visionary. In fact like a teacher Merlin demonstrates the mystical consciousness of God.

Who, apart
From ourselves, can see any difference between
Our victories and our defeats, dear sir?
Not beast, nor bird, nor even the anticipating
Vulture watching for the battle’s end,
Nor a single mile of devoted dispassionate ground.
All indifferent. (127)

Hence, the title *Thor, with Angels* signifies Cymen moving firmly and confidently on the path of Christian faith. Cymen decides to proceed and he informs Hoel,
Your God has come, perhaps,
Or lies in wait on the lips of a man from Rome. (p. 140 - 141)

These words spoken by Cymene reveal that he is undergoing a change in himself mysteriously, and is leaving towards Christianity with absolute faith in ‘The One God’.

There is a very mellifluous sermon sustained as a dream by Merlin, that life is a variety of dreams; death a single dream, a simplification, but continuous with life. Beyond the dreams of life and the dream of death is the awakening into God’s morning. Life as dream, death as waking figures a platonic afterlife; as reality, death as dream, figures a secular view. In Fry’s view both life and death are dreams, from which one awakens to a physical reality in God’s morning. Fry affirms the resurrection of the body.

Merlin turns to the metaphor of evolution, redefined in Christian terms: humankind must grow into the reality, God prepares for it. Merlin introduces the evolution idea by imaging he is a squirrel looking at himself in the nutmeat he is about to eat, as in a mirror:

And above the shapes of life, the shape
Of death, the singular shape of the dream dissolving
Into which all obediently come
Beyond the dreams of life and the dream of death
Is the awakening into God’s morning. (14)

Whatever God reveals, human kind must still discover and articulate; whatever human kind discovers and articulates, God has already revealed. God’s word is incomprehensible except when it coincides with the human word. Death in this play reflects the sacrifice of the crucifixion. Hoel is tied to a tree, as on a crucifix, to be speared by Tadfrid, Osmer, Cheldric and Quichelm. The death of Hoel signifies acceptance of God’s will, a hope of life after death. Coming back from Augustine’s Sermon, Cymen knows that all the necessary violence of the world has been borne by Christ in the crucifixion. Since the changes in Cymen occurred by God’s direct working within his heart and not by rhetorical eloquence, Cymen remains Christian and non-violent even
after he discovers the crucifixion of Hoel. Cymen’s confrontation with Hole’s crucifixion prompts him to discover what Merlin has been saying all along, though never to Cymen: God turned Christ’s crucifixion to the redemption of the world and he can also turn Hoel’s crucifixion to good. Cymen’s hatred of violence within himself and others, and his simultaneous love of others, even though they may be self-righteousness – is an early good result of Hoel’s murder. Cymen’s openness is evident in the refrain which Cymen first states immediately after his return, and which he repeats after he knows Hoel was crucified, and repeats again to end the play with a benediction: ‘… lonely flesh be welcome to creation’:

.... We are afraid
To live by rule of God, which is forgiveness
Mercy and compassion, fearing that by these
We shall be ended. And yet if we could bear
These three through dread and terror and terror’s doubt,
Daring to return good for evil without thought
Of what will come, I cannot think
We should be the losers. Do we believe
There is no strength in good or power in God?
God give us courage to exist in God,
And lonely flesh be welcome to creation. (153 - 154)

Thus, the play finally stresses the power of good in the world. At the end of the play faith and sacrifice have come together. In this play Fry is not interested simply in establishing the superiority of Christianity over paganism. He is obviously trying to show how man’s religious ideas change through experience of life. It is undoubtedly written with deeply felt convictions and impressions which disclose a healthy optimistic view of life by exercising faith and belief, maintaining equanimity of temperament. Richard Findlater discovers, “Thor, with Angels .... Illustrates the Christian background to Mr. Fry’s comedy and the contemporary relevance of his mock-Jutes in fancy dress. These plays are not the prettified pious pastorals that some critics would have us believe, the by-blows of an anestheticised religion on its last legs.”
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Semiotic/ Symbolic in Anna:  
A Psychoanalytic Critique of *Mister God, this is Anna*  

Nithya Mariam John

“Mister God goes right through my middle and I go right through Mister God's middle”  
- Anna in *Mister God, this is Anna*.

*Mister God, this is Anna* by Fynn is aptly given the sub-title: “The true story of a very special friendship....” Anna was barely four years old when Fynn found her on the London’s fog-shrouded docks. He took her to his home and that started a friendship of delight and discovery. Anna was a very special gift of God since she used to speak a lot about the mysteries of life, including God, death and war. The science of being, the ontology, was an answer, rather than a question for Anna. Fynn was often baffled by the way in which she used to talk about life’s larger questions without any hesitation. An active and buoyant child, she had mastered the realms of language, science and life in general even without any schooling. Anna had a very special friendship which was both human and divine. She loved “Mister God,” her name for the Master of the Universe and she loved Fynn, her earthly guardian. The book keeps your mind and soul hooked once you get into it.

One of the specialties of a gifted child is that she/he is self-taught. Gifted children love to philosophize and talk like an adult whenever an issue comes at hand. Psychology believes that they find issues like war, life, and death easy enough to think about. At times they may get frightened and angry that adults are so inconsistent and unreasonable, but still they try to solve the issues on their own. An adult guidance is important since an adult can guide them to be free in thinking, yet restrict them without letting them to become over-ambitious. Anna is a gifted child, a child of potentiality, who ran away from home. And the adult world she was offered was Fynn’s. The reader is thrilled by the way in which she maneuvers her adult guardian to love and respect
God. Fynn claims that it is a true story and Anna died, almost seven years old, when she fell down from a tree. The text depends on the Bible for many of its philosophical ideas, and theology is expressed through a tiny tot, Anna.

The present article tries to re-read the short narrative in the light of psychoanalytic theory of semiotic and symbolic—the maternal and the paternal. It attempts to find out the semiotic and symbolic in Anna, how fluid her thoughts and her words are, between the two psychic realms.

For Julia Kristeva, symbolic is the law of unity, the place where we get socialized and reject pleasure drives. Johanne Prudhomme and Lyne Le’garre’ in “The Subject in Process” says, “While the symbolic function governs unity, the semiotic function demonstrates the heterogeneity of meaning”. The semiotic works against symbolic, but also moves through the syntax, denotation and signification. For instance when Fynn picks up the four year old and tucks her into bed, she asks him to kneel down with her for prayer. Her prayer is simple: "Dear Mister God, this is Anna talking...Thank you for letting Fynn love me” (Mister God, this is Anna, 19). Fynn says that he was captivated by the simple language she used in order to talk to God. Here Anna has moved onto the symbolic, paternal law of recognizing the Absolute Power, an area of socialisation. But she uses a semiotic language which is fluid and maternal enough to express her gratitude to the adult kneeling down with her, for loving her.

Anna sees Mister God in the “middle” of everything and everybody. For her, God is not a fixed unity, but “heterogeneity”, as Prudhomme and Le’garre’ comment. She leads Fynn along twisting cognitive processes before she finally lets him off the hook by giving him the moral of the story that “people can only love outside and kiss outside, but Mister God can love you right inside, and Mister God can kiss you right inside, so it’s different” (Mister God, this is Anna, 44). She says, “Every person and everything that you know has got Mister God in his middle, and so you have got Mister God in your middle too” (Mister God, this is Anna, 117). He is the “middles of everything” (Mister God, this is Anna, 117). For Anna, even when she addresses the heterogeneous
divine power, she uses “Mister”. This shows the symbolic function of language, the norm and rule of socialization. Thus her inner heart tries to express the maternal and the pre-Oedipal, but she tries to grapple with the realities of the Symbolic when it comes to linguistic structures.

Fred Abraham in “Kristeva’s Semiotics” says that the Semiotic at times “overflows” the Symbolic constraints of language. The Semiotic is often relegated to the margins, since it doesn’t go hand in hand with the Symbolic. This might be the reason why when Anna tries to explode into the Symbolic realm of the ideas regarding universe as a whole, she finds it difficult to express it so that the Semiotic realms of her own are expanded so as to meet Fynn’s already established adult Symbolic world. She tries to establish her theory on death. She says “Mister God” made rest. She explains Creation in Genesis in such a manner as to make Fynn understand that when everything is in muddle, one doesn’t rest. God rested after “God had undone all the muddle” (*Mister God, this is Anna*, 221). And death is like rest. “Being dead you can look back and get it all straight, before you go on” (*Mister God, this is Anna*, 221). Here she makes Fynn go all over the muddle—issue after which she finally lets him understand what she wants to convey. Later when she explains about questions and answers, Fynn is baffled, “That’s difficult; go on a bit” (*Mister God, this is Anna*, 233). Again he says, “Search me, Tich” (*Mister God, this is Anna*, 260). It proves that Anna tries to move into the Symbolic, but is within the Semiotic where her playful ideas are at play. They criss-cross one another that Fynn stuck in the lawful, paternal, unitary Symbolic level cannot get hold of her. Semiotic fuses with Symbolic; Semiotic tries to explain to the Symbolic.

One of the reasons for Anna’s choice of such larger topics can be explained by a look into E. I. George’s essay. He says that a child’s speech patterns and topics are influenced by “health, intelligence, socio-economic factors and to a considerable extent sex, family relationships and bilingualism” (“Language Development in Young Children,” 195). Children of intellectual superiority show “maturity of speech in the content of speech” (195). He continues, “Girls talk better. Their sentences are longer, better in construction, their vocabulary is better and so also (sic) their pronunciation” (196).
Anna ran away from her home because she was a victim of abuse. Anna says, “She’s [her mother] a cow and he’s [her father] a sod. And I ain’t going to no bleeding cop-shop” (*Mister God, this is Anna*, 11). She was brought up in a battered family, but had within her a thirst for knowledge. She went into Fynn’s home and developed her inquisitive skills in the positive atmosphere. Fynn says, “...I didn’t teach Anna the Right and Proper way to do things. Oh sure, I showed her ways to do things, funny ways, quick ways, hard ways and all sorts of ways, but not the Right Way” (*Mister God, this is Anna*, 204). She was a gifted child as is evident from her talks. And with reference to E. I. George’s article, she is superior to other children, between four and seven years, in her language skills. Her distorted family, her lack of a proper guidance into the “Right Way” and she being a girl helped her, rather than inhibiting her growth. She was not forced into the Symbolic realm, but gradually evolved on her own. She derived theories on her own, conquered differences between people and objects, light and shadow on her own.

