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Rethinking the Model of Translation of the Literary Text as Creative Interpretation and Examining the Translation of the Literary Title as a Problem of “Hidden Meanings”



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Abstract

This paper argues against the inclusion of the translation of works of literature in the commonly theorized model of semantic transfer from the source text to the target text and for the role of the title in the complex structure of the literary work of art. Works of literature – including their titles – are by their nature polysemic. One of the terminological deficiencies of English literary scholarship is the lack of a term for the “hidden meanings” of a literary text. Unfortunately, the use of the word “sense” by Frank Kermode has not become accepted, nor has the key role of the title and also the ending of a work been sufficiently recognized in English literary scholarship. The function of the title in creating “hidden meanings” resists generalization, yet the issue of translating the title has not received deserved attention, although it is central to the work of analysis of the text that the translator must undertake.

Key words: meaning; sense; title; ending; translation; interpretation

Introduction

A perusal of Anglo-American theoretical writings on translation leaves the reader with a sense of disquiet at the inclusion of the translation of the literary text under the general heading of translating as a burden to be carried across a gap – in this case between two different idioms. Such a conceptual model lies at the heart of those linguistic-based translation studies that seek to theorize and categorize the practice of translation¹. There is no doubt a place for that model in many situations where the meaning of a text is unequivocal and simple replication of that meaning in another language is the objective. This model excludes by default aesthetic considerations and ambiguity, needing only a simple identification of the register of the source language

¹ See, for example, the definition in Colina 2015, 3.

and the choice of an equivalent in the target language. Theories, however, tend to generalize and to be prescriptive, whereas literature is subjective and polysemic and abhors generalization. Defending the theoretical model, Peter Newmark writes: "From a translator's point of view [connotations are] the only theoretical distinction between a non-literary and a literary text". He then lists such "connotations": "polysemy, word-play, sound-effect, metre, rhyme" (1988, 16-17). This list only scratches the surface of the possible features of a literary work.

Instead of Newmark's and Colina's translation model I would argue that the work of the translator of the literary text is analogous to the work of an actor *interpreting* a role, essentially mimicking the voice of the narrator, but in a different idiom. Moreover, there can be different "performances" of the same text by the same interpreter, as they reflect on the text, perceive different nuances of meaning, and adjust the discourse in their own idiom. It is not banal to say that the interpretation of a poem, a short story, or other literary text is an art, just as an actor's interpretation of a role is an art. The actor's work of presenting onstage the *image* of a character in a play-text grows out of their interpretation of the entire work. Similarly, the translation of a poem, novel, or other work of literary art requires a careful study of the original text, including the title, and the production of its perceived *image* in the interpreter's idiom. French translator and poet André Markowicz has been adamant in his unabashed insistence on translating the effect of the words in the source text into its, sometimes, shocking equivalent in the target language, refusing to reshape the text to suit French "tastes"². He has been consistent in this from the very start with his translation of the works of Dostoevsky. He recently stated: "In essence my translations [are] an interpretation. All one can ask of a translator is, not to say the truth of a text, but to say his or her truth of it, and to share this reading"³. In the same spirit, in his translations of poetry, he makes the form – meter, rhyme – as close to the original as possible, since the form of a literary text is part of its meaning. He has not long ago completed, together with his partner Françoise Morvan, for the first time in history, the translation into French of all of Shakespeare's sonnets *in the meter of the original*.

Complicating the matter is the fact that each work of literature brings what has been called in English "hidden meanings"⁴. The word "meaning" in this context demands explanation, since English terminology is frustratingly imprecise. Those who read Russian know that in that language there are two words for meaning. The first – *znachenie* – refers to "meaning" in the ordinary sense of an unambiguous

² Contrast this practice with Gideon Toury's statement: "Literary translation would involve the imposition of conformity positions [...] namely to *models and norms which are deemed literary at the target end*" (1999, 50; my italics – JDC).

³ My translation – JDC. « Mes traductions [sont] par essence une interprétation. Tout ce qu'on peut demander d'un traducteur n'est pas de dire la vérité d'un texte, mais de dire *sa* vérité du texte et de partager sa lecture ».

⁴ Toury speaks of the "web of relationships" in a literary text. This seems hardly an appropriate description of the exhaustive interpretive possibilities of a literary artwork.

correspondence between a sign and the fact denoted. Another word, *smysl*, is used to mean those underlying complexes of signification that exist in all literary texts, and which cannot be easily construed. In English there is no such word in general use among literary scholars for this type of signification. In Frank Kermode's classical study titled *The Sense of an Ending*, his usage of the word "sense" corresponds exactly to the word *smysl*. Moreover, Kermode is right in asserting that the ending is almost always meaningful. It is where the story stops. It has a *smysl*, a sense. For example, Alice Munroe's *Runaway prima facie* seems to be a disjointed set of stories with no coherence. But if one inquires what is the last word of the book, it is in fact "dust", referring to the cremated remains of a character. This last word defines the *sense* of the whole. It invokes the words of the Christian burial rite "ashes to ashes, dust to dust", and points to a general "hidden" meaning in the stories – the "sense" running through them of the decline of religion in Canada, and the problem of how to solemnize (or not) the disposal of a deceased person's remains – the dust. So, it is definitely worth looking at how a text ends. This is not, of course, always true, although the absence of a meaning-full ending may also be meaningful. Unfortunately, the word "sense", as Kermode uses it, has not caught on in general use among literary scholars working in English.

The Title as an indispensable part of a literary text

After the ending, the most important and meaningful element of any work of literature is usually its title⁵. The title of a work presents especial difficulties for a translator⁶. The most obvious function is the title as the name of the text, identifying it and enabling it to be documented and catalogued. A literary text cannot lack a title. By default, if a poem is untitled, its first line becomes its title. Naming is, however, only its most basic function. Its role in creating meaning within the text is just as important. Natalia Veselova demonstrates that the title has a key role in the overall aesthetic system of the literary text. It is outside the text, but has a profound relation to it. She describes this paradoxical position – the ontology of the title – thus:

One of the most important characteristics of the title is the fact that it is located on the external boundary of the text: between the text and the reality beyond it. Of course, apart from the title there are other "boundary" positions that mark the limits of the textual space: the first and the last line. But unlike these, the title both separates off the text and is itself separated from it. [...] Thus, the title does not belong to the text inseparably. On one side it touches the world lying beyond the limits of the texts, and

⁵ For a survey of the history and evolution of the literary title, and how the style of titling has evolved over the centuries in the Western tradition, see Levin 1977.

⁶ Peter Newmark, in the very brief subsection "Titles" of his textbook (1988, 56-57) is alarmingly brief in the attention given to titles, and does not distinguish between literary and other texts.

on the other the text, marking its beginning. Thanks to its boundary position, the title serves as a connective link between the text and reality beyond it, and correlates first itself, and then, through its agency, the actual text, with certain phenomena external to the text. As a result, the semantic structure of the text is made significantly more complex because of those meanings that the title imports “from outside”. It is through the title that the reader’s understanding of the given concrete text is oriented and the conditions governing its reading are set out. (1998, 86. My translation – JDC)

Ilaria Remonato further defines the role of the title as (potentially) the voice of the author:

At a general level, the relevance of titles as integral parts of literary works needs to be underlined: since the whole headline is unmediated by a narrative voice, it may be, in concrete terms, as close as we come within that text to an authorial voice. This is the reason why [...] we talk of “poetics” of titles [...], because in many cases they convey and condense in a few words meaningful thematic instances connected to the poetics of the author. (2022, 39)

There are various types of titles, some of which are documented by Steven Kellman (1975, 154-156). It may simply be the name of the main character, or it may be a word or phrase in the text that is highlighted. It may be a quotation or reported speech. It may be a metaphor. Titles can be full of meaning, full of “senses”. They are an example of what one should call sense-creating, or perhaps “meaning-full” elements. Consequently, the translation of the title should be the last thing to be finalized after careful reflection and analysis of the text. It is this process of analysis and how to translate the title that is the object of what follows.

The danger of mistranslating the title

I have always thought there was something strange about the English title of Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is ungrammatical. In English we put the proper name before the noun, not after it. For example, we say the “Brontë sisters”, not “the sisters Bronte”, and the “Kennedy brothers”, not “the brothers Kennedy”. Yet, more than 100 years after the first English translations appeared of this novel, *The Brothers Karamazov* is still the generally accepted translation of the book’s title in English. I would argue that it has changed in a subtle way the reception of the book by English speakers. The mistranslation of the title suggests something strange and foreign and mysterious to the intended reader, and indeed this is the image of the Russian writer in the English-speaking world. A hidden meaning perhaps? No, just the fact that this “Russian accent” is now engrained in the reception of Dostoyevsky’s novel. I assume that the origin of the mistake was a literal translation of the French *Les Frères Karamazoff*, which is the correct order in French, since Dostoyevsky’s

novels were originally translated into that language before English, and British translators' knowledge of Russian in the Victorian period was limited, to say the least. As far as I have been able to discover, the first translator of the book into English was Isabel Florence Hapgood (1905), shortly followed by Constance Garnett (1912). For those who were translating directly from the Russian original, as they were, the simple grammatical error is unforgivable. This is a good example of how translators imitate one another's mistakes. Even the most recent translation, by Michael R. Katz, copies this mistranslation of the title, although two of his recent predecessors – Julius Katzer (1980) and Ignat Avsey (1994) did finally translate it correctly as *The Karamazov Brothers*. Out of curiosity I wrote to Katz to ask him why he used the incorrect title. He replied: "Reasons of tradition. [...] I felt that the *Brothers Karamazov* was more euphonic and *slightly mysterious*. So I kept it"⁷. So, the Russian accent in the title was "slightly mysterious". In fact, this is a problem. The reader was supposed to be enticed by this mysteriousness, which had nothing to do with Dostoevsky or his book, the title of which in Russian is normal with no "mysteriousness". The justification, apparently, was to make the book more intriguing and therefore sales-worthy. The title corresponded to clichés in the English-speaking world about Russia and Russians. This little anecdote about the title of Dostoevsky's book illustrates the importance of the title in conditioning the reader's reception of the work. It also suggests something equally important, namely that the translator should be careful not to repeat others' mistakes, since the product of their labour may leave a long-lasting misunderstanding of the work in the target language.

Titles and Epigraphs

Even after analyzing the source text in its totality, including the title and its relation to the text, when giving the translated text its title in the target language, the translator may feel their translation is incomplete. It is especially the "hidden meanings" or senses that are the most difficult part. Often, they cannot be captured in the target language for a variety of reasons. And even after giving the title a lot of thought, the translator will have to deal with a formidable opponent – the publisher, whose interests are often very different from theirs – and who may veto the title, however well chosen. Moreover, in addition to the title proper, as Genette points out (1997, 117-160), there are often subtitles, dedications, epigraphs and other matter placed after the title proper, but before the beginning of the text, so that together with these other components the title can be part of an entire prefatory complex. Here again a work by Dostoevsky provides an instructive example. His novel, titled in Russian *Besy*, is now generally referred to in English as *Demons*. It took a long time

⁷ Email to the author from Michael Katz. (My italics – JDC).

for it to get its rightful name. The novel has two epigraphs: the first epigraph is a fragment from Pushkin's poem "Demons", in which a nobleman and his coachman get lost in a swirling snowstorm. The superstitious coachman blames a swarm of demons for them losing their way, and this theme is taken up by the nobleman: "...various demons have begun to swirl".

The second epigraph, from the Gospel according to St. Luke, 9: 32-36 is the parable of the Gadarene swine. The novel first appeared in English with Constance Garnet's 1913 translation under the title *The Possessed*, clearly influenced by Victor Derély's French translation of 1886 titled *Les Possédés*. Surprisingly, there is even a recent translation into English with this title. In 1953 David Magarshack published a new translation with the title *The Devils*, thus recognizing the link between the title and the fragment from Pushkin's poem. The two titles thus reference the two separate epigraphs in the novel. Magarshack's title refers to the first epigraph, the fragment from Pushkin's poem "Demons", and Garnett's title *The Possessed* references the second epigraph, the Gospel parable of the Gadarene swine. The most recent title, and the one that corresponds most tightly to the Russian, is Michael R. Katz's choice: simply *Demons*. Katz thoughtfully chooses to omit the definite article, recognizing that the title is in fact a quotation from the words of the lyrical persona of Pushkin's poem: "various demons". Whether one chooses *Demons* or *The Possessed*, is perhaps not so important as the metaphorical function they both serve to describe the author's view of the revolutionaries who try to stage a coup in their little town. The demons they are possessed by are actually, we learn in the novel, the microbes of rationalistic Western culture. An interesting effect created by Dostoevsky's choice of Pushkin's poem for an epigraph is that one can no longer think about the poem in the same way, especially when it is juxtaposed with the parable from the Bible. The later writer makes explicit in his novel what was only implicit in the poem before.

"Hidden Meanings" and the translation of titles

A function of the title is the creation of hidden meanings (senses) that resonate with the text to enrich and render more complex the total sense of the work. The naming of a book after one or several of the characters in it may seem to be simply a question of a random choice on the author's part, but in fact they may be the result of choosing "speaking names". In the case of *The Karamazov Brothers*, the first element of the surname *kara* clearly relates to the Russian verb *karat'* meaning to punish, and indeed punishment is a theme in the novel. Interestingly enough, the title of Tolstoy's novel *Anna Karenina* also contains that root, and indeed that message in the title is reflected in the epigraph to the novel: "Vengeance is mine, and I shall repay". We should further notice that the surname Karenin is not Anna's, but that of her husband, a high-level member of the civil service. She has not married him for love,

but because of his status. She is his prize, a trophy wife. To drive home the point, one of the rewards given to those in service was that of the Order of St. Anna. Thus, the entire story of Anna is encapsulated in her name which is the title of the book. She has been bought by her husband, an older man whom she does not love. If she is unfaithful to him, she will be punished: crushed by the weight of social opinion, and driven to throw herself under a locomotive. It might be legitimate, then, to think of the two great novels *Anna Karenina* and *The Karamazov Brothers* in relation to each other – and perhaps to a third novel without the *kara* root in its title, but the explicit mention of punishment itself. I am referring, of course, to another novel by Dostoevsky – *Crime and Punishment*, which in fact came chronologically first in the sequence, so that a “dialogue of titles” can emerge around a common theme.

The Title as Parody

Written some twenty years after *Anna Karenina*, Anton Chekhov’s story “Anna Round the Neck” is, as Stephen Baehr has pointed out (1995, 34), a parodic inversion of Tolstoy’s novel. Anya, the heroine in the story, is only eighteen when she marries (hence the condescending diminutive form of her formal name “Anna”). Though initially intimidated by her husband, who is 52, she soon learns how to manipulate him, spend his money, and flirt with the wealthy businessman Artynov. Modest Alekseich, her husband, quotes his superior’s comment to another colleague whose wife was also called Anna, upon his receiving the order of St. Anna Second Class: “you now have three Annas: one in your buttonhole and two around your neck”. (Civil servants wore the medal of the order on a chain around their neck on ceremonial occasions, and a badge in their lapel at other times). Modest Alekseich fears the same fate – and indeed he does receive the St. Anna Second Class and his Anya does turn into a millstone around his neck. The title of the story is significant. The fact that it begins with “Anna” makes the comparison with Tolstoy’s novel inevitable and clearly intended. The name of Anya’s husband is Modest Alekseich. Since Karenin’s name is Aleksey, the husband’s patronymic makes him “son of Aleksey” – suggesting that Karenin is his literary forebear. He is a more “modest” version of Karenin, grovelling before superiors in the small provincial town and hoping for the paltry reward of the Order of St Anna and the extra 70 roubles per year of stipend that goes with it. (For comparison, Anya, his young wife, spends 100 roubles on a single dress). The title of the story is difficult to translate. The pun is possible in Russian because the medal was simply called “Anna” in familiar circles. One translator renders it word for word as “Anna on the Neck”. The other translation I have found – “Anna Round the Neck” – works better because it realizes the metaphor of a woman dependant on her husband, although their relationship quickly becomes totally inverted. By the end of the story Anya has all the power, and treats her husband with contempt, so that there is a deep irony in this inversion of the plot of Tolstoy’s novel. The French title is “Anne

au cou" and German "Anna am Halse". Neither of these languages is able to come close to the deep ironies immediately apparent to the Russian reader when it was published. (The orders in question were abolished after the Bolshevik revolution). It is a case where the translator might be tempted to have recourse to a paraphrase or a footnote.

Title as quotation

Sometimes the title is a quotation from some other work of literature to which the author might, or might not, draw attention. We then have to consider what is the link between the quotation chosen by the author and the content of the work. In short, what is its "hidden meaning" or sense? In Cormac McCarthy's novel *No Country for Old Men* the title is a quotation from "Sailing to Byzantium", a poem by William Butler Yeats, of which the first two stanzas seem particularly pertinent – the "swan song" of an old man who feels out of place in his now liberated homeland: "That is no country for old men. The young / In one another's arms, birds in the trees, / Those dying generations at their song [...]" (Yeats 1966, 95). What has "Sailing to Byzantium" to do with a novel full of bloodshed that takes place on the Mexican borderlands of Texas? The clue is in the author's first name – in his youth he changed it from Charles to Cormac in honour of his Irish ancestry. The Irish poet wrote his poem in 1927, when he was 62; McCarthy's book was written when the author was 72, an "aged man". Towards the end of the novel there is a long rumination in italics by Sheriff Bell, who had tried in vain to avert the inevitable bloodshed to come. It is not difficult to see Sheriff Bell, who complains about the decline of mores in America and who desparingly retires at the end, as the projection of the author himself. It is as if, shocked by the violence of the plot he has written, he has left the novel open-ended, unable to finish it, or perhaps suggesting that the bloodshed in America is unending, and he is giving up in disgust. The *sub rosa* identification of the author as a disillusioned old man like Yeats, himself disillusioned with the way an independent Ireland was going in the 1930s, suggests that the figure of Sheriff Bell is indeed a projection of the author.

Armed with these observations, let us then see how the title has been translated into various languages:

No Country for Old Men
Non, ce pays n'est pas pour le vieil homme
To nie jest kraj dla starych ludzi
No es país para viejos
Kein Land für alte Männer

We do not know if the translators were aware that they were translating a fragment from Yeats, but one would have expected them to catch on to the poetic tone and rhythm of the original. The French translation is a wordy, “literal” retelling of the English title, concerned only with the semantics of the original, but serenely indifferent to its structure and sound. Nothing remains of the clipped concise four-word verbless and article-free original, which is reflective of Sheriff Bell’s terse Texan dialect. The Polish translator is forced to be more wordy. Nevertheless, the Polish title reads like a line of poetry with a caesura between *kraj* and *dla*. The German reflects very closely the English syntax – unsurprisingly. Perhaps the best translation is the Spanish, which is simple, terse, and sounds like something one of the Mexican characters in the novel might have said.

The Problem of the Article

Not all languages have definite and indefinite articles – for example, most of the Slavic languages – Polish, Russian, etc.. This fact places the translator into English before a choice when the title is a noun: “the”, “a(n)” or zero?⁸ In general the definite article in English serves the naming function of the title. It reflects an external perspective on the content of the poem or novel it names. An indefinite article in the singular tends to reflect an authorial comment on the matter of the work. A zero article is usually a quoted opinion from one of the characters, as in the title of McCarthy’s novel discussed above. Vladimir Mayakovsky’s play titled in Russian *Klop*, in English “bedbug” was titled by its translators *The Bedbug*. In other words, they translated quite “literally”⁹ the semantics of the word *klop* rather than its form and function in the play. The definite article distances the reader’s perspective, announcing a play called “The Bedbug”. However, the play contains a bitter, self-ironic portrayal of the poet himself as being out of step with the new Soviet reality. (Shortly after writing it, he committed suicide). The main character Prisyypkin is frozen by accident and only wakes up fifty years later when he is defrosted and is relegated to a zoo for the edification of the masses. He finds companionship in a bedbug that has also been defrosted in the aseptic, parasite-free future. The metaphor of an unwanted member of society as an insect was part of the Zeitgeist in the early years of the twentieth century: for example, Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, who wakes up and finds he has been transformed into a monstrous insect. What is striking about the Russian title is its concision and the shock effect of the monosyllable: the author is self-dramatizing, calling attention to his position as vermin in a futuristic Soviet society. Which article should one use: definite, indefinite, or none? The title is

⁸ Hoek’s list is rather different because he is referencing French (164); in other words, article usage will vary according to the language.

⁹ On the use of this term in translation studies see Bobadilla-Perez 2007, 119.

best with simply one monosyllabic word with no article: “*Bug*”. In contemporary playbills the title stood out as the painful cry of an author *in extremis*.

The Importance of Context

Works of literature, especially poetry, are by their nature polysemic. Any attempt at literary translation needs to take into consideration the *context* in which the source text appeared. Recently I translated a short poem by Pushkin into English. I began by researching the time, place and circumstances in which it was written. I also sought to reproduce the *form* chosen by the poet, since the formal characteristics were intrinsic to the meaning. In Russian the title of the poem is simply “Uznik”, which means “prisoner”. Pushkin wrote the poem in Kishinev, Bessarabia in March 1822, the year in which the Russian government tightened control over the potential revolutionaries among the army officers. On February 6th one officer, a friend of Pushkin’s, Vladimir Raevsky, was arrested and imprisoned in Tiraspol fortress with no visitors allowed. Shortly thereafter, Pushkin himself was placed under house arrest by the governor of the province, General Inzov, who had been mandated by the Emperor Alexander to keep an eye on this young, unruly poet. In exile in Kishinev Pushkin had got into frequent scrapes – duels and scandals, and more than once had been placed under house arrest. This time it was for quarreling with a local nobleman. Inzov was actually fond of Pushkin and so the punishment chosen was again house arrest, which meant confiscating the poet’s boots. A month or so later Pushkin absolved himself by attending the Easter service. Outside the building where Pushkin was “incarcerated” there was an eagle that had had its flight feathers removed.