In “Kristeva and Feminist Theology” by Cleo McNelly Kearns, we read about the semiotic/symbolic disruptions which are necessary in theological discourse. She says that we are supposed to “move between the semiotic and the symbolic, and to do so not, perhaps, without pain, but at least without the violent extinction or sacrifice of one or the other” (67). She continues that such a struggle is a “struggle for healing” (67). Anna could stand in Semiotic and Symbolic without one superseding the other, but let it “overflow” from one to the other. It is this play which helps the reader to pursue the text without a speck of boredom. Wilfred L. Guerin says, “Echoing Lacanian Theory, she [Kristeva] argues that the semiotic realm of the mother is present in the symbolic discourse as absence or contradiction, and that great writers are those who offer their readers the greatest amount of disruption of the nameable” (*A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, 230). For Anna, Mister God became a source of healing even in death because she had a fluid existence between semiotic and symbolic. The Symbolic is disrupted by the semiotic and vice versa, and so Anna becomes the first one to teach Fynn that Mister God is right in his middle.
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A Critical Study of Feminist Realism in D.H. Lawrence’s Fictions

Thuanreilung Phaomei

What distinguishes Lawrence from the others is a particular kind of fidelity to reality which is not different from his feminist visions. Thus, feminist realism can be extensively elaborated through the fictions of Lawrence. The patriarchal realism (social realism) and female reality is scrutinized to explain the difference between the world as men have constructed and the reality that is lived, imagined and expressed by women.

The emergence of the feminist movement is considered one of the most important developments in the history of literary criticism. Since the late 1960s feminist criticism has become more sophisticated, and has branched off into different critical theories such as: liberal, marxist, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, postmodern, and radical theories. But all these different theories fall under a general umbrella, since they all agree that society is wholly patriarchal. All feminists agree that women are not born but they are made by the society in which men dominate everything because they are thought to possess the qualities of domination and power. Feminism in Literature starts with some sort of evaluation the female writers according to the traditions of literary criticism of the male critics. Fraya Katz-Stoker (Cornillon, 321) in her article “The Other Criticism: Feminism vs. Formalism” expresses the criterion of feminist criticism. She believes that feminist critics evaluated modern critical approaches with the same attention to contextualization. She blames formalism for allowing critics “to study literature as a privately created world completely independent of its social and political context”(321). For formalist critics, “the words literature, poetry, and art conjure up images of bubbles floating in a cloudless, Platonic sky” (316). “Feminist criticism,” Katz-Stoker says, “is a materialist approach to literature which attempts to do away with the formalist illusion that literature is somehow divorced from the rest of reality.” This critic explains that the absurdity of that reality “cannot be corrected until it
is perceived” (326). Adrienne Rich, declares that the act of seeing text and life “with fresh eyes,” was more than a feminist critical method; it was “an act of survival”. A radical feminist literary criticism would take the text as a clue to “how we have been living,” “how our language has trapped as well as liberated us “and” how we can begin to see—and therefore live-affresh” (18). The point was “not to pass on a [patriarchal] tradition but to break its hold over us” (19). The term “materialist feminisms” is known which proves a contentious interest in the issue of whether women’s interests can, or should be tackled in terms of traditional socialism and Marxism. In the United Kingdom, Juliet Mitchell’s essay “Women: The Longest Revolution” (1966) started the revision of traditional Marxism by explaining the position of women in terms of psychoanalytic theory of sexuality and gender. Twentieth-century women were belittled for their portrayal of female experience, while male writers were admired for “their ruthless appropriation of life for their art”, (Rapone 1973: 400). Thus, Carol Ohmann (909) discovers that reviewers who assumed *Wuthering Heights* was written by a man attributed power, originality, and clarity to it, while those who knew that Emily Bronte was the author considered it an interesting addition to the tradition of women’s novels in England. Ohmann concludes that there is a “considerable correlation between what readers assume or know the sex of the writer to be and what they actually see, or neglect to see, in ‘his’ or her work”. So many critics admitted that this novel is a masterpiece when they thought that it was written by a man and they were shocked when they knew that it is written by a woman. Anni Pratt, (877) in her article “The New Feminist Criticism”, thinks that there are four steps to realize the feminist criticism: rediscovering women’s works, “judging the formal aspects of texts”, understanding what literature reveals about women and men in socio-economic contexts, and describing “the psycho-mythological development of the female individual in literature”. “Feminist criticism” should be “criticism with a cause. . . . Tania Modleski’s important book *Loving with a Vengeance* (1982), represents a conscious feminist critique of psychoanalysis to explore romances and Goths aimed at female audiences. Janice Radway’s ethnographic *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984); and Meaghan Morris’s *The Pirate’s Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism* (1988) have helped
open up the study of popular genres to politically sophisticated feminist analysis. Elaine Showalter, observes in her article “Women Writers and the Female Experience” that women writers had been forcibly alienated from their experiences. The Nineteenth-century women were prohibited from writing anything related to femininity and were scolded for doing so. She finds the social theory of Marx useful to criticism. In “Critical Cross-Dressing,” she is not sure about the ability of prominent male critics to turn women as readers without surrendering “paternal privileges.” What she fears is that “instead of breaking out of patriarchal bounds,” they will merely compete with women, failing to acknowledge women’s feminist contributions (Showalter 1985:143). She talks more about men through the category of gender in her later edited collection Speaking of Gender.

Feminists believe that the question of gender is a question of language. The relationship between gender and language is the focus of the feminists who draw upon the theory of post-structuralism gender difference exist in language rather than in sex. The understanding of writing and the body as sites where the material and the linguistic intersect requires the interrogation of woman as a category of gender or sex. The poststructuralist feminist attention to language and materiality has provoked an extended argument over the meanings of “gender” and “sexual difference.” Joan Scott explains that gender denotes “a rejection of the biological determinism implicit in the use of such terms as ‘sex’ and ‘sexual difference’”. Materialist feminist literary critics focus on key problems in language, history, and ideology. In addition, they focus on critiques of the gendered character of class and race relations under international capitalism. The importance of these critical positions and developments for feminist literary theory and criticism arises from their foundations in political theory, psychoanalysis, and sociology rather than from traditional literary concerns with questions of principle, form, genre, author, and composition.

Although he was dissatisfied with women’s new social role, he explores many independent female characters, and portrays them all differently. D. H. Lawrence’s England, was the turning point in the feminist movement. Lawrence’s expectations of modern women, and his
inevitable disappointment, provide the theme of Hillary Simpson’s *D.H. Lawrence and Feminism*. She continues the theory of Kate Millett about Lawrence’s feminism. As Hillary Simpson (62) explains, the motivation for the women’s movement was largely economic, for “a highly industrialized nation faced with mass conscription of its active men had no choice but to look for an alternative labour force, and the employment of women was the obvious answer”. It seems that Lawrence’s feminist critics are capable of looking at him with an open mind. Kate Millet discusses *The Woman Who Rode Away*, along with other works, in her 1970 book *Sexual Politics*. In it, an unnamed female character escapes white society in search of American Indian spirituality only to die in a ritualistic sacrifice. Millet portrays the story as an exploitative and sadistic work. According to Millet, Lawrence tends to “fudge the meaning of the story by mumbling vaguely that it is all allegorical and symbolic.” (377) In *Monkey Nuts* Lawrence presents a new type of female character, Miss Stokes, who is one of the most independent and powerful women Lawrence develops. Though a feminist critic might try to show how Lawrence abuses Miss Stokes in the end of *Monkey Nuts* by showing how Joe finally escapes her desires. Miss Stokes certainly does her share of abusing Joe. As a young “land-girl” doing what was considered man’s work before the war, she is confident enough of herself. Stokes is able to force a strong, 23-year old soldier into a relationship. The soldier, Joe, is powerless to resist, “I’m not keen on going any farther—she bain’t [sic] my choice” (Lawrence 372). Joe tries to avoid Miss Stokes, despite her being young and attractive. Yet Miss Stokes is able to win out, and only the help of the much older Corporal Albert can break Joe out of his problem. *Monkey Nuts* is a story in that Miss Stokes, upon her realization that she wants Joe, she tries to bend him to her will. So Lawrence seems to feel that a woman can have just the same power over a man as a man might over a woman.

In “The Fox” perhaps Lawrence felt that some people, both males and females, are born as “foxes” while others are victims, born to be dominated. Banford and March in Lawrence’s novella “The Fox.” live in a sort of a utopian society. Banford as book-keeper and March doing the masculine farm work. While Banford lacks some of her femininity,
March keeps hers, and is very attractive despite doing dirty, hard labour and wearing a man’s work clothes. The farm to Lawrence is a sort of laboratory to examine the possibilities inherent in women’s new social role. What would the world be like without men? Of course, Lawrence cannot really consider this question alone—it would hardly make for an interesting story. So he adds another subject. How will these new types of women behave in the real world? Perhaps the attack of the fox on their hen house represents the return of men to England following the war. It is something that both Banford and March have difficulty dealing with, so March, having the fox in her sight, is taken by its male power and is unable to kill it. The situation is changed by a young boy, who is much like the fox that he kills. He kills Banford by felling a tree on top of her and forces March into a marriage in which he is very much the dominating male, with March learning “her place” as a female. The female is certainly dominated by the male in what could indeed be called a “twisted, sadistic fantasy.” The boy’s feelings at the end of the story claim that the male attitude focuses on female submission to the male. In “The Fox”, the male hero is again much younger than the female, a situation that certainly in Lawrence bears parent-child implications. Henry Grenfel must strongly struggle with those overtones in his relationship with Nellie March. And so he simply dismisses March’s objection that she is old enough to be his mother, although, in fact, she is not; but even in his own mind, he must insist on his priority in a way that protests a little too much: “[he] was older than she, really. He was master of her (Fox, 23).

In the final novella of the volume, “The Ladybird”, there is a curious inversion which is related, I believe, to Lawrence’s childhood illnesses and dependence upon his mother. The severely wounded male protagonist, one of Lawrence’s little dark men, who has been likened to “a child that is very ill and can’t tell you what hurts it” (Fox, 163) and himself feels that he has lost his manhood as a result of his dependence, heals himself and “cures” the nervous unease of the Sleeping Beauty figure, Lady Daphne. A remarkable short story from the volume England, My England (1922) may serve to illustrate the dynamic through which the mother-child paradigm becomes displaced unto a married couple, in such a way that the displacement symbolically
threatens the self-integrity of the male protagonist. In “The Blind Man,” Maurice Pervin has returned from the battlefield of Flanders to his wife, Isabel, scarred and completely blind. They are able to achieve a generally satisfying relationship that is, however, stained by occasional attacks of depression on his side and an annoying feeling of weariness on hers. When Isabel’s old friend Bertie Reid, a bachelor, comes to pay them an extended visit, the feminist problems come to the surface. The two men dislike each other, and Maurice feels isolated to the point where he draws back to the stable and his animals for the feeling of warmth and security which he experiences there. Isabel sends Bertie out to check on Maurice, and the story ends on a sad note. Maurice touches Bertie’s face and head and asks Bertie to touch his scarred face in return. The result is a feeling of happiness for Maurice and sadness for Bertie. “The Blind Man,” like so many other stories of roughly the same time, obliquely but clearly expresses Lawrence’s denial of his own illness and his belief in a spiritual strength beyond any mere physical weakness. However, the relationship of Maurice and Isabel has begun to founder on Maurice’s dependency on her, an entirely reasonable one given the circumstances. One might posit an oedipal constellation at work when Maurice, upstairs changing, hears Isabel and Bertie talking and feels “a childish sense of desolation”; he “seemed shut out—like a child that is left out.” (Howarth: 229) But there is more to it than that, for it is clearly a feeling of dependency rather than jealousy that distresses him: “[He] had almost a childish nostalgia to be included in the life circle. And at the same time he was a man, dark and powerful and infuriated by his own weakness. By some fatal flaw, he could not be by himself; he had to depend on the support of another. And this very dependence enraged him” (“The Blind Man,” 66). While Lawrence clearly would like to think of himself as a Maurice Pervin, overcoming mere physical disabilities, he must fight against the barely acknowledged fears of a psychological collapse like that of a Bertie Reid (as the fact that Lawrence as a boy was known as “Bert” might suggest).

In *Women in Love* (1920) Lawrence describes a record of deep and passionate desires; this novel records the lives of two sisters and their lovers. The couples’ passions are set against the chaos of World War I. “Ursula, don’t you really want to get married?” opens the book, which
poses questions of love, passion, and desire. Lawrence introduces two lively and individual women characters. The narrator also captures the subtleties hidden within the prose, and describes the two women’s growing awareness of sensuality with delicate intimacy. In fact, in Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, there is an intellectual depiction of each character’s relationship with the others. Truly, these relationships include a significant amount of bonding. Moreover, there is a type of womanly bonding between the characters of Ursula, Gudrun Hermione and Winifred. This bonding creates a certain intimacy between the two women; however, they soon become detached from each other reminding us of the differences in nature and the separate individualities of the women in *Women in Love*. In short, *Women in Love* is based on human relationships; it is interested in describing a type of bonding that occurs, especially between the women. However, in some cases this bonding becomes quite detached, causing a feeling of cynical struggle towards the other. Through examining the relationships between Ursula, Gudrun, Hermione and Winifred, Lawrence introduces some sort of womanly bonding and he exposes their feelings when they are separated. When Lawrence says “I hate sex, it is such a limitation,” he is concerned with the unequal sharing of gender. Sex is the most promising way of escaping this “human, all too human world,” yet it fails to offer enough elevate. Thus, Lawrence’s fascination with distinguishing between good sex and bad sex is the distinction between the blessed and the disrespectful. Finally, Lawrence manages his characters to present his ideas of feminism and he presents these ideas in some sort of confrontation between his male and female characters.

The primary purpose of this paper is mainly to highlight some of the main concepts that are related to feminist thought. The focus is on feminist realism in D. H. Lawrence’s fiction. Some of his works have been scrutinized to prove their feminist allegations. The study tries to dig deep to see how Lawrence expresses the feminist ideas in his works and how he develops his characters to explain ideas related to the feminist points of views. His works are mainly talking about women and their feelings towards other women or towards other male characters. Some may argue about the nature of feminism in Lawrence’s works, but the analysis of his short stories prove his ability of talking
about women’s feelings in different situations and from different points of views. The analysis of his works from different periods deserves the serious consideration of critics. The study clearly shows that phallic realism and realist feminism are an extension of Western culture facilitated by capitalism. Lawrence’s works transform his notion of feminist realism. Marian Shaw (24) comments:

What emerges as most obviously interesting about Lawrence’s relation to feminism is the extent to which it changed from a pre-war interested and guarded encouragement to a final intense hostility in which feminists were seen as ‘absolutely perverse’ and the future of the race despairingly depended on the self-sufficiency of the phallus with women’s role that of sacrificial acolyte.

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Soul-body Concept in the Selected Novels of R.K. Narayan

Jothilakshmi R. & Dr. G. Meenakshi Sundaram

R.K. Narayan has a very strong background firmly fixed on the Vedic injunction. Narayan never fails to extol the Vedic perspectives in his novels. How he impregnates the essential concepts of Vedic philosophy into the sequence of events in his novels is indeed worth admiring. In the most unexpected places Narayan inserts the profound philosophy which provides the reader with a sudden insight into the concept of ‘WHO AM I’.

The question ‘Who am I’ is the basic principle on which the entire Vedas is built. One who is a ‘jnani’ or scholar, in whose mind this question arises, is considered eligible to pursue the study of Vedic literature which includes the four Vedas (Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharvana), 108 Upanishads, 18 Puranas, the Itihasas and Brahmasutra.

This profound question is repeated on many occasions in the novels of Narayan. Srinivas is one of the main characters in the novel *Mr. Sampath*. Narayan portrays Srinivas as quite philosophical. After his graduation he spends years reading the Upanishads and is not in the least bothered about earning a livelihood. The mystic purity of the Upanishads, which in terms of human existence means restrained and regulated life becomes Srinivas’ dominant passion in life.

When Srinivas approached the old landlord for a house, the old landlord asked him,

“Who are you?”

“It is a profound question.”[replies Srinivas]. “What mortal can answer it?”(Sampath 9). While he thundered against municipal or social short comings a voice went on asking, “Life and the world and all this is passing-why bother about anything? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. Why really bother?”(30)

This statement is the natural conclusion for his questioning mind and he has to find an answer for the question. His interest in the
Upanishads leads him to ask, “Is it right to be family centered”. He says that every activity in this world is centered around false ego [I am this body-(i.e) My] and real ego [I am a soul—(i.e) I]. While he was reading Upanishad he was totally absorbed in it. All his domestic worries and all these questions of prestige seem ridiculously petty.

“My children, my family, my responsibility must guard my prestige and do my duties to my family—who am I?” (13) Srinivas considers this to be a serious problem that he has to face. These are meant to encourage gradual development of self realization.

The Vedic wisdom helps us to live and get rid of the material entanglements. The chance for spiritual realization is offered in the form of the Upanishads. After reading a few lines from Upanishads, Srinivas involves himself in deep inquiries above his own self which is the beginning of self realization.

“Till I know ‘who I am’ how can I know what I should do?” (13). Narayan is at his best in his interpretation of Vedic literature. The same idea is echoed in Narayan’s *A Tiger for Malgudi*, a very profound work about a tiger that is possessed of the soul of an enlightened human being.

When the master, the chief protagonist, is questioned by someone among the crowd.

“Who are you?”

He replies “you are asking a profound question. I’ve no idea who am I! All my life I have been trying to find the answer. Are you sure you know who you are?” (Tiger118) Being steeped in the Vedic philosophical attitude to life, in the acceptance of self realization, Narayan reflects his own response to the deeper needs of life. Thus he is in search of real identity: “Who am I”.

Srila Prabhupada’s teachings found in the *Topmost Yoga System*, clarifies that man is not his body but a spirit soul, “aham brahmasmi”, (I am a spirit soul). The qualities of a spirit soul is explained in Bhagavad Gita as follows.
avicini ti tad viddhi
yena sarvam idam tatam
vinasam avayayas yasya
na kascit kartum arhati.

(That which provides the entire body you should know to be indestructible. No one is able to destroy that imperishable soul.) (96)

In Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna says that the soul maintains the body.

antavanta ime deha
nityas yoktah saririnah
anasino `prameyasya ...

(The material body of the indestructible, immeasurable and eternal living entity is sure to come to an end.) (98-99).

The material body is perishable. It may perish immediately or it may do so after a hundred years. It is a question of time. There is no chance of maintaining it indefinitely. But the spirit soul is so minute that it cannot even be seen by anybody. In the Vedanta Sutras the living entity is qualified as light because he is part and parcel of the Supreme light. As sun light maintains the entire universe, so the light of the soul maintains this material body.

The same idea is reiterated in The English Teacher. The novel is undoubtedly the most personal and autobiographical of Narayan’s novels. It is a direct result of the agony of Krishna’s losing his wife, whom he loved very clearly. The novel is indeed based on the need to understand and realize life and death as two different states of existence. There is certainly a deliberate contrast in the novel between the visible bodily world of human being and the invisible world of spirit and dead.

Narayan drives home the point that the human body is perishable, whereas the soul is eternal. He establishes this fact while talking about how Krishna succeeds in communicating with the spirit of his wife.
While talking about the loneliness and separation, which is caused by the sudden death of his wife, Narayan, the master craftsman, puts forward the same idea that the soul – the maintainer of the body, is not perishable. He says there is no escape from loneliness and separations.

Wife, child, brothers, parents, friends ... we come together only to go apart again. It is one continuous movement. They move away from us as we move away from them. The law of life can't be avoided. The law comes into operation the moment we detach ourselves from our mother’s womb. All struggle and misery in life is due to our attempt to arrest this law or to get away from it or in allowing ourselves to be hurt by it. The fact must be recognized. A profound unmitigated loneliness is the only truth of life. All else is false (177).

Narayan puts forward the same idea in *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

“No relationship human or other association of any kind could last forever. Separation is the law of life right from the Mother’s womb.” (Tiger 174)

Bhagavat Gita confirms this idea:

-na jayate mriyate va kadacin
-nayam bhutva bhavita va bhuyah
-ajo nitya sasvato yam purano
-na hanyate hanyamane sarire

(For the soul there is neither birth nor death at anytime. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever – existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.) (101-102)

In *The English Teacher* Susila, who is no more, tries to send a message to her husband through a medium. This proves that her physical body is destroyed but not the soul.

It is quite distinctly stated in all Vedic literatures and especially in Bhagavad-Gita that death is not an end:
jatasya hi druvo mṛtyur
dhruvam janma mṛtasya ca
tasmad aparihaye rthe
na tvam socitum arhasi

(One who has taken his birth is sure to die, and after death one is sure to take birth again. Therefore, in the unavoidable discharge of your duty, you should not lament). (110-111)

This piece of thought is very clearly substantiated in the *The English Teacher* as well as in *A Tiger for Malgudi*. We find Krishna lamenting over the sudden demise of his wife. At that time Krishna is not aware of the fact that death is not the end of life. Krishna comes to know about this reality when his wife communicates with him and enlightens him about the fact that the soul is eternal.