Pushkin’s poem was prompted by Byron’s *The Prisoner of Chillon*, which he read in a prose translation in French, since it was only in the Autumn of 1822 that Zhukovsky published his Russian translation of Byron’s poem (Pushkin 2016, 735). Interestingly, Pushkin wrote the poem in amphibrachs, not the four-foot iambs of Zhukovsky’s elegies or Byron’s poem. Moreover, it is brief compared to Byron’s wordy poem. It consists of three quatrains and has only masculine rhymes (rather than the usual alternating masculine-feminine lines common in Pushkin’s time). Other features that one must take into consideration in reproducing the overall “shape” of the original are the three anaphoras in the last quatrain, and the fact that the last word is *ia* (“I”) – in the strongest position in the poem after the title. Since the first word of the poem, *sizhu* (“I sit”) is marked by its grammatical form as being in the first-person singular, but without the pronoun, the appearance of the first-person *ya* in the strongest position at the end is very striking indeed. This is the internal drama of the poem – the passage to expressing the missing pronoun of the first line in the final, assertive position as the last word of the poem. In Russian there is a certain reluctance to use the first-person nominative pronoun, which probably explains the

abundance of impersonal structures in the language. Its use at the end of the poem could therefore be thought a powerful assertion of the speaker's humanity, although the word is attributed to the eagle, as an unspoken thought. This deep meaning of the poem is muted in English, since the English verb "sit" needs an explicit subject, expressed in Russian by the verb ending.

One problem is the title. In his recent collection of unrhymed translations of Pushkin's poetry Antony Wood rendered it as "The Prisoner" – following Byron's example, reproducing its distanced contemplative perspective – like the title of a painting (Pushkin 2020, 17). But the translator into English has other options. My choice to omit any article was motivated by the perception that the title is actually a rueful, ironic thought addressed by the lyrical persona to himself: "you have landed under house arrest for foolish behaviour, but others are real prisoners in harsh conditions with little hope of freedom". Thus, the "hidden meaning" of the poem is the assertion of the lyrical persona's humanity, but also a humble and ironic realization that a friend and fellow poet is seriously imprisoned, whereas the poet's "imprisonment" is only a benign corrective imposed by his well-meaning superior. (Raevsky spent four years in solitary confinement in Tiraspol, was eventually exiled to Siberia, and is today remembered as the "first Decembrist"). Here is my translation of the poem, with the Russian original below.

Prisoner

I sit behind bars in a dank dungeon cell.
A young eagle, raised in captivity's hell,
My gloomy companion, waves wings as in flight,
And pecks bloody food near the window's dim light.

He pecks, turns away, through the window sees me,
As if I am thinking the same thought as he.
Through glances and cries he implores me to see,
And seems to be saying: "My friend let us flee!

We two are free creatures. 'Tis time, friend, 'tis time!
Let us soar o'er the clouds where the white mountains climb,
Where only the blue ocean's wave meets the eye,
Where only the wind freely wanders ... and I!"

[Узник // Сижу за решеткой в темнице сырой. / Вскормленный
в неволе орел молодой, / Мой грустный товарищ, махая крылом, /
Кровавую пищу клюет под окном, // Клюет, и бросает, и смотрит
в окно, / Как будто со мною задумал одно. / Зовёт меня взглядом и
криком своим / И вымолвить хочет: «Давай улетим! // Мы вольные
птицы; пора, брат, пора! / Туда, где за тучей белеет гора, / Туда, где
синее море края, / Туда, где гуляем лишь ветер... да я!...»]

I do not claim, nor do I expect, that this version will be widely acclaimed. My objective was to give the reader a sensation of the shape of the poem, and to try to emulate the effect of the original on the reader. Russian-speakers to whom I have read it were surprised to recognize the poem, even if they did not understand English. I felt that the general intention was realized – to create an *image* of the poem in English – blurry, to be sure, but still recognizable.

Concluding remarks

The above discussion is informed by the belief that in literature the title – text relationship is sacrosanct, and that both deserve equal respect in the process of interpreting. Moreover, I would argue that the arid theorizing of translation studies documented by Anthony Pym has nothing to tell us about the process of translating a literary work. That process is akin to that of the literary scholar, a process of research and creative interpretation that respects the verbal and formal aspects of the source text, seeks to understand the culture that produced it, and strives, always incompletely, to recreate the totality of its image in the target idiom.

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Shared Grounds, Shifting Agreements: On the Liminal Structure of Deep Disagreements¹



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Abstract

This paper explores the nature of deep disagreements through a reinterpretation of Wittgenstein's concept of *form of life*. Rather than adopting skeptical or relativist positions, it questions the assumption that disagreement marks a failure of rational communication. The central claim is that deep disagreements are *liminal* in structure: they unfold at the threshold between shared and divergent backgrounds of understanding, and must be approached as such. Drawing on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and related remarks, the paper argues that disagreement and understanding are made possible by the same background conditions. The possibility of partial understanding depends not on reaching a final consensus, but on our ability to recognize and respond to unfamiliar ways of speaking and acting. This account shifts the focus from resolution to acknowledgment, and from epistemic closure to the ongoing conditions of mutual intelligibility.

Key words

deep disagreement, form of life, Wittgenstein, liminality, acknowledgment

"I forgot, it's no use arguing because of course I won't be listened to; because there is no will to understand, but only one not to hear what the other says".

(Schönberg to Wassily Kandinsky, 4 May 1923,
in Schönberg, *Letters*, p. 93)

1. Introduction: agreements, disagreements and liminality

The central theme of this paper is the nature of deep disagreements, a topic that has long fueled philosophical debate without yielding consensus – a fitting outcome, given their apparent resistance to resolution². Rather than aligning with skeptical or

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² Deep disagreement refers to fundamental conflicts where disputing parties lack shared assumptions or methods of reasoning to resolve their differences. These disagreements often stem from incompatible

resigned interpretations of deep disagreement, this paper questions the assumption that rationality must culminate in final agreement. Its aim is not to relativize our standards of justification, but to unsettle the expectation that consensus represents the natural or necessary endpoint of understanding.

Examples of deep disagreements include debates over moral relativism, conflicting cultural frameworks, and irreconcilable metaphysical positions, such as those between science and religion or within ethical theory³. The significance of this issue lies in the high value traditionally placed on agreements: bluntly put, agreement is often seen as inherently preferable to disagreement. Moreover, deep disagreements challenge conventional models of rationality which assume that most conflicts can be resolved through open-minded, logical argumentation and access to relevant information. Their persistence calls this assumption into question.

The third element of my claim is liminality. The word “liminal” comes from the Latin “limen”, meaning “threshold”. It was the French anthropologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep who in 1909 coined the term “liminality” (Gennep 1960) understood as a state of transition between one stage and the next, to describe rites of passage in small-scale societies. Later, the anthropologist Victor Turner (1969) further developed and expanded the concept to describe phases of ambiguity, in which individuals are neither in their previous state nor have yet assumed their new one. Liminality, then, refers to a threshold state – a transitional, in-between space where established structures and roles are suspended or blurred embodying both transformation and uncertainty. Over time, the concept has been expanded to encompass broader contexts of uncertainty and ambiguity, particularly in situations where identity, meaning, or understanding remain fluid. While the term has been widely applied across disciplines, its relevance to the philosophy of disagreement has remained, as far as I can tell, underexplored. It is in this light that I propose that the notion of liminality provides a fruitful lens through which to understand the dynamics of deep disagreement. By examining the transitional nature of agreements and disagreements, I aim to illuminate how these states are intertwined and how they challenge traditional philosophical approaches to consensus and conflict.

worldviews, basic principles, or conceptual frameworks. For recent literature on deep disagreements, see Arroyo (2024), Baghrarian, Carter, and Rowland (2024), Hales (2025), Lavorerio (2021), MacFarlane (2009), Ranalli (2018 and 2022).

³A classic example of deep disagreement is the conflict between evolutionary theory and creationism. Here, two divergent frameworks clash: supporters of evolutionary theory rely on scientific evidence, empirical observation, and the methodologies of natural science, while creationists ground their beliefs in religious texts and divine revelation, rejecting the premise that empirical science alone can fully explain the origins of life. This disagreement is resistant to resolution because it arises from fundamentally different epistemic frameworks – scientific empiricism versus faith-based reasoning. Attempts at persuasion often fail, as they presuppose the validity of their own framework, which the other side rejects. This conflict underscores the limitations of rational deliberation when interlocutors lack shared assumptions.

Deep disagreements, as conceptualized by philosophers like Robert Fogelin (Fogelin 1985), are conflicts that resist resolution through rational argument alone. Such disagreements often rest on divergent frameworks or worldviews that cannot be reconciled through standard means of deliberation. But if we consider deep disagreements not as static impasses but as inherently liminal what we get is a different picture of the matter in which deep disagreements to be sure, disrupt established norms and agreements, although not because there is something that participants ignore, but by pushing them into a transitional state where frameworks of understanding are unsettled. Of course, this may not seem much of a change and this unsettlement can be still seen as a hindrance. But it can also be interpreted as a space of possibility – the opportunity to reexamine assumptions, question commitments, and engage with alternative perspectives. Be it as it may, my aim is not to emphasize the optimistic view of this unsettled space as an opportunity for transformation. Instead, I argue that the liminal nature of deep disagreements supports a more radical claim: *no disagreement is ever truly as deep as the term suggests*. The very liminality of such disagreements reveals their provisional nature, undermining the notion that they represent ultimate, insurmountable impasses.

This paper, then, challenges the traditional understanding of deep disagreements. By pointing to their liminal nature, I wish to highlight that they are provisional disruptions that reveal the shared human form of life as the foundation for agreement, even in seemingly intractable cases. Specifically, I engage with Robert Fogelin's characterization of deep disagreements as arising from incompatible "forms of life," a Wittgensteinian notion that underscores the foundational role of shared practices, customs, and values in human understanding. While Fogelin interprets the notion of "forms of life" as a source of irreconcilable conflict, I challenge this view. I propose instead that our shared human form of life, broadly conceived, provides the ground for agreement⁴. Far from rendering agreement impossible, it is precisely what makes agreement possible – even if building bridges between distinct cultural or epistemic frameworks remains a challenge.

In engaging with this issue, I also consider Maria Baghramian's work on deep disagreements and relativism. Baghramian suggests that such disagreements offer an opportunity to cultivate intellectual humility and other virtues. While I appreciate her constructive take, I see it as a kind of resignation – as if the kind of agreement we could achieve in the face of deep disagreement are mere consolation prizes. My approach, by contrast, seeks to show that such immutable agreements were never necessary for the possibility of understanding or consensus. Instead, our shared

⁴ For the purposes of my presentation there is no need to take into account all the nuances of the expression "form of life"; suffice it to say that when talking of form of life here what I have in mind is something like a fundamental human perspective. The perspective characteristic of beings endowed with language and capable of finding their feet with other human beings, no matter the cultural and historical differences among them.

human form of life provides a dynamic, yet stable enough, foundation for agreement even amidst significant differences. This perspective, I argue, offers a more compelling reframing of deep disagreements and their implications.