While acknowledging the fact that any artist is bound to improve his art as he gains experience, the researcher is inclined to conclude that the realization about the law of life Narayan gained out of loneliness caused by the separation of his wife played a great role in bringing about a great change in his philosophy of life and in his ability in creative writing. Indeed this realization has not only touched the recesses of his mind and soul, but also ignited a sort of enlightenment in Narayan which can be confirmed from the fact that the novels which follow *The English Teacher* show a maturity of mind, and art and tightness in structure. The analysis of the novels like *Mr. Sampath, The Man Eater of Malgudi* and *A Tiger for Malgudi* may hold testimony to this view. This realization would have helped Narayan to create characters like Sampath and Srinivas in his novel *Mr. Sampath* which follows immediately after the *The English Teacher*. One finds Sampth being very materialistic right from the beginning of the novel.

In *Mr. Sampath*, the quest for self realization is the main theme. When one analyses the characters like Sampath and Srinivas in *Mr. Sampath* one may be tempted to believe that Narayan would have had the same line of thought in his mind. Sampath is completely materialistic and runs after the gratification of the senses. He does not find time to pose and think for a moment anything about self-
realization. Perhaps that may be the reason why Shiva. K. Gilra says, “Sampath and Margaya uproot themselves from their traditional ethos to run after illusions of material success”. (40)

From the beginning Srinivas drips away from his family life and engages in the quest for self-realization. This can be understood easily from the conversation between him and his elder brother.

His brother asked, “What exactly is it that you wish to do in life?” Srinivas flushed for a moment, but regained his composure and answered: “Don't you see? There are ten principle Upanishads. I would like to complete the series. This is the third.” (Sampath12)

Through Narayan depicts Srinivas as totally different from the other characters in the novel, he faces the same kind of mental crisis just like any man who is caught between worldly duties and the quest for self realization.

He asked himself, “Family duties come before any other duty. Is it an absolute law? What if I don't accept the position? I am sure, if I stick to my deeper conviction; other things like this will adjust themselves.” (33)

Perhaps that may be the reason why he is not at all disturbed when the attempt for making the film gets completely wrecked all on a sudden.

Like all fables, A Tiger for Malgudi tells a good story. As the story proceeds one is made aware of much more clarity in design and intersection in the narrative momentum. In an unusual prefatory introduction, Narayan reveals how he came to write this novel. He had read a newspaper report of a tiger faithfully following hermit during the Kumbhamela festival and speculated on its possibilities for a novel. He writes, ”It also occurred to me that with a few exceptions here and there, humans have monopolized the attention of fiction writers.” (Tiger 7)

He then emphasizes the moral basis of this novel. “Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures.....I made a tiger the central character in a novel”(7-8).
The religious aspect takes over from the moral and the social and the tiger’s life is one of gradual transformation, equivalent to the Hindu ashrama of sanyasa. It is here that Narayan perfects the theme of renunciation and creates a real sanyasi in the Master, instead of the earlier fake Sadhu Raju, the guide. The master is neither an animal trainer, nor is he an ordinary man. Once a respectable and prosperous man of the world, a man of property, and one who had taken an active part in the politics, he gives up everything. Like Siddhartha he renounces the world because of an “inner compulsion,” in order to merge his could with the universal soul and attain the spiritual insight of a mystic. (38)

The tiger, ferocious in nature is calmed by the power of the Master’s suggestion. He stands head and shoulders above humanity in general and is a symbol of the perfection that man can reach through the pursuit of ancient wisdom.

“Life or death is in no one’s hands: you cant die by willing or escape death by determination. A great power has determined the number of breaths for each individual, who can neither stop them not prolong ... that’s why God says in the Gita “I am life death: I am the killer and the killed...”(142)

The first lesson the tiger learns is that it is not a tiger. It must learn to transcend the self – a lesson that does not come easily to man. As old age advances, Raja learns to appreciate the companionship of the forest animals. Self realization can only come through acceptance rather the rejection.

Though he maintains a objective detachment from his themes and characters, a close scrutiny reveals his Indianess: and even detachment is an essentially Indian quality. According to the Hindu philosophy in which Narayan’s faith is unshakeable as is evident in his novels, this mundane world is not the real world and so is ultimately insignificant. Being essentially Hindu in his attitude, custom and practice, Narayan views every phenomenon as illusion (maya). Through characterization Narayan filters the unique Hindu philosophy. The lives of his major characters revolve around a particular obsession, which may be ambition
as in Srinivas of Mr. Sampath. In A Tiger for Malgudi, and The Man-Eater of Malgudi, the main characters prove to be truly Indian in spirit as they strive for their true identity. Srinivas in Mr. Sampath is a classic example.

The novels The English Teacher, A Tiger for Malgudi, The Man-Eater of Malgudi and Mr. Sampath become all the more popular among the Indian readers for this philosophy of life which is a part of the mass consciousness of the Indian people.

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Bangladesh in *A Golden Age*

Priya Jose K.

The Bangladesh-born British author Tahmima Anam’s debut novel, *A Golden Age* won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for a first book in 2008. Published by John Murray in 2007, it has since been translated into twenty two languages. Like Jahanara Imam’s novel “Of Blood and Fire” this novel also deals with the untold story of Bangladesh’s War of Independence. Though she was born years after the actual struggle, Tahmima draws heavily from the memoirs of her parents and relatives who were actively involved in it. A social anthropologist by training, her doctoral thesis at Harvard which takes a subaltern look at the history of the Bangladesh War of Independence was an interesting prelude to the novel. Often compared to her contemporary, the British writer of Bangladeshi descent, Monica Ali, she is different in that she deals with Bangladeshis living in their cultural milieu while the latter deals with characters who are expatriates living in the West.

*A Golden Age* is not a tale of many. A widow, Rehana Haque and her children Sohail and Maya are the protagonists. The novel opens with Rehana at the tomb of her husband blaming herself for losing her children and concludes with Bangladeshis celebrating freedom from Pakistan singing “Amar shonar Bangla. How I love you my golden Bengal.” As each chapter unfolds, personal struggle is transposed by collective struggle. Her next novel *The Good Muslim*, a sequel to the first one, too looks at the life of these characters in independent Bangladesh in the shadow of the war.

Partition created new boundaries and drove a wedge across the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan and East Pakistan were stuck on two sides of India. This paper is an attempt to look at Anam’s portrayal of how East Pakistan severed all ties with the mother country and emerged as an independent nation, Bangladesh, with a new identity and how as a language Bengali contributed to this process.
The first chapter of the novel titled “March 1971” begins with the protagonist Rehana Haque throwing a party to celebrate her triumphant return to Dhaka with her children Sohail and Maya. She had to give them up to her childless brother in law, Faiz and his wife after her husband’s death as a judge had ruled that “being a widow- No fate worse for a woman”(Anam178) she was incapable of taking care of them. She then builds another house named ‘Shona’, rents it out and armed with the money to bribe the judge she gets an order in her favour and gets her children back. Since then, they had been living “ordinary, unexceptional lives” (Anam 50) but it changes forever on that fateful day, 25 march 1971. Sohail is in love with Silvi, the daughter of their neighbour, Mrs. Chowdhary. She is to be engaged to a Pakistan army officer Sabeer Musthafa on that day and the neighbours are gathered at Mrs Chowdhary’s house for a small dinner to celebrate the event. But they realize that “a war had come to find them” (Anam 65) and the hysterical Mrs. Chowdhary insists that Sabeer marry her daughter immediately and the marriage takes place with Rehana reciting the marriage verses from memory as the lights go out at precisely the same moment .Sohail has to act as a witness while on the table “Mrs Chowdhary’s lamb roast was a half eaten corpse with naked ribs and a picked over leg. The tomato was gone but the mouth was still open.”(Anam 56)

The following days witness a lot of changes in their lives. Sohail, a pacifist joins the resistance. Born in Calcutta Rehana had come to Dhaka after her marriage to Iqbal. Her sisters were living in Karachi. Now that Pakistan is at war with Bangladesh (East Pakistan) she finds her allegiance to the country questioned by her own daughter Maya who blurts out that Sohail must have been killed by one of “your” Pak soldiers (Anam 89).

Rehana who has a ‘diasporic identity’ shares an emotional connection with the old country. She had :

ambiguous feelings about the country she had adopted. She spoke, with fluency, the Urdu of the enemy. She was unable to pretend, as she saw so many others doing, that she could replace the mixed tongue with a pure Bengali one, so that the Muslim salutation
As-Salaam Alaikum was replaced by the neutral Adaab, or even Namoshkar, the Hindu greeting. Rehana’s tongue was too confused for these changes. She could not give up her love of Urdu, its lyrical lilts, its double meanings, its furrowed beat. (Anam 47)

“To prove that she belonged” (Anam 92) Rehana takes the saris that Iqbal had presented to her in the eight years of their marriage and sews blankets out of them for the fighters and the refugees. Her house “Shona” is used as a guerilla hideout and she even nurses an injured Major back to health. They plant guns under her rosebushes. Her brother-in-law Faiz and wife Parveen come to Dhaka to “rid the nation of its dirty elements” (Anam 106).

Two nations are at loggerheads here and two languages are too. The Karachi- Dhaka, Urdu - Bengali conflict shows how language works as a tool of nationalism. Languages are the core makers of ethnic and national identity. Language is a secret territory shared with like minds, a refuge impenetrable by outsiders—an ideal weapon for resisting an invasive culture. But greater bonds than borders and language bind Rehana to those around her and by her actions she proves herself to be a true nationalist. Rehana soon finds the language which is so close to her heart aggressive when she goes to the meat market and the butcher talks to her in Urdu.

“How are you, madam?” he asked in Urdu, and saw her start . . . Rehana realized how strange the language suddenly sounded: aggressive, insinuating. She saw now that it was the language of her enemy, . . . she tried to feel something else, some tenderness for her poets, . . . Rehana could see that he was afraid of her, and she was pleased, and then ashamed to be pleased . . . . (Anam 119-120)

Albert Memmi in The Colonizer and the Colonized says:

the difference between native language and cultural language is not peculiar to the colonized, but colonial bilingualism cannot be compared to just any linguistic dualism. Possession of two languages is not merely a matter of having two tools, but actually means participation in two psychical and cultural realms. Here, the two
words symbolized and conveyed by the two tongues are in conflict; they are those of the colonizer and the colonized.

Furthermore, the colonized’s mother tongue, that which is sustained by his feelings, emotions and dreams, that in which his tenderness and wonder are expressed, and that which holds the greatest emotional impact, is precisely the one which is least valued. . . . In short, colonial bilingualism is neither a purely bilingual situation in which an indigenous tongue coexists with a purist’s language, nor a simple polyglot richness benefiting from an extra but relatively neuter alphabet: it is a linguistic drama. (107-108)

We find this linguistic drama unfolding when Language comes to her rescue and identifies her Pakistani roots when she speaks perfect Urdu to Col. Jabeen who has come to arrest Sohail. In order to know his whereabouts he threatens to hand over Maya to the waiting soldiers. Rehana gains valuable time when the colonel’s attention is captured by the perfect Urdu that she speaks and they capture the major mistaking him for Sohail. (Anam 260)

In his Preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* Jean Paul Sartre talks about how the mother country’s soldiers overseas may decide that the natives are not their fellow men because it is a crime to enslave, rob or kill one’s fellow men. The inhabitants of the annexed country are reduced to the level of monkeys so that they can be treated as beasts of burden. The natives are dehumanized and their traditions, language and culture are wiped out. We find this phenomenon taking place in the novel when during the time of the curfew, soldiers blare out from their microphones “Bengalis take down your flags . . . . you bastard traitors” (Anam 61).

Maya goes to Calcutta when she gets news that her friend Sharmeen has been raped and killed by the Pakistan army, by Tikka Khan’s soldiers. War finds Mrs. Chowdhary when Sabeer is captured by the army. Sohail requests his mother to get him released using Faiz’s influence. Rehana has dinner with Faiz and Parveen, hides her true feelings and manages to convince him to release Sabeer. On the day of his release Faiz becomes aware of her treachery when he comes across
an article in the paper written by Maya. Now it is up to Rehana to secure his release as Faiz refuses to have anything more to do with them. The order for his release has already been issued. So Rehana goes alone and after many hardships manages to get Sabeer out from the prison. She confesses the dark secret in her life to the Major, viz., that she had stolen from a blind old man his dead wife’s ornaments and that “Shona” (gold) had been built with that money. She attains freedom from that guilt and rediscovers herself as a woman in the company of Major. The day the war comes to an end she goes to Iqbal’s grave to give him an account of her life in those difficult times.

Anam exercises a lot of control while describing the innumerable casualties of war. She never goes into the gory details but the readers are made aware of what has taken place. Sharmeen raped and killed by Tikka Khan’s soldiers, Supriya Sen Gupta separated from her missing family and discovered in the refugee camp, Sabeer appeared a red tipped bird whose his nails have all been pulled. These and similar descriptions are pointers to the horror and trauma.

It is interesting to remember that UNESCO declared 21 February as the International Day of the Mother Tongue because of the efforts of Bangladesh. When the Governor General of independent Pakistan Mohammed Ali Jinnah declared Urdu as the sole official language of the country the people of East Pakistan embarked on an agitation for the right to their mother tongue, Bengali. The government countered their move by outlawing all protests, but the movement gathered momentum and strengthened the Bengali sense of identity. It was the forerunner of the country’s movement for independence. On 21 Feb 1952 the police opened fire on a group of students who were on a protest march inside the Dhaka University campus. It is in memory of that 21 February that Bangladesh moved a resolution in the UN for an International Day of the Mother Tongue and carried it through. We find an echo of this incident in this novel too.

*A Golden Age* is a story of hope, revolution and unexpected heroism set against the backdrop of Bangladesh war of independence. A story of domestic loss is woven into the narrative of civil war and the writer deftly balances the story of a nation against that of a family.
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Socio-Cultural Space of Dalit People in India with Reference to Bama’s Sangati

S.R. Adlin Asha

Bama is a Dalit writer, born in Puthupatti village in Virudunagar district in southern Tamil Nadu in 1958. She has written a collection of short stories and three novels on the Dalit community (i.e., Karukku, Sangati and Vanmam). Sangati, is considered to be a socially-oriented novel as it depicts human relationships in different aspects. It is an episodic novel published in the year 1994. It was translated into English by Lakshmi Holmstrom and published in the year 2005. It is considered as an autobiography of dalit women of different generations. The narrator is an old woman named, Vellaiyama kizhavi. It has no plot. Apart from the plight and sufferings of the dalit women, it also touches the dalit culture.

Social Hierarchy of Dalit People in India as Reflected in Sangati

Upper caste men
Upper caste women
Lower caste men (Dalit men)
Lower caste women (Dalit women)

In fact, the lower caste people are outcaste by birth. They have no escape from this suppression. Women in general, are considered to be at the lowest level in Indian society, in spite of various steps taken for the freedom of women by the government. Women are still exploited or suppressed either by women themselves or by men. “Dalit Women” are commonly referred to as “oppressed”, or “subalterns”

Social ecology is an attempt to link human society and natural phenomena. “Social ecology examines social categories like culture, social structure and economy in their relation to natural categories like soil, water and forest”. (Subaltern Studies, Guha 4-7).
In *Kappirikalude Nattill*, S.K. Pottekkatt pointed out that culture and nature remain two entities by which people are rated in a society. The cultural aspects of society are required to be implicit in terms of its connection with race, traditions, customs, people and class. Dalits were not given equal rights to live comfortably in their villages. They were marginalized exploited and were considered as the most downtrodden people in the Indian society.

Poverty contributes in a major way to the ineffectiveness of the educational systems. Children are forced to work in order to support their families. More and more dalit girl children are found to be school dropouts. They are either given in betrothal as soon as they attain puberty or they work as child labourers. As labourers they are involved in agriculture or some strenuous jobs like working in match factories, construction works, well digging and so on.

“As soon as she gets her periods, you stop her from studying, hand her over to some fellow or the other, and be at peace”. (Sangati, 9)

In fact, many institutions have voluntarily offered the dalits a free education and other facilities. But still they are not willing to pursue their education.

“Even though the white priests offered them a free education, the small children refused to go to school. They all went off to took up any small job they could get. At least the boys went for a short while before they stopped school. The girls didn’t even do that much”. (Sangati, 5)

Different kinds of occupations in different villages reflect the base of their socio-economic culture. Dalits are landless agricultural workers. They work in the fields of the upper caste people and they also take up any kind of work for their livelihood. Apart from agriculture, these people are also involved in other occupations like carpentry, construction works and so on. Sometimes dalit men migrate from rural areas to urban areas for work. There, it was reported, that they were ill-treated when they worked as laborers.

“…they said they were treated like dogs over there. They said even life in our village was better than that”. (Sangati, 4).
Untouchable women are the most economically backward section of Indian society. These women perform hard domestic work as well as agricultural work. They are ready to take up any job and are actively getting involved in different industries like construction works and well digging. Though they work hard, they are not given equal wages, security, maternity benefits and so on. Apart from this, they also rear cattle for additional income. These women feel proud that they are economically or financially independent compared to the upper caste women.

“Mariamma heard that the builders who were digging wells in those parts gave good wages….only youths and young girls were suited to do that work. Even though it meant hard labour, the youngsters went to work there hoping to pick up a few coins which would help to fill their bellies”. (Sangati, 17)

Even today, Child labour is practised in many parts of India, including rural areas. People from the dalit community used to send their children to urban areas for work even at a very young age.

“If I go to the fields now, the landlord refuses to let me work, because I’m too little. But you will see children working in the match factory who are even younger than me”. (Sangati, 71)

The major cause of child labour is poverty. Even though children are paid less than adults, their income is of benefit to poor families. The livelihood of the poor family sometimes depends upon the child’s income. All children, especially girls from dalit community are child labourers and they are mostly employed in unorganized industries in rural areas like match box factories, fireworks and so on. These are harmful to the children both physically and mentally.

“Your mother was saying that you get a pain in your guts from working in the match factory. Yes, Periamma. The stink from the drugs they use pulls at my guts. But what to do, I must work there until I’m a little older”. (Sangati, 71)

The constitution of India clearly states that child labour is wrong and punishable. In spite of this, people in rural areas send their children
to work. It is a significant problem in India. The same is very clearly projected in “Sangati”.

Indian villages have a traditional community justice forum known as the “panchayat”. Here the political power is taken over by the upper caste people. It consists of senior naatamai, junior naatamai and other important men from the village's upper castes. Head man or the senior naatamai was appointed through panchyat elections. The weaker groups or the people of lower caste had to rely on them. They had the power of imposing fines and punishing the people. The dalit people depend on these upper caste men for their living. So they cannot raise their voice against them. They are voiceless. They believe that only they could provide a solution or justice for their problems.

“What do we know about justice? From our ancestors, time it has been agreed that what the men say is right.” (Sangati, 28-29)

The occasion of a girl coming of age or attaining puberty is a big event. On the day of attaining puberty the girl is given a bath, and then isolated for about a week inside the hut like room in the house. She is prohibited from going out and doing any sort of work at home and outside. She is also given rich food and sweets during that period. A grand feast follows and the relatives present gifts to the girl.

Likewise, the dalit community also celebrates the attainment of puberty. Though they are poor or belong to economically weaker sections, they never fail to celebrate these occasions at home. This is the way they inform others that the girl is ready for marriage.

“In our street, when a young girl came of age, they made a little hut like room inside the house, with Palmyra fronds, and got her to sit there for sixteen days…” (Sangati, 15-17)

Dalit people, especially women are unable to access health care services. Due to poverty, they depend on country medicine for their confinement and other health problems. Even, though the government hospitals provide free medicines for the indigenous people, they prefer country medicines.
“In those days, there was no hospital or anything in our village. Even now, of course, there isn’t one. If there is any illness or disease, people first of all look to country medicine for a remedy”. (Sangati, 3)

In some places, government hospitals do not provide surgical treatment for obstetric emergencies. Because of these factors, almost all rural deliveries take place at home. A dalit woman delivers her child usually in her own house, where she is attended to by other dalit women. Without any education these women folk learn to deliver babies. They also use equipments that we use for our daily chores for the delivery. Sometimes, pregnant dalit women die due to the lack of treatment during delivery. In this novel, the narrator, the Paati is a respectable woman because, she is a midwife. She also handles even the most critical delivery cases.

This is one of the incidents in this novel, where the dalit woman looks after her own delivery. It says,

“…She was pregnant at that time, nearly full term. She went into labour then and there, and delivered the child straight away. She cut off her umbilical cord with the sickle she had taken with her to cut the grass, dug a hole and buried the placenta and then walked home carrying her baby and her bundle of grass”. (Sangati, 6)

Even in the full term pregnancy it is necessary for them to work for their living. Unlike the women working in the city, they do not have maternity leave and other benefits. They have to toil even when they are on the death bed. This dalit woman with the help of the sickle instrument used to cut the grass, cuts off her umbilical cord. Thus, she delivered the baby on her own. after the delivery she digs a hole, buries the placenta and then carries her baby and also the bundle of grass to her home.