A note before continuing with my exposition. The argument that follows is, at best, impressionistic. I am perfectly aware of this⁵ and although it is deliberate, I understand that it will not appeal to everyone. Therefore, I will summarize what is to come in a more formal fashion:

(1) Debates and exchanges, whether philosophical or otherwise, begin with disagreement; (2) agreements cancel out disagreements; therefore, (3) we value agreements more than disagreements; (4) as the destination of argumentative exchanges, agreement is considered final; (5) as the starting point our argumentative exchanges, disagreement is also final – in the sense that it provides a fixed starting point; (6) disagreements can be superficial or deep; (7) deep disagreements as fundamental conflicts where disputing parties lack shared assumptions or methods of reasoning to resolve their differences; (8) in line with a widely accepted characterization, the concept of deep disagreements finds its roots in Wittgenstein's notion of "form of life"; (9) the notion of "form of life", as traditionally interpreted, is incompatible with the idea of a definitive, final, carved in stone for the rest of time, agreement; (10) an interpretation of both deep disagreements and "form of life" in terms of liminality calls all of the above into question and reframes deep disagreement as a contingent phenomenon dependent as much on our will to understand and acknowledge others forms of life as on any rational standard.

In light of this outline, my central thesis is that deep disagreements should not be treated as anomalies to be resolved or bypassed, but as thresholds that reveal the mutual dependence of agreement and disagreement. What I propose, therefore, is a shift of perspective: from understanding deep disagreement as a breakdown of rational discourse, to recognizing it as a constitutive feature of our form of life. This shift does not eliminate the difficulty of such disagreements. They are not to be solved once and for all, but explored as part of the human condition. The liminal structure I wish to foreground enables us to see that disagreement and understanding arise from the same background, and that their entanglement is not a failure of philosophy, but one of its proper topics.

⁵ This paper has its origin in an oral presentation. The tone of the first drafts maintained the essayistic and lighthearted style of that presentation. None of the referees who evaluated my work criticized this aspect of it, but one of them did draw attention to some reiterations of ideas (which I have tried to reduce to a minimum), and to the need to shed greater clarity on the notion of "form of life" and on its role in my defense of the liminality of deep disagreements. About the latter I will say something more in the main text, about the other comment I have already said something in the previous footnote, and I hope that the (few) modifications I have made in this regard will be enough. If not, no disagreement is deep enough, or that is what I want to defend here; what is important, if I may paraphrase Rorty, is that we can keep the conversation going.

2. The Liminal Nature of Agreement

The rigidity of the traditional conception of agreements contributes significantly to the perception of deep disagreements as irresolvable. On this view, resolution demands a definitive and final consensus – a standard that often seems unattainable in contexts of profound conflict, and this is why agreements are treated as endpoints: the culmination of negotiation, inquiry, or debate. However, agreements are rarely permanent; they are provisional settlements reached within an ongoing process of negotiation. In this sense, agreements occupy a liminal space between stability and flux. They are thresholds rather than final destinations.

Consider Socrates' dialogues, where reaching agreement served as both a method and a goal. Through persistent questioning, Socrates sought to uncover the foundations of concepts such as knowledge, justice, or happiness, aiming to reach shared conclusions with his interlocutors. Agreements, in this case, emerged not as static truths but as provisional stopping points within a process of dialectical inquiry – open to revision in light of further questioning or reflection.

Yet the broader history of philosophy and inquiry reflects a recurring aspiration toward conclusive, enduring agreements. Intuitively, the term “agreement” refers to a mutual acknowledgment of understanding or alignment: it implies at least two parties recognizing shared terms, beliefs, or conditions. More precisely, agreement can be defined as a state of harmony or accord, marking the resolution – or at least the suspension – of competing views. Philosophically, agreements are closely tied to notions of truth, knowledge, and shared meaning.

From Aristotle's categorization of knowledge to Kant's search for synthetic *a priori* principles, philosophical traditions have often assumed that agreement, once reached, represents a form of finality or closure. In ethics, for example, John Rawls' notion of “reflective equilibrium” presupposes that agreement on moral principles can be achieved through iterative reasoning and adjustment. In science, paradigmatic shifts described by Thomas Kuhn suggest temporary agreements within frameworks of shared understanding – only to be unsettled when anomalies arise.

In these examples, the shared assumption is clear: agreements are markers of progress, achieved through rational deliberation and signaling a form of closure. The expectation of finality is built into this traditional conception. After all, something that shifts or dissolves from one day to the next scarcely seems to qualify as an “agreement” at all.

Still, is this closure as final as it appears? Upon closer inspection, agreements exhibit a fundamental tension: they strive for stability but remain embedded in conditions of flux. Contexts change, perspectives evolve, opinions vary, and the very terms of agreement may be reinterpreted over time. If we accept that agreements are inherently provisional then the perception of deep disagreements as static, unbridgeable impasses begins to erode.

To illustrate these ideas, consider practical examples of agreements within different domains:

- a) In political contexts, treaties or coalitions are often formed to address immediate conflicts, but their stability depends on ongoing negotiation and adaptation to changing circumstances.
- b) In science, consensus around a theory – such as Newtonian physics or the Standard Model in particle physics – reflects provisional agreement, subject to revision or abandonment when evidence or paradigms shift.
- c) In ethics, agreements on shared values or norms (e.g., human rights) may serve as functional foundations for cooperation while remaining subject to reinterpretation across cultures or historical periods.

Each of these examples demonstrates the liminal quality of agreement in that they occupy a transitional state, offering a degree of closure while remaining open to reconsideration. This view of agreements as liminal does not entail a slide into relativism or conceptual indeterminacy. On the contrary, the very fact that agreements are situated within shared forms of practice provides the normative scaffolding that makes them both possible and revisable. What is at stake is not the abandonment of standards, but their contextual negotiation and renegotiation in light of shifting perspectives and experiences. Liminality, then, should not be confused with arbitrariness: it is a space where disagreement and agreement coexist within a framework that is stable enough to sustain communication, yet flexible enough to permit critical revision. This conception allows us to retain a robust notion of normativity while acknowledging the dynamic, evolving character of our linguistic and social lives.

Understanding agreements as thresholds rather than endpoints, then, reframes their philosophical significance. Rather than treating agreement as the resolution of disagreement, we can view both as integral to an ongoing process of understanding. Agreements, then, are not static endpoints but provisional alignments that exist within a dynamic interplay of perspectives.

This reframing has direct implications for our understanding of deep disagreements. If agreements themselves are liminal then deep disagreements too are never as insurmountable as they may appear. Disagreements are not to be seen, then, as failures of rationality but as opportunities to revisit, revise, and clarify the terms of agreement. Their perceived finality dissolves when we recognize the liminal nature of the agreements they challenge.

In the following section, I will extend these observations by examining how the liminal nature of agreements reshapes our understanding of deep disagreements. Drawing on Robert Fogelin's notion of deep disagreements as conflicts rooted in incompatible "forms of life", I argue that the shared human form of life provides a foundation for navigating such disagreements. By situating this analysis within

Wittgenstein's insights on meaning, I aim to show that the very frameworks that generate deep disagreements are also the grounds for their potential resolution.

3. Rethinking Deep Disagreements Through Liminality

Robert Fogelin (1985) is often credited with coining the term “deep disagreement”. He introduced it to draw attention to a striking phenomenon in philosophical argumentation: a kind of disagreement that, unlike more superficial ones, arises from a clash between framework propositions or fundamental principles underlying our reasoning practices. He defines deep disagreement as a fundamental conflict between two parties where the dispute is not merely over facts or values but extends to the very framework of their reasoning: “[W]e get a deep disagreement when the argument is generated by a clash of framework propositions” (Fogelin 1985, 5). These disagreements are difficult to resolve because the parties involved lack the common background required for effective argumentation – they differ on standards of evidence, meaning, and even rationality itself. Giving this, Fogelin famously concludes that deep disagreement is, by its nature, impervious to rational resolution.

Since Fogelin's paper, it has become customary to distinguish between superficial and deep disagreements depending on whether rational evaluation is possible. Most disagreements over epistemic principles are relatively shallow. They can, at least in principle, be resolved through time, deliberation, and appeal to shared standards. In contrast, disagreements over fundamental beliefs – those that are not grounded in more basic assumptions – are considered *deep*, precisely because they concern the very conditions that make belief and understanding possible.

A distinctive feature of Fogelin's conception is that it finds its roots in Wittgenstein's later philosophy. While Wittgenstein did not explicitly address “deep disagreement”, his ideas – particularly in *Philosophical Investigations* and in *On Certainty* – laid the groundwork for later debates on the topic. Central to this connection is his notion of “form of life”. Broadly understood, Wittgenstein's “forms of life” provide the normative and conceptual frameworks shared by members of a given culture, shaping the rationality of their practices and defining what counts as reasonable or meaningful within that context⁶. According to Fogelin, then, the clash underlying deep disagreement is ultimately a clash between “forms of life”.

⁶ Fogelin's work inspired a significant body of research. For instance, Turner and Wright (2005) distinguish disputes resolvable through argument from those beyond rational resolution. Laverio (2020) interprets Fogelin's theory as a form of relativism akin to Bernard Williams' relativism of distance. Melchior (2024) critiques the term “deep disagreement” and argues for alternative theories of disagreement, while Octav Popa (2022) challenges the idea that deep disagreements are categorically distinct from ordinary disagreements. Godden and Brenner (2010) explore how reason and persuasion might operate even within deep disagreements. Regardless of my sympathies to some of these works, my goal here is not to pursue all these avenues but to show that the Wittgensteinian concept of “form of life”, rather than being an irremediable cause of deep disagreement, is its cure – if we abandon the notion

Yet beyond Fogelin's skeptical account – according to which deep disagreements are inherently immune to rational resolution because they involve foundational frameworks – there is no single conception of what constitutes rational disagreement⁷.

Despite this diversity, I believe that at least as a starting point for thinking about deep disagreements and their consequences – rather than for providing a definitive taxonomy – the intuitions underlying Fogelin's view still hold. In other words, I am assuming that the notion of deep disagreement (at least in that they are fundamental and persistent) is well established and has sparked productive debates in areas as diverse as political theory, Wittgensteinian exegesis (mainly around the notion of “form of life”, as in Fogelin, but also more recently from hinge epistemology⁸), and discussions of contextualism and relativism⁹. It is, by now, a self-sustaining field with its own networks of cross-reference and a relatively stable

that resolution requires fixed, absolute agreements. We somehow have to decide whether that is something we have to resign to or, contrariwise, acknowledge as if it were our birth's right, so to speak.

⁷ Hales (2025), for instance, distinguishes between disagreements about beliefs, values, emotions, and actions. Vid. note 2, above for more references. Since it is completely impossible to echo all the relevant works in this regard, I will limit here myself to pointing out a recent work that includes and comments a large number of them. Arroyo (2024) carries out a fairly exhaustive tour of many of the existing characterizations of deep disagreements, dividing them into “two ideal or paradigmatic forms that [he] calls ‘models of deep disagreement.’ The ‘logical model’ conceives deep disagreements as contexts where there is a conflict of propositions (or ‘beliefs’) that have the peculiarity of not being rationally assessable. [...] On the other hand, the ‘dialectical model’, unlike the logical model, is holistic and conceives deep disagreements as clashes of belief systems” (Arroyo 2024, 608). As Arroyo rightly points out, both models seem to be present in Fogelin's seminal work. I want to interpret this to mean that the important thing is not whether the disagreement is about certain particular beliefs or, on the contrary, about entire belief systems, but the depth to which the disagreement occurs, and although this is already pointed out in everything said so far in the main body of the text, I would like to highlight it because the debate has been led in another direction. The question then becomes: how much depth is necessary for a disagreement to be deep? And, does agreement, at such depth, depend exclusively on rational factors?