“If they stay at home, how are they going to get any food? Even their cows and calves will die of hunger then. And anyway, it wasn’t just her; more or less all the women in our street are the same. Even your mother spent all day transplanting in the western fields and then
went into labour just as she was grinding the masala for the evening meal. And that is how you are born”. (Sangati, 6)

Most of the time, they are engaged in difficult tasks. They hardly enjoy their lives. Unlike the men of the dalit community, these women toil for their living and also for the welfare of their children, cattle and other beings. They consider their fellow beings more important than their physical health. So they will not spend money for their own health and delivery. With their low income they feeds their children and other beings. Thus, most of the dalit women deliver their child in their homes and also in the workplaces. Death rates among the dalit women are also high due to lack of medical care.

In many communities throughout India, dowry has traditionally to be given by a bride’s family at the time of her marriage. More than five marriages could be held jointly in the church. Marriage is not a very expensive issue for dalit women. No dowry is required for them, because the bride groom shares the expenses by giving “parisam”. There is also no system for the registration of marriages.

“Among us, we don’t make a big deal out of bridal gifts. The bridgroom gives a parisam, you see. We buy what we can out of that money”. (Sangati, 81)

“In our streets, there is no snatching and grabbing in the name of dowry and such-like. People make do with what they have. Instead of the woman bringing a dowry at the time of marriage, in our case, the man gives a parisam, a bride price. He gains respect according to the amount he is able to give”. (Sangati, 89)

Although illegal, the practice of child marriage is widespread in Indian society, especially in the rural areas. Dalit people marry off their girl children as soon as they attains puberty.

“In my day, girls were married off even before they came of age. Guruvamma’s children all came of age only a couple of years after they married”. (Sangati, 10)
Thus, they are also forced into a relationship, of which they have only the faintest knowledge and for which they are not prepared.

Indian women lose their identity to their husbands the day they get married. So if the husband leaves his wife or passes away, the woman loses her identity and is subjected to all kinds of hardships. The condition of widows and divorced women remains deplorable in society. The dalit people however have a distinct culture and customs. There is no system of widowhood or evil practices like “sati”. The women of dalit community have the freedom to marry a second time after the death of a husband.

“Some women marry a second time after the death of a husband. This is quite normal among us. On the other hand, among the other communities of our village, you can see straight away, the indignities suffered by widows. In our street though, everyone is held the same; widows are not treated differently”. (Sangati, 90)

Due to their difficult tasks in the fields they sometimes will not wear “taali”. For example: In case of, Vellaiyamma Kizhavi. She got married at the age of fourteen. Her husband Govindan had gone to the city as a manual labourer and failed to return back to his village. Thus, she was deserted by her husband at a very young age. After several years, due to famine, she takes off her taali and sells it, in order to take care of her children.

“It seems Paati waited and waited for Govindan to return, and at last, when there was a terrible famine, she took off her taali and sold it. After that she never wore a taali or geeli ever again”. (Sangati, 5)

Women of the dalit community rarely wear “mangalsutra” or “taali”. So when the husband dies she is not expected to remove it like the upper caste women.

“If a man dies, there is no rule that say his wife must immediately go into white saris nor that she must behave in such and such manner…” (Sangati, 90)
Some of the Dalit Cultural Terms Reflected in these Novels

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We know, in many parts of India, Dalits and women are fighting for their rights. From Independence to the present age, Untouchables and women face many types of problems created by the dominant people. They are completely ignored and pushed to the outskirts of the mainstream society. So they are unaware of the schemes that the Government of India has launched to protect these people. Dalits are often unaware of their rights, and even if they know the law, they do not know how to look for help. In spite of their sufferings they are full of song, dance and mocking at the upper caste people and cheerful in their own way. The author has contributed enormously, in representing the dalit world, analyzing its changes and projecting their perspectives in various forms. Thus, this novel reflects their cultural overtones and undertones.
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Culture Anamorphosis: A Case Study in China

Wu Zhonghua

China, a country with a splendid history of approximately five thousand years, is abundant in cultural resources; however, with the passing of time, it also has to absorb other cultures to enrich its own. Some negative influences have been made on people’s lives and their way of thinking due to distorted cultural transmission. Such a case can be found in Chengdu, where the young Chinese differentiate themselves from their western counterparts in the way in which they celebrate Christmas. This paper intends to demonstrate what the best ways are for the Chinese to bring in other fine cultures with the implementation of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory. By analyzing a typical ‘culture distortion’ we can get an overview of how to welcome the culture inflow and evade unpleasant outcomes in cultural exchanges.

Functional systems are dynamic psychological systems in which diverse internal and external processes are coordinated and integrated. They provide a framework to represent the complex interrelationship between the individual and the social world. Vygotsky used three central tenets, social sources of development, semiotic mediation and genetic analysis, to develop the concept of internalization in his famous socio-cultural theory. The key to the theory is that the psychological function of human beings can be understood via the special context where people participate in social activities. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory can be simply illustrated as follows:

Vygotsky argues that the individual development depends on the assimilation of others’ experiences. Beginners rely on the experience passed down by predecessors at first, but as time goes by, they begin to shoulder more responsibilities in both the study and in the participation of social activities (Lave & Wenger). Vygotsky explores the critical role of social interaction, whose main characteristic is called “guided participation”. Learners improve their understanding and
participation through various social activities. This process of internalization enables beginners to grasp the useful strategies and the key knowledge points (Wang Tao).

Semiotic mediation is a significant concept of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory. It demonstrates that interactions among human beings can be internalized through some processes, which can be finally completed by their gradual change and adaptation to the environment.

It is well recognized (Vygotsky, 1962; Wertsch, 1985) that in putting forward the concept of semiotic mediation, Vygotsky attached greater importance to language than he did to other modalities of meaning. Language has been granted this special status in Vygotsky’s theory because it enables us to do something that other semiotic modalities cannot do, at least not to the same extent. The term “mediation” refers to a process that is inherently transitive: it requires some people to mediate something (Ruqaiya Hasan). In this sense, it is self-evident that semiotic mediation is a constant characteristic of human social life.

Language is used to mediate in the context of cultural activity. Semiotic mediation occurs wherever discourse occurs, and that discourse is ubiquitous in social life. Language enables the speaking subjects to internalize the world they experience (Ruqaiya Hasan). The cultural components of language involve such elements as society, politics, economics, cultural background, education and ideology which are

Chart 1. Introduction to Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory
combined to form a complex multidimensional restriction on culture learning.

Langue, as the social semiotic, is the core of building and embodying the reality. From this perspective, the most pivotal and fundamental accomplishment of semiotic mediation is the inculcation of mental disposition – the habits of mind to respond to situations in certain ways (Carr 2001, Claxton 2002), producing in social subjects a sense of what things are worth doing and how they are to be done.

Since cultural tradition is inherited from one generation to another generation, one adequate approach to the study of higher mental abilities is historical. Although the sociocultural theory recognizes genetic domains, most of the research has been carried out in the ontogenetic domain where the focus has been on exploring the ways in which abilities such as voluntary memory are formed in children through the integration of semiotic means throughout the thinking process.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory can fully explain this cultural distortion. According to the Bible, on the day Jesus Christ, the son of Yahweh, was born, a shepherd heard a voice from the sky, telling him that the Saviour was coming. Later, Christians began to take this day, December 25th, as a holy day, and the day before it was taken as Christmas Eve or the so-called Silent Night. On Christmas Eve, equivalent to the day before Chinese New Year, family members get together and sit around expecting the advent of this great event. There is a family reunion so in most cases people stay at home instead of going outside.

However, some young people in China have distorted this holy festival by degrading it into a crazy carnival. They hit others with balloon hammers on Tian Fu Square in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. On December 24th, people of all ages, young people in particular, converge there. Their behaviour is beyond the social norms. People gather on the main streets with inflatable clubs and beat each other up. They hit others, whether acquaintance or stranger. On that night, in their eyes, laws and regulations are not at work. Tian Fu Square
is in disorder and accidents happen. This phenomenon dates back to 1995 when a spontaneous gathering resulted in the crazy celebration.

The cultural distortion in Chengdu can be explained with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory since the three tenets enable us to have an insight into its nature. To begin with, China has become much stronger than ever before, politically, economically, and culturally, so with reforms and the opening-up policy, China is more accessible to the outside world. The concept of building a harmonious society is perpetuated through every branch of the government. One of the most important components of a harmonious society is to achieve a harmonious cultural context. China is embracing the cultural heritage of foreign countries. It is easy for young people to get in touch with foreign traditional enlightenment and civilization by means of internet or by travelling abroad. Inevitably, Christmas Day has become the focus of interest.

In the case of semiotic mediation, language plays an irreplaceable role owing to its function as the bridge to connect people. English is spoken by the largest population all over the world. It is taken as the official language by many countries and international organizations. English learners in China tend to come easily in contact with western ideologies and cultures. Most of the information available online is in English. The Internet and modern technology have opened up new markets, and allow us to promote our business to new geographic locations and cultures. It is now as easy to work with people far away as it is to work face-to-face, cross-cultural communication is increasingly the new norm. But, even so, barriers still exist when people absorb abstract subjects and this is due to their perspectives on these things. English is a tie to bind cultures but cannot solve controversies. When one concept enters another culture, people have to evaluate its origin, function and influence.

Chinese culture has gone through a long history of development. Therefore genetically, subjects of this culture being under the influence of Taoism as well as Confucianism, tend to be tolerant towards different forms of cultural genres not to mention young Chinese people without a fixed ideology. Such a tradition has led to the imbalance of the Chinese
cultural system to some extent. On the other hand, America has been imposing its cultural hegemony on other countries in order to take control of the people all over the world, so it keeps on infiltrating other cultures in different ways like movies, music and fashion. China has fallen victim to these influences by having extremely contradictory elements in its own cultural reservoir.

Christmas in Chengdu has reached a large scale. Shopkeepers have seen the frenzy with which people shop during the holidays and they, therefore, adorn their storefronts with Christmas trees, snowflakes and white-lettered exhortations. The festivals have lost their religious basis and turned into a feast of pleasure and enjoyment. It fills the retailers’ pockets, satisfies public’s desire for happiness, and mixes social cultures.