⁸ In this context, hinge epistemology holds that there is a class of commitments – hinge commitments – which play a fundamental role in our structure of belief and rational evaluation: they are the most basic general presuppositions of our world views not subject themselves to rational justification, but which make it possible for us to evaluate certain beliefs or doubts as rational. Drawing on Wittgenstein's epistemology and within the conceptual framework that has shaped the so-called “hinge epistemology”, Pritchard (2018) has explored the idea that disagreements over one's hinge commitments would seem to be a paradigm case of deep disagreement. Another prominent advocate of hinge epistemology as the correct interpretation of *On Certainty*, Annalisa Coliva (2025), defines deep disagreement as the kind of disagreement that depends on different and incompatible hinges, which prevent parties from utilizing a common epistemic method or practice to rationally resolve the disagreement. Ranalli (2020) also applies hinge epistemology to the issue of deep disagreements. According to Ranalli, a certain non-epistemic interpretation of our relationship with hinge commitments lends support to pessimism about deep disagreements (i.e., the thesis that such disagreements are rationally irresolvable). My own account here is that, the recognition of the liminal nature of deep disagreements shows that epistemic interpretations of Wittgenstein's hinges are theoretical impositions, and that, contrary to what Ranalli defends, being optimistic in relation to deep disagreements is possible only if we interpret non-epistemically our relationship with hinge commitments.

⁹ Cf. MacFarlane (2007) and Cappelen y Hawthorne (2009); and Bahgramian and Coliva (2019).

conceptual repertoire. My intention, from within this space, is not to redefine deep disagreement, but rather to question whether such disagreements are truly as deep as they appear – by offering a *sui generis* interpretation of Wittgenstein’s “form of life”.

But before moving on, I want to mention the contributions of María Baghramian, particularly her efforts to bring the debate on deep disagreement into contact with to real-world cases in politics and cross-cultural understanding. Baghramian (2015) has explored the possibility that deep disagreements might lead to extreme relativism, where “anything goes”. She, however, offers a perspectivist approach to deep disagreement, viewing such disagreements as conflicts between incommensurable perspectives. Resolving them, she argues, requires acknowledging the legitimacy of these perspectives within their respective contexts. Her approach thus embraces a form of philosophical and epistemic pluralism. She proposes that moderate relativism should not be understood merely as a doctrine or fixed thesis, but as a philosophical *stance* – a broad orientation with significant normative implications. Embracing this stance, she contends, can cultivate intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, tolerance, humility, and curiosity.

For Baghramian, intellectual humility is especially important in navigating deep disagreements. She presents it as a constructive means of approaching such conflicts – one that avoids both unproductive relativism and rigid polarization. A mindset oriented toward dialogue and mutual understanding becomes, in this view, essential for engaging with disagreement in a meaningful and productive way. However, despite the appeal of her position, I cannot help but feel that both her emphasis on humility and Fogelin’s resignation are, in different ways, expressions of what Richard Bernstein (1983; 1992) famously described as *Cartesian anxiety*.

Bernstein defines Cartesian anxiety as the fear that without a secure foundation for knowledge, we risk falling into chaos, relativism, or intellectual nihilism. As writes: “[e]ither there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, or we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos” (Bernstein 1983, 18). I would argue that Wittgenstein’s later philosophy aims to dissolve this anxiety – not by offering a new foundation, but by reconfiguring how we understand rationality and disagreement. It is from this refusal of foundational anxiety that the liminal reading of “*form of life*” gains its philosophical traction – precisely where resignation and humility fall short.

4. Humility or Anxiety?

As I have just suggested, Baghramian’s stance, in my view, does not fully embrace the brighter aspects of our epistemic condition. The intellectual humility she advocates seems to conceal a certain disappointment with our epistemic state – as though the absence of certainties capable of definitively resolving deep disagreements were a regrettable limitation. In this light, humility begins to resemble a consolation prize

rather than a virtue in its own right. What this anxiety ultimately reveals is a dissatisfaction with the kind of certainty our form of life can offer – a certainty that, it seems, falls short of our expectations or needs.

These expectations, once again, can be traced back to Plato's notion that the ordinary world is inherently flawed by movement, change, and instability. This perspective is sometimes, mistakenly, attributed to Wittgenstein's notion of a "form of life", casting him as a relativist. More specifically, motivated in part by his attention to the diversity of human experience, some interpretations of Wittgenstein associate "forms of life" with a kind of cultural relativism: Does the notion of 'forms of life' commits Wittgenstein to a form of relativism or not?¹⁰ Can members of different conceptual communities meaningfully engage with one another on Wittgenstein's view? Isn't our shared form of life a sufficient common ground for reaching satisfactory agreements?

The problem is that if we limit ourselves to noting only the few places where Wittgenstein uses the expression "form of life"¹¹, that is, if we choose to stay with the letter rather than with the spirit of what he might have meant, we run the risk that the trees prevent us from seeing the forest. Thus, while it is possible to draw contradictory interpretations – such as an biological reading (where "forms of life" are patterns of behavior rooted in our nature, cf. Garver 1994) and a cultural reading (in which "forms of life" are social constructions providing the context for meaning, cf. Baker and Hacker 2009; Glock 1996) – we will do better to pursue an integrative account. On this view, Wittgenstein's "forms of life" are understood as an intersection of the biological and the cultural, functioning as a background that makes both language and human action intelligible (Cf. Cavell 1979 and 1989; Moyal Sharrock 2015).

According to Wittgenstein, learning our mother tongue is not merely acquiring a language; it is also an initiation into a form of life. To learn a language is, in essence, to adopt a particular worldview. This characteristic is shared by all forms of life. However, nothing guarantees that the resulting worldview will be identical for all participants in a given form of life. For this reason, if sharing a form of life is the condition for agreement, then the possibility of deep disagreement is an inherent feature of that same condition. Such disagreements can arise even among those who share the same form of life, language, and worldview.

¹⁰ Different relativistic interpretations of Wittgenstein's thought, some stronger, others not so strong or even in favor of a healthy amount of relativism, can be found in Arrington (1989), Ashton (2019, 2020), Baker (1991), Chauviré (2020), Gellner (1998), Glock (2008), Kusch (2016, 2018), Rorty (1993), Tonner (2017) and Trigg (1991), to name just a few.

¹¹ Wittgenstein mentions the concept of "form(s) of life" only 8 times in all his writings, four of these mentions can be found in the *Philosophical Investigations* (IF §§ 19, 23, 241, Part II.i p. 174) one in *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* (§§331, 630), another one in "Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness" (p. 397), and the last one in *On Certainty* (§358).

What is often overlooked is that Wittgenstein distinguishes between *forms of life* in the plural and *form of life* in the singular¹². While learning a specific mother tongue is part of every particular form of life, the act of learning a language itself is part of the broader *human* form of life. If we focus exclusively on the plurality of forms of life, it may seem that being a stranger to another's form of life constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to cross-cultural agreements through rational means. But if we recognize that the diverse forms of life are simply expressions of the broader human form of life, we may find that agreement, though difficult, is not impossible. This is because we share a fundamental common ground – for example, being human and possessing language or the capacity to learn one. As Wittgenstein writes in *Philosophical Investigations*: “The common human way of acting is the frame of reference by which we interpret a strange language” (PI §206). This shared frame allows us to make sense of difference and navigate the challenges of intercultural agreements.

This interpretation of the concept of “form of life” offers a philosophical lens that helps explain why some disagreements resist conventional forms of resolution. It brings us face to face with the moral and existential dimensions of disagreement, reminding us that our failures to reach consensus often stem from deeper differences in how we live and see the world. But, recognizing these differences is the first step toward resolving any disagreement, no matter how deep it may seem. Intellectual humility is valuable only if it does not involve underestimating the potential embedded in our shared form of life. This reading does not erase the depth of disagreement, but reframes it as part of the shared terrain of our humanity – where difference and mutual intelligibility are not mutually exclusive. To paraphrase Hölderlin: “Where there is disagreement, agreement also grows”.

5. Deep Disagreements and the Potential for Resolution

In the *Investigations*, agreement in form of life is presented as contingent – so intersubjective understanding is not guaranteed in advance. But it does not follow that Wittgenstein was skeptical about the possibility of reaching such an understanding; if anything, he denied that it depends exclusively on rational factors. When, in the second part of the *Investigations*, he writes about the lion – remarking that even if a lion could speak, we could not understand him (IF II.xi, 225) – his point is that agreement requires the shared framework of a human, in our case, “form of life”, which is what enables mutual understanding and interpretation. Or more precisely: “our agreement is... in form of life” (PI §241).

¹² Cavell (1989), Conway (1989), and Moyal-Sharrock (2015) are three well known exceptions.

“It is [...] important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country’s language. We do not *understand* the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them” (IF, II.xi, p. 225).

Wittgenstein’s point in this passage is that understanding falters when there is no shared background of human practices. In the lion’s case, the barrier lies not in vocabulary or syntax, but in the absence of any broader connection between what is said and the life in which saying it would have meaning. Human beings, by contrast – even those whose customs seem remote or unfamiliar – remain within a range of possible comprehension. Though their language may at first resist interpretation, we can imagine establishing links between their words and the patterns of behavior, reactions, and expectations that accompany them. In such cases, understanding becomes conceivable – not because of abstract reasoning, but because we are capable of adjusting our perspective, of relating what they do and say to the framework of human life we also inhabit. When understanding occurs, it does so not by inference alone, but through a widening of our perceptual and practical horizon.

These reflections point to a crucial distinction: while some beings (like the lion) remain beyond the reach of mutual understanding due to the absence of shared practices, human beings – no matter how culturally distant – remain within the horizon of possible intelligibility. This intelligibility is not automatic, nor guaranteed by reason alone, but it is structurally possible because of our shared form of life. And it is precisely this possibility, however fragile, that casts doubt on the idea of insurmountable disagreement.

The strong thesis, then, is this: no disagreement is so deep that agreement is impossible. Ultimately, it depends on where we place emphasis – on the objective features of the disagreement or the subjective dispositions of those involved. While both undoubtedly play a role, my argument is that no disagreement is insurmountable if the willingness – or unwillingness – to reach agreement is the decisive factor.

If we, like Fogelin and nearly everyone that followed him, assume that deep disagreements arise from a clash of forms of life, then neither rational nor objective factors can definitely resolve the disagreement. What is really at stake is our mutual interest in one another – the acknowledgment of our respective forms of life (belonging to one is what makes us capable of acknowledging the others’). In other words, resolution hinges on acknowledging the otherness of one’s interlocutor – their subjectivity, interests, prejudices, and experiences. Equally – and perhaps even more importantly – it depends on recognizing that each of us is an “other” to everyone else, and must likewise be acknowledged.