The inflatable bat battle on Tian Fu Square is a typical example. Thousands of people get together and the whole place erupts with noise till midnight. Some intellectuals are against this huge gathering as it has a bad influence on our society.

Young students are the main body of the huge crowd. Whenever young people are involved in an activity, they put forward some crazy and exciting ideas. On Christmas Eve, most of them bring along a balloon hammer to defend themselves and to hit others. But there are 30,000 or 40,000 people on Tian Fu Square at the culmination of this celebration, so it is unavoidable that some wrong-doings like theft, harassment, fights, and traffic jams occur. Headmasters of middle schools in Chengdu are worried about their students because injuries and damages have happened in the past few years.

This cultural anamorphosis is attributed to different factors. Most people in this fast moving society feel smothered. They have to live under pressure from work, problems in relationships, etc. This crazy night gives them a good occasion to enjoy themselves. There are three critical factors: Firstly, the celebration of Christmas Day has begun in recent years in China. One of the reasons is that when Christmas Eve went into the Chinese society, it was translated as “Ping An Ye”, which means a lot to Chinese people, since they like peace and well-being. This is a Chinese tradition. Businessmen use many marketing strategies
they put up attractive advertisements. The atmosphere created by businessmen stimulates the public and raises their desire to celebrate foreign festivals.

Students and immigrant workers account for a large share of the whole population. In general, their life is quite dull and drab, so they are in pursuit of temporary pleasure. Going to Tian Fu Square is simple and cheap. In reality, most of these participants have only a vague understanding about the real meaning of Christmas Day. Some of them do not know its connotation due to their poor education and they just focus on the pleasure they can obtain from the frolic. (See the pie chart below).

Secondly, traditional festivals are the spokespersons of our national culture. All the blame should not be put on the young for their ignorance of our own cultural spirit, because they lack the awareness of the importance of traditional conventions due to inadequate publicity and lack of right guidance. Thirdly, the Chinese society is going through a transition and moving towards modernity. This leads us to some questions, such as how to retain Chinese national flavor and what measures are to be taken for avoiding distortions. Essence transfer always overshadows the superficial transfer, thus the cultural essence should be given more importance.

Chinese people observe a wide variety of traditional festivals, which are mainly based on the lunar calendar, such as Spring Festival, Chinese Lantern Festival, Mid-autumn Day, etc., among which Spring Festival is the most important and the most joyful occasion in China. It is also the day of family reunions. This festival is usually celebrated in a
peaceful and harmonious way. As part of tradition, people put up the spring festival scrolls, hang lanterns, have feasts, sit up late and wait for the arrival of God of Wealth at midnight. The New Year day as an integral part of Chinese culture is usually spent with close friends and relatives at home. People seldom hang around on the streets.

According to Tom Doctoroff’s observation, before Christmas, office buildings in China’s metropolises are decked out with holiday displays. Christmas tunes can be heard everywhere, even in the government buildings. Images of Santa Claus and words like “Merry Christmas” are ubiquitous. He thinks there are two reasons behind the adoption of Christmas rituals in China. For one thing, Christmas can be viewed as a win-win festival. It combines fun with transactional gain. For another, Western holidays, Christmas and Valentine’s Day in particular, are useful tools in reinforcing individual identity within a Confucian context. He holds such a view from a foreigner’s perspective. In China, some scholars even argue for the elimination of Christmas celebration as people are ignorant about it. Now Chinese government has declared “National Holidays” on certain traditional Chinese festivals. One purpose is to give extra attention to cultural heritage in view of the prevailing westernized festival celebrations.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines culture as: the customs, beliefs, art, music, and all the other products of human thought made by a particular group of people at a particular time. Culture plays an important role in our daily life, so how to inherit it and carry it forward is an important mission. Now that some forms of cultural distortion has happened in China, it is urgent to emphasize the importance of culture. Culture cultivates men’s minds, contributes to the development of truth, goodness and beauty, consolidates the foundation of a community and is the platform for world harmony.

There are two terminologies, “high context” and “low context” that are used to describe broad-brush cultural discrepancies between communities. All modern societies have the two forms existing side by side.

Linell Davis believes that high context is employed to define societies where people have close connections over a long period of
time. Many aspects of cultural behavior are made implicit because most members know what to do and how to think through years of experience from interacting with each other. Low context refers to societies where people tend to have connections of shorter duration or just for some specific reasons. In these societies, cultural manners and subjective concepts may need to be explained directly and clearly so that newcomers can know how to behave.

Cultural discrepancy is an important factor in contemplation. Edward T. Hall argues that high-context means “most of the information is either in the physical context or initialized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message”. In comparison, low-context communication means “the mass of information is vested in the explicit code” (William and Young). America belongs to the low context while China is in the high context. A party with friends may be an obvious case in point of high context environment and the huge gathering on Tian Fu Square can fully embody this feature; however, the code, transferred from America, is not clearly understood by the Chinese, and naturally cultural distortion happens. Chinese people have internalized a distorted understanding of what is communicated and have forged a strong tie with others based on wrong activities.

In China, it seems quite normal to take in elements of the outer sphere and enrich them with Chinese characteristics; while in the US, innovation, originality, pioneering spirit and such are regarded absolutely significant. This can partly be due to the Chinese education method, which overemphasizes rote memory and exams. The traditional papers that won high honors at the old times were appraised not in view of originality but of how well they brought in phrases from the sages. The further China mixes with the rest of the globe, the more adjustments they have to make.

Some strategies are put forward to solve this dilemma. First, proper guidance should be given to young people. If the younger generation fails to identify with the cultural significance of these festivals, it is easy for foreign ones to be like carnivals giving people pleasure and enjoyment, and losing their authentic meaning. The most critical step
to inherit Chinese culture is to be aware of its importance and exclusiveness. Enough funds are allocated for promoting academic research on the history of Chinese traditional conventions.

Chinese tend to answer questions in a spiral way while westerners always prefer the linear method. It is hard to distinguish which is better, but it is certain that the entire genetic heritage is the shared legacy of human beings. Young people, after speculation, should resuscitate traditions and enhance their value.

Second, enough emphasis should be put on traditional Chinese festivals. China has a long history of brilliant culture, in which Chinese take great pride. The value of reviving this treasure is that traditions can signify the miniature of one country’s culture.

Third, excellences in foreign culture should be absorbed into Chinese culture storage. What makes traditional festivals unique and special and what keeps them breathing and refreshing are their cultural elements. Learning from each other to complement each other’s advantages is a great way for improvement. Chinese culture should take in the excellence of foreign culture and eliminate the dregs. Cultural transmission is like a flow that runs constantly. Building soft power is important to a strong country, which cannot be thought to be strong without enough emphasis on cultural concord. The optimum situation is the fusion of Chinese and Western culture. During this process, the policy of “seeking common points while preserving differences” should be kept in mind.

This thesis sets out to investigate the “culture anamorphosis” in China. Based on the above studies, this paper puts forward the following countermeasures to avoid cultural dilemmas:

- Fine Chinese culture should be stressed rather than ignored.
- Proper guidance ought to be given to the younger generation.

It is explicitly understood that culture influx and efflux are necessary in the process of cross-culture communication, but how to optimize Chinese culture and how to keep its own unique features need
more thought. Chinese people should go deep into the real sense of the intangible foreign cultural heritage that they imbibe. It is pivotal for us to have a lesson, draw a conclusion and realize every facet of this cultural dilemma for avoiding other distortions. The present paper suggests that the Chinese should carry forward the Sino-culture features through methods of evading culture anamorphosis and achieving harmony. Analysing the Christmas Day celebrations with Vygotsky’s socio cultural theory, the author believes that as long as the Chinese realize the importance of their own cultural tradition, Chinese fine culture heritage will revive energetically in the future.

Works Cited


Musings

Dr. Celine E

You had your invitation
To the concert hall of eternal silence
While you resolutely put in
Every minute preparation
My whimpering heart
Silently surveyed the song
You may be commanded to sing
Before the audience of the marriage feast
Every effort you made
To perfect the song
Every strain added a new note
Till at last I heard the voice fade
Into the ebbing cadence of the eternal silence
My waking thoughts and sleeping dreams
Have tried to capture the tunes
Of the Kingdom of light beyond the blue
Where you have your home now
Where you’ll mix your voice with
The varied strains of nations and faiths.
A Million Rainbows

My heart silent with the sadness of loss
A heavy burden sets in as if a stone has blocked
The easy flow of mountain spring
First you, without a word
Passed away into the threshold of my experience
Leaving me forlorn.
Hopefully I gripped the rock of my faith
To escape the quick sands of despair
Then you, when I least expected
Crumpling all my dreams
With it everything I held dear
Under the earth is buried
Waiting perhaps a regeneration
Silence grips my heart
As I gaze at the silent sky for
Once there I had found in the eyes
Of a shining star the calm I needed
To steady my wavering heart
Today, staring at the starless sky
Strains my vision with fog and dust
Like opaque blanket over the face
Leaves me desolate without a light
But still behind the darkest clouds
My shining star doth brilliantly reign
I can still feel rising in the horizon
A whispering breeze that’ll tear the gloom
My eyes then will behold a million rainbows
After the shower of a drenching rain.
drops of nectar

Pradeep Dharmapalan

i know not whence
these tumbling words come
have no real control
over cadence and sequence
and though i constantly seek answers
i also know
that even this desire to seek
is not an actual choice
but a command from the other side
the side not seen
but only heard
inside our heads
frequently spewing forth
as voice and word
on a roller-coaster ride of feeling
joy, anger, exasperation
sadness, concern, bewilderment,
but with it, most decidedly,
a sense of elation
from being able to ponder
and to savour
the many pleasures
of contemplation.
anomaly

it is not as if
one does not wish to fit
into the apparent order of things.
the truth is
that one probably does,
albeit not apparently so.
but the apparent and the real
are equally false, equally true.
the part one plays,
although at loggerheads with the world,
is as significant or insignificant,
as those one opposes,
or those who oppose one.
this is where, i suppose,
goaded by a sapient charioteer,
one casts all thoughts of futility aside
and steps onto the battle field.
to meet others similarly driven,
to wage a war no one understands
and no one wins.
sweppt by passions, pressing and mighty,
always overwhelming the feeble mind,
struggling not to be left behind.
what fruits of labour can one seek,
when one does not know what they are?
does it matter that one is human,
and also the dust of a star?
emotions masquerading as thought,
leave one shattered, distraught,
but keep the mind moving,
in circles and ellipses,
rotating, orbiting,
captured in constant motion.
what? how? why?
who? me? i?
take that for an answer;
take that for a reply.
Book Review

Last Man in Tower

Aravind Adiga (2011)
421 pp.