This conclusion draws together the central threads of my argument: agreements are liminal and dynamic, never final; deep disagreements are not fixed impasses but invitations to engage, listen, and to acknowledge the others. Through the shared human form of life, we possess the tools to transform even the deepest disagreements into possibilities for mutual understanding. This might involve, for example, acknowledging the different paths that other forms of life have taken. Rather than fearing the depth of disagreement, we might instead come to see it as a pathway toward more meaningful, more human forms of agreement.

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Migration and Gender Norms in Yosano Akiko's Prose Fiction “Keshimochi” (Poppyseed Rice Cake, 1910)



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Abstract

This paper contends that the short story, “Keshimochi” (Poppyseed rice cakes), written by the renowned Meiji period Japanese woman poet Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), is a gender defiant semi-autobiographical tale that reveals the circumstances that drive the main character to migrate within the boundaries of societal constraints. Through the trope of an unidentified female narrator, the story features elements of confession, a theme celebrated in Akiko's poetry, capturing a pivotal moment when Akiko herself, living with her family in Sakai, is invited to join a literary club in Tokyo led by a poet who will later become her husband, Yosano Tekkan (1873-1935). The unique portrayal of various elements of migration, including literary, social, and geographical, highlights the duality of the unnamed female character's adherence to societal norms while seeking opportunities beyond her present situation. In this short story, Akiko masterfully intertwines literary, social, and cultural migration, exploring female aspirations and illuminating societal limitations.

Key words

Modern Japanese Literature, Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese Women writers, Yosano Akiko, I-novels, prose fiction, “Keshimochi” (Poppyseed Rice Cake)

Introduction: Autobiographical Elements in Akiko's Fiction

“Keshimochi” (Poppyseed Rice Cake, 1910) is a confessional short story by the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century Japanese woman writer Yosano Akiko (1878-1942), which reveals the circumstances under which the main character decides to pursue her dreams through internal geographical migration. Notably, in the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese women authors like Akiko found themselves in a marginalized position, where gender norms were controlled within a patriarchal society that saw male authors dominate literature, especially through the new genre of the I-novel. Nevertheless, Akiko transformed the confessional genre, traditionally dominated by male authors, into a female space by employing the “I” narrative and

a semi-autobiographical style. This approach was often disparaged, as women's lives were viewed as domestic, dull, and unworthy of serious literature. Although Akiko's stories depicted women in traditional settings, she created strong female characters, skilfully representing the liminal spaces they could occupy, as she shows how they moved into the male-dominated workforce and later saw the opportunities to search for freedom through internal migration.

"Keshimochi" is placed third-last in Yosano Aki ko's anthology *Kumo no iroiro*¹ and includes verifiable autobiographical elements of Akiko's personal life. In "Keshimochi", the narrator contributes to her parents' business. Although stated as living in Sakai², she is depicted as mature and self-assured, having already decided to pursue a literary career and extending her imagination even further in considering a trip to Osaka to present her poetry. The narrative in "Keshimochi" is conversational and centres around a dialogue between an unnamed female protagonist – a sweet shop owner's daughter who assists in the shop during her free time – and two male characters, Kumashichi and Iwasaki, brothers who are helpers at the shop. Akiko focuses the narrative more on the older brother, Kumashichi, whom she depicts as set under the so-called *Yōshi* system, to assume the role of an adopted son-in-law in another family. The conversation explores Kumashichi's reservations, revealing his fears, disapproval, and a sense of helplessness about becoming *yōshi*. He expresses his disdain for his future wife and demonstrates a marked lack of interest in the responsibilities of becoming a family head. Concurrently, while listening without sympathy, the female narrator contemplates a future that liberates her from her prevailing social constraints. This potential for liberation is shown through a letter of invitation requesting the narrator, a budding poet, to contribute to a literary club in Tokyo. The story features elements of confession, mirroring a pivotal moment in Akiko's life that occurred while she was still living with her family in Sakai. The

¹ In this article, the primary reference is to the version edited by Itsumi Kumi, known as "Tekkan Akiko Zenshū", with a total of 32 volumes (excluding supplementary volumes) published by Bensei between 2001 and 2011. Specifically, I refer to Tekkan Akiko Zenshū volume 6 (2002), which I will abbreviate as TAZ. The title of the anthology, as well as three of the story titles, Akarumi e, "Keshimochi", and "Kokyō no natsu", were translated into English by Janine Beichman in the bibliography section in *Embracing the Firebird: Yosano Akiko and the Birth of the Female Voice in Modern Japanese Poetry* (2002).

² Janine Beichman's detailed account of Sakai describes it as a city located about fifteen kilometers south of Osaka, in the Kansai region. In the past, Sakai was a key commercial center, and the narrator of "Keshimochi" is believed to live there. By the late 1800s, when Akiko was born, the city had become somewhat detached from Japan's main cultural centers, particularly Osaka and Tokyo, both in terms of geography and culture. Although Sakai once had a prestigious reputation as a thriving international trade hub, it had become mostly a provincial city, characterized by conservative social values and traditional art forms like tea ceremonies, classical dance, and poetry. It maintained a strong merchant spirit, often prioritizing commerce and traditional family values over personal innovation and modern ideas. Given Sakai's relative isolation and conservative nature, the narrator's trips to Osaka and Tokyo take on greater significance, highlighting the differences between life in the provinces and the appeal of urban culture.

narrative ends with the clear impression that the female narrator has decided to accept the invitation from the editor in Tokyo.

Indeed, this invitation to attend a literary event happened to Akiko in real life when an unexpected request was received from Yosano Tekkan, a renowned editor who later became Akiko's husband. Notably, Beichman points to Akiko receiving her first-ever letter from Tekkan in April 1900, when she was around twenty-two years old (2002, 83). The letter mentioned:

As yet, we have not met, but
Lady Akiko, whose lovely name I know
quite well, please send me poems! (Beichman 83).

Beichman further points out that Akiko, after receiving this request from Tekkan, then hesitatingly submitted seven poems, out of which Tekkan selected six, which he published in *Myōjō*³. This literary magazine was released monthly from April 1900 through November 1908. Tekkan founded the magazine and established the Tokyo *Shinshisha* (Tokyo Society of New Verses) in 1900. More of Akiko's contributions followed, including some of the poems that were later included in her now-famous collection *Midaregami*, a collection distinctive for the bold expression of female sexuality. With the evident popularity of the New Poetry Society, Akiko's poetry soon gained prominence. Yet, as Beichman further notes, Tekkan found Akiko's poetry even too bold and changed a few words to make it appear less challenging (84). Notably, with Akiko's continuing popularity, Tekkan decided to open more branches of the magazine to be established in Sakai (94).

Significant to this analysis of the short story "Keshimochi", Beichman further states that in July 1900, Tekkan wrote notes to Akiko and another young female poet, Yamakawa Tomiko (1879–1909) (84). He told both women about a visit he intended to make to Osaka, Kobe, and Okayama, regions in western Japan, some 500 km distant from Tokyo. Included in these letters was his proposed invitation for the poets to visit Osaka. Several *bona fide* letters appear to have been used by Akiko to blend them into the prose "Keshimochi". This emerges when the narrator discusses being sent a significant invitation in the form of a letter from an acclaimed editor, Ōkii Sensei, presenting a recreated version of an incident in Akiko's own life. This reinvention technique is discussed later as a way to romanticize and embellish her poetry. Itsumi identifies Ōkii sensei as Tekkan and Yamakawa as the character Yamaoka (2009, 46). Indeed, the narrative in "Keshimochi" ends with the receipt of the letter, leaving the reader curious and able only to anticipate what could happen next. Notably, by the time this short story was published, it was a clear and open secret that Tekkan arrived

³ The name *Myōjō* from the planet Venus, commonly known as both the *ake no Myōjō* (the morning star) and the *Yoi no Myōjō* (the evening star). For details see Lee p. 3.

in Osaka in August 1900 and met the young Akiko, along with Yamakawa (Itsumi 2002, 46; Lee 1986, 3; Beichman 2002, 86). This quickly formed into a love triangle that, in "Keshimochi", the narrator is only hinting at. In real life, both young poets fell in love with Tekkan, who, in any case, already had a common-law wife. However, by the end of this real-life trip, Yamakawa's parents intervened, and she withdrew from the love triangle, leaving Akiko and Tekkan free to pursue their relationship (Lee 1986, 4) once he could separate from his common-law wife.

In the following analysis of "Keshimochi", I demonstrate how Akiko uses confessional elements from her life in semi-autobiographical fiction to convey a realistic perception of the narrator's search for freedom. These confessional elements are reflected in "Kokyō no natsu" (Summer at home, 1909), which appears early in the anthology, where Akiko also delves into the confessional introspection of characters residing in Sakai, revolving around the narrator's similar longing for a seemingly unattainable world in the bigger city (Ota 1994, 63). This desire for freedom motivates the more mature narrator in "Keshimochi" to embark on a physical journey toward fulfilling her dreams by deciding to leave for Osaka. Akiko highlights the path toward freedom as a growing female consciousness, which I will show includes elements of literary, social, and internal geographical migration.

In "Keshimochi", Akiko's approach is to transfer the memories of her youth to the narrator's yearning, which then translates as a yearning for social and geographical migration, warranting a fairer evaluation. Through the stories' confessional elements, Akiko exposes how migration has a gendered burden. Particularly for Japanese women in the Meiji period, the desire to relocate to a place of freedom, including internal geographical migration, is contingent upon societal approval, including that of family and friends. The portrayal of potential geographical migration in "Keshimochi" showcases the duality of the narrator's conformity to societal norms while seeking a departure on a path beyond her current circumstances within restricted patriarchal control. Thus, I show how Akiko defies social norms by exploring female aspirations while shedding light on societal limitations.

Context: Stagnation and Migration Theory

This research centers on Japan's Meiji era, a time when women writers faced limited freedom of expression and often confined themselves to specific genres. In Akiko's case, by the end of the first decade of the 1900s, she primarily wrote poetry, which had been her main genre up to that point. Akiko then discovered prose fiction as a way to depict Japanese women as strong female characters, skilfully representing how they moved out of stagnant female roles into a male-dominated workforce that offered the potential for social movement. Not only this but also reflecting on her life experience, she shows how Japanese women at the time began to see opportunities

for geographical migration, as in the case of the narrator in “Keshimochi” seeking freedom from social constraints in the small town of Sakai and looking towards a more significant personal expression that could be achieved in physically moving to Tokyo. In this research, I show how, in “Keshimochi”, Akiko’s depiction of complex social and geographical processes reveals a narrative arc of migrational issues depicted within an intersection of class and gender struggles. This is enhanced by the author’s autobiographical stance, which in her unique case included a literary migration from poet to prose author.

As noted by Maeda Ai in his book *Text and the City*, the concept of *risshin shusse* – personal advancement through self-improvement – reached considerable popularity, mainly via prominent literature (110). Noteworthy among such profitable works were Yukichi Fukuzawa’s *Gakumon no Susume* (An Encouragement of Learning, 1876) and Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* (1859), translated as *Saikoku risshi hen* (Tales of success in Western nations, introduced to Japan in 1970) (110). They all contained the motivational message that people could bring about their success through personal efforts, which energized individuals to develop themselves and contribute to the modernization of Japan. The central theme of “Keshimochi” is female self-empowerment, which is similar to what Copeland in *Lost Leaves*, says Miyake Kaho was also doing in her prose (80).

Several writers, including Futabatei Shimei for *Ukigumo* (The Drifting Cloud, 1887) and Higuchi Ichiyō for “Takekurabe” (Child’s Play, 1895–1896) have been analyzed on the use of this theme⁴. Discussing Futabatei’s place in modern Japanese literature, Powell (1983), in her book *Writers and Society in Modern Japan*, quotes Itō Sei, who wrote that he was “the first writer really writing about the self and its conflicts with the world” (14). On the idea of *risshin shusse*, Itō states Futabatei had scrutinized the “cult of advancement in life and social success”, exploring the problems experienced by people in their private lives during the Meiji period (14). In examining Ichiyō’s perception of the Meiji concept of *risshin shusse*, Treat (2018) highlights how she demonstrates the desires and obstacles facing people (81-2). He singles out one of her characters, namely Midori, who personifies the principle of moving upwards in life by rising from peasantry to a higher socio-economic status (81-2). The emphasis is on her success resulting from her labor, which speaks of a broader societal change from intrinsic value to one of trade and distribution, similar to capital (81-2). As I show, Akiko stands out in her novels’ equivocal conclusions, with her characters not acting on decisions made before the story ends. This indeterminate approach brings female consciousness to the fore, mindfulness, and potential endeavor without the compulsion to spell out the actions taken. I also

⁴ For more on this theme, also see Van Compernelle, Timothy J. *The Uses of Memory: The Critique of Modernity in the Fiction of Higuchi Ichiyō* / Timothy J. Van Compernelle. Harvard University Asia Center, 2006.

show how the subtle exploration of *risshin shusse* is achieved through the method of making the characters undertake a psychological journey of self-knowledge and aspiration.

As this research points out, Akiko was immensely successful in poetry yet found it difficult to be accepted in her transition to writing prose fiction. However, I demonstrate the covert ways in which Akiko subversively achieved a remarkable literary migration, moving the confessional genre of I-novel into a female domain by consciously using the first-person "I" narrative and a semi-autobiographical approach. She managed, through self-reflection, using details from her own life story to create a narrator who rose above the stereotype that women's lives were domestic and boring and not worthy of high literature, stagnant in other words. As such, this reveals the circumstances under which the main character decides to pursue her dreams, which would result in an independent physical relocation from her small hometown to the main city, Tokyo.

Profoundly, if we look at the sexist approach of *bundan*⁵ towards women, this is only covertly challenged by Akiko's prose. Notably, during the Meiji period, gender roles were very rigid, and women had limited opportunities for self-expression or pursuing their dreams outside of traditional familial roles. This did not, in turn, signify that all males were free, an element of Japanese society that Akiko also reflects on in "Keshimochi." For example, the *Yōshi* system was an example of a traditional practice that reinforced not only the patriarchal structure of society but also the class distinctions. She also mirrors herself in the narrator's statement: "I" was invited to submit poetry to a literary magazine. This invitation symbolizes a rare opportunity for the narrator to step outside societal expectations and express herself creatively.

The Narrator's Search for Freedom and Internal Geographical Migration

Significantly, Akiko uses reports of the editor's letter, rather than the letter itself, to alert the reader to the invitation from Ōkii sensei. In this way, she avoids using the editor's voice, maintaining the independence of the female narrator to mock the social system through which a woman poet would need permission to relocate to Tokyo and subverting that same social order that would require a female poet to seek approval to migrate to an author of prose fiction. For example, in one instance, while making poppyseed rice cakes, Kumashichi is shown asking for help from his brother, Iwasaki. The latter then casually tells the female narrator that he received a phone

⁵ Copeland in her book *Women Critiqued* (2000) defines *Bundan* as "the term initially used to describe male writers and critics of the Meiji and early Taishō periods who belonged to an exclusive Tokyo coterie. Eventually it came to refer to a broader establishment of writers and incorporate a greater sense of canonicity. *Bundan* writers, almost exclusively male, were those who sat on editorial and prize committees; who were in positions to advance or mentor the careers of other writers; and who, in their capacity as critics, determined who was or was not a member of the *bundan*" (18).

call from Ōkii sensei (loosely based on Tekkan), asking her to join the poetry event at Hamadera. Iwasaki says, “Ōkii sensei was saying something like (*nantoka*), you should come” (TAZ 6: 388). *Nantoka* translates as “something or other”, showing the listener is not taking a serious interest in the conversation. In response, the female narrator questions Iwasaki indifferently, “Why didn’t you hear him properly?” (TAZ 6: 388). The unapologetic questioning of the female narrator shows her initial lack of interest in the invitation. In addition, when Kumashichi asks, “What kind of person is Ōkii sensei?” the female narrator mockingly says, “he looks like a monk” (TAZ 6: 389), elaborating that he “is 27–28 years of age” (TAZ 6: 389). This reflects Akiko’s teasing attitude towards Tekkan in real life (Beichman 2002, 96).

The opportunity the narrator is given to migrate internally can be seen as opportunistic only because she takes advantage of it. Akiko is careful to express that the narrator’s decision to go to Tokyo is not independent but must be blessed by her family. The narrator experiences change through her choices, which then evolves to change those around her. The personal struggles of the narrator (mirrored from the life of Akiko herself) interact and compete with her family. The tension between individual aspirations and acceptance of stagnant social norms, or adaptation to changing ones, is reflected in “Keshimochi” through the shifting dynamics of gender roles within socio-evolutionary and literary changes. This is reflected in the potential for literary, social, and internal geographical migration in Akiko’s construction of the female narrator (“I”). In the narrative, Akiko constructs the female narrator’s path of freedom as a conscious decision not to break any of the rules, nevertheless still being able to find freedom through change.

As such, Akiko depicts the characters in “Keshimochi” as being influenced by their friends, family, and society, reflecting a process of social change. The story explores the impact of these influences on personal decisions, such as Kumashichi’s potential adoption, and highlights the role of others in shaping his life. In the same way, the female narrator is also shown to have received permission to pursue her dreams. While the vulnerability of Kumashichi does not save him from helplessness and sad life, the narrator is shown to have made her way out of this social stagnation. In “Keshimochi”, in addition to the phone invitation from Ōkii sensei discussed above, the narrator also receives a formal invitation by postcard, which is read to her by her mother. Beichman (2002) analyzes this scene as the mother granting her permission to accept the invitation without any objections from the narrator’s family (49). However, the theme in “Keshimochi” is more of wish-fulfillment, where the narrator is set free to follow her dreams (50), allowing her to migrate internally, that is, in a society that otherwise strictly controls women. As Beichman points out, it is essential to note that the narrator did not receive any of the invitations directly; she always had an intermediary (49–50). This signifies that her decision to follow her dreams was not unilateral, as the family members supported her. Likewise, Akiko

herself did not break any family bonds to become an independent poet. Beichman states, "Akiko unwittingly revealed an important truth about her adolescent years" through this crucial scene in "Keshimochi" of receiving an invitation from Ōkii sensei (2002, 50).

Reflecting on this crucial scene, we also see the importance of this moment when Akiko herself must also have decided to leave home and pursue her dreams. Thus, the revelation that she was not particularly interested in Tekkan is shown in how she receives permission to join the club without asking for permission from her parents. In "Keshimochi", the narrator receives a letter from Ōkii sensei, and in reading the contents to her, this is seen as her mother giving her permission to complete her duties at home and leave for her dreams (Beichman 2002, 50). Furthermore, early in the story, the conversation between Kumashichi and the narrator leads to Kumashichi's comments on Ōkii sensei's age, saying, "he is young" (Akiko 1910, 389). This is also another veiled reference to the real-life Tekkan, who was still considered relatively young, and may signify that Akiko's parents gave their approval to court Tekkan (TAZ 6: 389). In essence, "Keshimochi" delves into the intricate web of societal, familial, and personal influences that impact the characters' life decisions, shedding light on how these forces shape the choices made by Kumashichi and the female narrator. Kumashichi's adoption as *yōshi*⁶ highlights how external factors can intensify vulnerability and dissatisfaction, as it forces him into a marriage that grants him wealth and status—benefits he never sought and does not desire. In stark contrast, the female narrator's journey reveals how societal compliance and familial support paved the way for personal freedom, even within restrictive environments. Through her narrative, Akiko intricately weaves the narrator's path to freedom, demonstrating that it is possible to achieve autonomy by negotiating societal rules.

In summary, so far, "Keshimochi" is a confessional short story in which Akiko reveals the circumstances under which she decided to pursue her dreams. Regarding literary migration, the short story uses confession to capture the real-life moment when Akiko was invited to join the literary club and inform the reader that her friends and family supported her decision to join the literary circle. The story also highlights social migration by showing the vulnerability of men under the *yōshi*

⁶ The adoption method of a male heir is referred to as the *yōshi* system, which enforces succession in the traditional Japanese family system. Depending upon the circumstances, it consists of different types, such as customary adoption, which infers the adoption of a male child when there is no male heir in the family; adopting a son-in-law, which infers the adoption of a male child who will marry the daughter of the house; adopting two male children, which infers the adoption of two brothers together; terminal adoption, which refers to the adoption taking place only when the original heir dies because of illness; and lastly tentative adoption, which infers the adoption while the original heir is away from home (Takeuchi 2006, 82). Indeed, in "Keshimochi", Akiko highlights the idiosyncrasies of the *yōshi* system, exposing how men were also vulnerable and trapped by the system, not only women.

system, which strengthens the narrator's will to pursue her literary pursuit. Akiko's prose, "Keshimochi" in particular, is seen as an attempt to depict the I-novel of the 1910s. Unlike other women novelists who focus on female characters, Akiko highlights the interiority of the helplessness of both men and women in society. Through this recognition of the vulnerability of Kumashichi in "Keshimochi", who is yearning for a better life, the narrator gains the confidence to pursue her dreams. To follow her dreams, the female character is shown receiving permission to depart from the norms of patriarchal society instead of demanding equal rights. In contrast, men are portrayed as too weak to even think beyond their prescribed social roles and yearn for a solution that society does not provide. Therefore, Akiko's attempt to show the characters' interiority coincides with the yearning associated with I-novels. However, the transfer of this interiority, shown through migration, seems quite original to Akiko's prose.

The Japanese Family System and the Adverse Effects of Social Migration on Men

The adoption method of a male heir is referred to as the *yōshi* system, which enforces succession in the traditional Japanese family system. Depending upon the circumstances, it consists of different types, such as customary adoption, which infers the adoption of a male child when there is no male heir in the family; adopting a son-in-law, which infers the adoption of a male child who will marry the daughter of the house; adopting two male children, which infers the adoption of two brothers together; terminal adoption, which refers to the adoption taking place only when the original heir dies because of illness; and lastly tentative adoption, which infers the adoption while the original heir is away from home (Takeuchi 2006, 82). Indeed, in "Keshimochi", Akiko highlights the idiosyncrasies of the *yōshi* system, exposing how men were also vulnerable and trapped by the system, not only women.