Tania Mary Vivera

Last man in Tower is the tale of plebeian righteousness and the insatiable struggle for dignity against the relentless forces of capitalism shouldered by the virtuous Masterji and set in the all-engulfing Mumbai city-‘which folds in on itself like a practitioner of Yoga’. Aravind Adiga, transitioning from the concise characterisation in White Tiger has zoomed in on the mid economic class, who when showed a little cash would ‘jump, dance and run naked in the streets’. A cynical yet slap on the face portrayal of Mumbai where a garbage pit is ‘a marsh: cellophane, eggshell, politician’s face, banana leaf, sliced-off chicken’s feet and green crowns cut from pineapples. Ribbons of unspooled cassette-tape draped over everything like molten caramel.’ (Adiga, 2011) and where the underdogs have been tossed around like pebbles caught up in a torrent, a city in transit which recognises none and belongs to none. The nauseating human souls which squeeze through suffocating metro rail cabins, unable to breathe, but invincible all the same. Mumbai which never stops growing, created by junk, rubble and mulch, is every land developer’s dream and Adiga’s chief characters grow around this stereotype-churning, perpetually evolving, febrile environment.

A vivid and visceral tale Last Man in Tower offers a semi-voyeuristic view of the residents of Tower A of the Vishram Cooperative Housing Society, who have been blindsided by an irresistible offer by the unscrupulous builder and developer, Dharmen Shah, who proposes to build his dream project of salubrious luxury apartments- Shanghai- at the very site of the decrepit, yet ‘impeachably pucca’ Vishram society.
The promised riches and the ‘sweetner’ treats opportunistically handed out by Shah, reroutes even the most resilient residents, and gives wings to their otherwise clandestine dreams. Their life compromises become unbearable in the face of promised luxury. The Secretary Kothari’s shameful attraction to Africa and his passion for Flamingoes, Mr and Mrs Pinto’s reluctant acceptance of the power of money to tie up loose familial threads, Mrs Puri’s blatant refusal to continue to wash the bottom of her son who is afflicted with down syndrome and the fragile Ibrahim Kudwa’s inability to say no, which might ruin the good impression he had tried to create all his life soon become ticked check boxes in Shah’s dream run. The generous buyout proposed by Shah is rebuffed by Masterji, a lone, retired teacher who is clinging on to the memories of his late wife and daughter, through the camphor tinted walls and whispering calendar of his 3A flat. The lure of money and the upcoming demolition deadline creates enemies of friends and conspirators of acquaintances. Shah perplexed by Masterji’s acquiescence as the ‘last man standing’ coupled with an unabashed respect for human greed, is aghast when Masterji refuses to ‘want anything’. A profound moral abyss is created when Masterji’s top-up science classes get boycotted; threatening calls reoccur and human shit is smeared on his front door. Masterji refuses to succumb and resorts to legal help, a source which dries up as quickly as it started. His son Gaurav accuses him of prejudice and pride, and wants his father to forget his thirty four years of teacherhood and for once listen to worldly advice his son gives him. Masterji fortifies his battle when he realises that he is not fighting against someone but for someone, the someone being the slogging, half naked labourers fighting to survive. The ailing Shah, coughing up toxic phlegm from his demolition projects, is devilishly sly in his approach and does nothing while the money fuelled Society digs its own route to self annihilation.

Aravind Adiga fruitfully reconstructs the nuances of middle class Indians, their phony religiosity, insatiable greed and false morality. His characters are well etched out and project a complex face of India which is searching for wholesomeness of any sort. Adiga upholds his objectivity by sketching the intrinsic flaws of his protagonists, the unyielding narcissism of Masterji and the ruthless ambition of Shah, that are twin
portrayals of the same persona. The tale sustains a melancholic streak and this previews the reader to a doomed finale. The story loses it momentum half way, possible because of the thin storyline, and predictable outcome. A lone man’s pathetic fight against his scheming neighbours turned blood sucking animals, and the vicious entrapment of all righteousness and virtue seems to forgo the fundamental hope which holds humanity together. Ajwani’s retort, ‘You and I were trapped: but we wanted to be trapped’ (Adiga, 2011) leaves the reader with a self scepticism which is faintly mitigated by the characterisation of the slum boys as future Masterjis.

Aravind Adiga has reported that his socio economic narratives have come to a close with Last Man in Tower but his superfluous yet sensual writing, liberally splashed with vivid, repulsive images and his magnified scrutiny of his characters is both startling and powerful. Last Man in Tower is blatantly realistic in its design: There is no avoiding the basic truths of life, money and power, we just evolve around it.

Reference

Nandan Nilekani's "Imagining India" is certainly the most well-researched and brilliant book to have come out in recent times. He has succeeded in explaining things that appear to be a mesh to the common man into something of a linear and structured set of thoughts. He has taken the concept of ideation to the next realm and it is a pleasant surprise, coming as it is, from a technocrat cum entrepreneur. Nandan proves that above all his achievements and qualifications he is a patriot of the highest order, a quality that is sadly lacking these days among our countrymen. The very fact that this book was not written for the sake of just writing one but he felt the need for writing it as he tells us- itself lends credence to his attempt. Where this book is different from say a book of Shiv khera or any other distinguished writer is the sheer number of issues that he has covered and the thought that went into it. The only book that it could be compared to could be Barrack Obama's "The Audacity of Hope" as it is very similar in its theme though different in some ways too.
To put things in context Nandan has taken us to the period of the British rule and through the independence struggle to the years after independence and finally the India that is today. He has explained precisely how ideas have evolved over the years and how and why they happened. He has actually divided his book into four parts. The first part discusses "The ideas that have arrived". Here he speaks about the changes that have come about in the thought process of the people over the years. He goes as far back as the eighteenth century to explain how things were done in those days and the logic behind it and how it gradually changed over the years and what prompted those changes. He speaks of a consensus that has been arrived at by the Indian public regarding the importance of democracy, globalization, English education, technology, and population. He states that the attitudes have changed rapidly and radically through the years and these have come about as a result of the acceptance that these ideas received from a wide group of people through their experiences rather than any policy change by the government. He says that in many cases people championed the change as it was in the case of English education or the government being bereft of options as what happened before the opening of markets in 1991 when the coffers were empty, leading to the phenomenon of globalization. He delves into the importance of English education and the opportunities it presents. The "access" that comes with globalization, people as more of a resource than that of a burden, technology as a great leveller etc. are some of the important points that he raises.

The second part is about "Ideas in progress" - issues that are "still in the ether". Matters that are widely accepted but still leaves a lot to be desired. The idea of complete literacy, creation of a common domestic market, urbanization, decentralization and infrastructure development where we still are a work in progress.

Part 3 is about "Ideas in battle" where no progress has been reached due to people pulling in different directions with different agendas and vested interests. The problem here as he says is that no consensus can been arrived at by the various stakeholders and the policy makers and beneficiaries. The role of State versus private universities, foreign universities and labour reforms.
Across the world, he says people are divided in their economic opinion on ideological basis that places us either on the left or the right. But in India it is different as the country is still young and there is a lot of inequality that gives way to loan waivers, handouts, caste reservations and subsidies. This is where the businessman in him shows his true colours. Though he has a point, meritocracy and all that, his argument that all of these are populist measures and shortcuts are a bit hard to swallow. He believes that free markets can deliver everything though it's debatable. But he has a word of caution and calls for proper regulation and he gives the example of the economic crisis of 2008 as an example of what can happen in the absence of regulation. This is the only part he is a bit ambiguous in the entire book.

The fourth part is titled "Ideas to anticipate". Here he goes a bit futuristic. He anticipates the things that could go wrong in the future. He compares other countries that have trodden a similar path and dissects the problems that they faced. He gives us certain insights as to how we could prevent and avoid them and respond to them at the earliest. The "forgotten nooks of policy, ideas that have largely been missing from the public discourse", energy, environment, pension systems, health (obesity, lifestyle diseases) are the issues here.

Nandan has covered a lot of ground, an ever rolling set of ideas at a time when writers are getting more and more specialised. Nowhere does the narrative go wayward or careens off the track. The thing that stands out among everything is how non-judgemental he is and though it can be misconstrued as being diplomatic, it doesn't seem to be the case. He discusses the pros and cons of every idea that is in progress and says the time is ripe for India to make good on its promises. He gives the benefit of doubt to everyone and is magnanimous in his discourse. He says the country can dig deep into its heritage and legacy to regain its sense of self-worth that got eroded after the British colonised it. And stops short of negating the British argument that they "invented India" because of the more than 700 kingdoms and princely states always at loggerheads that it comprised and the couple of years it took even after independence for all of them to integrate into the Indian state. He has a genuine point when he says that the politicians have failed the people miserably. He believes that at the time of
independence the politicians were way ahead of its people while the opposite is true these days. It has found an echo in recent times with the hunger strike of Anna Hazare and the way people responded to it subsequently opening the eyes of our lawmakers. He is not downright critical of anyone including Nehru whom he justifies by going into the reasons for his belief in fabian socialism even as Capitalism was thought of as evil as it was considered a byproduct of Imperialism in those days. The Soviet Union, for all it's faults, was on the rise and the world had just witnessed two bloody wars along with the Great depression and was beset by hunger and famine. He also quotes Nehru from his last days when he went on record saying it wouldn't matter whether India was known as a Capitalist, Socialist or Communist country unless and until development was achieved and it became self-reliant.

He concludes that we are running out of time and the moment is apt for us to make that giant leap. He wants us to make the right choices and hopes that we finally would. He winds up by saying that "in the long term, we will either become a country that greatly disappoints when compared with our potential or one that beats all expectations." It's for us to choose! All in all, a compelling read.
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*I, Sr. Christabelle, declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.*

15th October 2011

*Sr. Christabelle*  
*Printer & Publisher*
St. Teresa’s College believes in the education and empowerment of women as the only path towards the realisation of a brighter future for humankind. The college, established in 1925, is affiliated to the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam and nationally accredited at the A Level. The first college for women in the city of Kochi and the second in the state of Kerala, this premier institution pursues excellence in every aspect of teaching and learning. Turning women into individuals in their own right, individuals who by actualizing their potential, command and earn respect, is the noble task the institution embraces. This vision is an embodiment of the ideals of the Founder of the college, Mother Teresa of St. Rose of Lima, a far-sighted educationist who understood the need for educating women. Led by the Congregation of the Carmelite Sisters of St. Teresa (CSST), the college has undertaken this mission with zeal.