Interestingly, in "Keshimochi", Akiko depicts her female narrator as having little or no emotions or sympathy towards the *yōshi* character, Kumashichi. In certain instances, it is even suggested that Kumashichi might harbor feelings for the narrator (TAZ 6: 384). However, she not only ignores him, but she also believes he is in a better situation than most women. Understanding that the narrator's actions do not necessarily indicate the author's beliefs is crucial. Instead, by showcasing male vulnerability within a patriarchal system, Akiko criticizes the system itself. She uses the female narrator to represent society's viewpoint within that society, not just women's perspectives on men. This portrayal starkly contrasts how Akiko uses the word "men" to represent society in general. By highlighting the vulnerability of men in this situation, Akiko subverts traditional norms, challenging the pre-existing notion that women were unworthy of becoming writers and, in her situation, considered unable to migrate from poetry, where she was successful, to fiction writing, particularly the I-novel genre, where as a woman she was not welcome.

Notably, in "Keshimochi", we see the circumstances under which the adoption is performed in the *yōshi* system from a woman's perspective, the female narrator, who highlights the man's perspective. Akiko uses this literary device to display male emotion in a very vocal way, especially in portraying Kumashichi's characteristics. Akiko shows the female narrator believing the *yōshi* system favors men because they can migrate socially and gain monetarily through it (TAZ 6: 386). This is supported by Sen (2014), as she argues that Akiko saw the *yōshi* system as an elevation of men who did not have any assets (42). In contrast to men, most women would not inherit assets and were considered lower in position than men, even ones who benefitted from *yōshi* (Kobayashi 2007, 368). Clearly, women of this era were limited in their options to migrate compared to men socially. However, they could go into service, marry, become a concubine, or, more rarely, be adopted. Regardless, even if a woman could rise above her existing circumstances, she was, even in her elevated status, socially lesser than the men in her family or relationship.

However, from a *yōshi*'s perspective, Kumashichi's vulnerability of becoming a "spare" is a term coined by Kobayashi (2007) to refer to a male who is utilized as a tool to continue the succession of assets (367). This way, Kumashichi is seen as a spare tool in this short story. For instance, in the conversation between Kumashichi and the narrator, Kumashichi voices his grievances, "I trust you, and so I will listen to what you say. As I always listen to you. I think all living beings should just be alone. Going for adoption or getting a bride is something I hate the most" (TAZ 6: 384). In his distress, he adds, "I always think that a great person will never have children and will die alone" (TAZ 6: 385). This signifies that he is sad that his future is vulnerable and wants to die because he sees himself becoming unfulfilled in society. Gaining monetary freedom seems meaningless to him. Kumashichi's perspective on marriage is shaped by a tragic example he shares of a hairdresser, Ohana, who died shortly after marrying a violent husband. This story informs his negative view of marriage as a system and repeatedly leads him to propose death as a solution to his worries. Akiko interestingly parallels Kumashichi's lamentations on his impending social migration due to his adoption with the feelings of women forced to move to their husbands' families after marriage. This comparison draws attention to the shared sense of dislocation and vulnerability that can affect individuals regardless of gender within societal expectations in Meiji Japan.

On the other hand, the narrator, aware that Kumashichi is getting married to the niece of Otoku, the wife of a former steward in the house of the narrator's sister, asks Kumashichi if he has seen his bride. To this, Kumashichi replies that he saw her side face and noticed her *ears*, which he thinks is the only good part (TAZ 6: 386, emphasis added). When the narrator asks, "What is the good part about ears?", for this Kumashichi replies, "She has plump ears (*fukumimi*), and her skin is fair as well" (TAZ 6: 386). In this context, *fukumimi* is used to express luck or wealth. The narrator

makes fun of this by saying, “This does not sound bad. Someone with plump ears (*fukumimi*) will bring you wealth. You should be adopted by Otoku” (TAZ 6: 386). It is important to note that Kumashichi only noticed the ears of Otoku’s unnamed niece when he looked at her from afar. The reference used for Otoku’s niece as having luck could mean that from the eyes of Kumashichi, the only part he saw in her was referring to luck, which is true as he will be receiving all her assets once he marries her. It is important to note that even if Kumashichi views Otoku’s niece as bringing luck to him, he is not happy. He is still thinking of dying, which shows that the *yōshi* system does not necessarily bring any happiness to men who are used as tools for the succession of the hierarchy (Takeuchi 2006, 81, 84).

As evident in the story, the pain men go through by becoming a *yōshi* highlights their vulnerability, yet when seen through women’s eyes, it is seen as an elevation in society. This revelation could be Akiko’s criticism of men’s opinion on the sufferings of women. However, Sen (2014) argues that Akiko still believed the *yōshi* system favored men (42). Nevertheless, the narrator’s views do not influence Akiko’s portrayal of Kumashichi. Instead, it is an honest depiction of how men feel when they integrate into this *yōshi* system. Thus, the display of emotions shown through Kumashichi shows the interiority of men’s world, which is seen as elevated through women’s eyes. To sum up, through “Keshimochi”, Akiko portrays male vulnerability and emotional complexity in the *Yōshi* system and serves as a powerful critique of patriarchal norms and societal expectations, offering readers a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics and the intricacies of human emotion within such systems.

From Edo to Meiji: Migration From Town to City

A general overview of how different literature was aimed at different classes in Japan, particularly between the Meiji period and the preceding Edo period (1603–1868), facilitates a deeper understanding of the social categories of the lives of characters depicted in and “Keshimochi,” which in turn reflects on the author’s semi-autobiographical intentions and her literary migration from poetry to prose. While Akiko never abandoned poetry, she remained a prose writer long enough to be considered more than a mere tourist in the genre and to produce a complete anthology of short stories. These periods are also reflected in the physical locations the author chooses for the stories’ settings. In other words, it is self-evident that modernization and change would be more rapid in big cities than in provincial towns. Significantly, also, in the Edo period, there were four major class divisions: royals (*kuge*), samurai (*bushi*), merchant (*chonin*), and peasant (*hyakushō*), and again, these classes would be represented in different geographical locations. Akiko’s family was from the merchant class and lived in provincial Sakai. In another short story of Akiko, “Kokyō no natsu”, the narrator longs to go to Kyoto, the home of the emperor

(royal class). Moreover, in the Edo period, different literary genres were aimed at various social classes, that is, in terms of entertainment. Akiko started by writing poetry (*waka*) but made her work into a new-style *tanka* (short poems). Akiko describes Edo-style theatre (*kabuki*) for the merchant class. This was specific merchant-class entertainment, a cultural tradition lingering over from Edo, and families that belonged to the merchant class could enjoy it (Shively 2015, 326). An amalgamation of entertainment styles followed the Edo period, and then, finally, everything changed in Meiji, strongly influenced by Westernization. The culture changed according to the changing period and the emergence of Western exposure. Naturally, these genres and literary categorizations became less distinct by the modernizing Meiji period. However, women writers would be more held back by lingering traditional sensibilities than men, such as the example of Higuchi Ichiyō⁷ (Mitsutani 1985, 53).

Moreover, in terms of internal migration, Tokyo's social norms (and thereby also literary norms) evolved faster when compared with smaller provincial towns like Sakai. This is essential to point out, as the semi-autobiographical story "Keshimochi" has central protagonist depicted as having grown up in the small town of Sakai, nevertheless longing to migrate to larger cities. Her desire to migrate is thus shaped by both the cultural constraints of her hometown and the appeal of urban literary life. Part of this new attitude towards migration was the availability of transport. As Jilly Traganou (2004) notes: "Throughout the Edo period, transportation in Japan was confined to foot travel [...] The Tōkaidō railway was established in 1889, at first paralleling and eventually almost eradicating the use of the highway. [...] After the installation of the railway in the Meiji era, the Tōkaidō was presented as a landscape of progress, modernity, and westernization expressing the positive and negative connotations that such notions carried" (Traganou, 1).

It seems pertinent to note that an accident of birth placed the protagonists in "Keshimochi" in the railway period, and there would unlikely have been any invitation from Ōkii sensei/Tekkan to the narrator/Akiko to visit Tokyo had this been even twenty years prior. Notably, on foot, the usual mode of transport, it would have taken Akiko three weeks to walk, six to eight hours a day without rest, from her hometown of Sakai to the big city of Tokyo. Significantly, as we now know that the character of the niece is loosely based on Akiko's autobiographical recollections, it is possible to state that she experienced a period of political migration in her lifetime. Indeed, it would be unreasonable to assume that these Meiji period changes happened

⁷ While Ichiyō tackled themes such as poverty and prostitution in her work, she adopted a traditional narrative style, influenced by Murasaki Shikibu, to conform to the expectations of "womanly" literature (Copeland 2000, 46; Tanaka 2000, 77). This strategic approach enabled her to gain acceptance into the male-dominated *bundan*, a privilege not easily afforded to less conventional prose writers like Yosano Akiko.

overnight. Therefore, these facts impact our understanding of “Keshimochi” as an example of Akiko’s use of autobiographical elements in her fiction.

Born into a merchant family, Akiko lived in a merchant world in Sakai, near Osaka. Notably, the culture in Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo was wholly different and distinguished between different social classes in the Edo period but became more unified during the following Meiji. In general terms, the inclusion of Sakai in the intensely autobiographical story of “Keshimochi” shows how the culture of Edo progressed and shifted to the amalgamation of Meiji culture. Through this, we can learn more about Akiko herself and see how she understood and reflected the emergence of modern Japanese society in the Meiji period. Therefore, this constant sense of movement in “Keshimochi” highlights the political possibilities afforded to women in the Meiji period, although these opportunities were encountered and enjoyed non-linearly. This shows that social progression and migration were sometimes a slow ebb and flow, although the coming of the train to Japan would immediately speed up the access that women like Akiko had to changes that would further their careers, in her case, a literary one.

Conclusion: A Successful Literary Migration of a Poet to an Author

In this article, I show how the unique portrayal of various migration elements, including literary, social, political, economic, and geographical, highlights the duality of the narrator’s adherence to societal norms while concomitantly seeking opportunities beyond her present situation. Significantly, “Keshimochi” is a semi-autobiographical account with two main themes. One social theme focuses on how the *Yōshi* system adversely affects men. The other is a gender theme, which highlights a critical turning point in the narrator’s life when she receives the surprising invitation to submit her poetry to a literary magazine in Tokyo, which would involve internal geographical migration. I demonstrate that the narrative is an ironic double entendre, as the author is writing a story about a fictional shop worker wanting to be a poet. Yet, the author herself is a poet wanting to be a writer. In other words, the story’s author is already a poet attempting to migrate to fiction writing. In this research, I show how Akiko skilfully crafts a story that generates curiosity among the audience. She uses elements of her life reflected in the background to the story of family life and the sweet shop business in Sakai. She also keeps the same romantic theme of her first encounter with Tekkan, the editor and literary critic who later became her husband.

Indeed, by the time Akiko wrote and published “Keshimochi”, the theme of her relationship with Tekkan had gained her poetry much popularity (Itsumi 2002, 46). Furthermore, I show in “Keshimochi” that Akiko brings over from her poetry her attitudes towards her future husband, Tekkan, which in her poetry often achieves a tone that is gently mocking (Beichman, 119). There is a similar teasing and poetic

freshness, and she involves her readers in the story on two levels, drawing them into the fictional narrative that nevertheless mirrors aspects of her life story. This may be seen as Akiko's attempt to shift her audience from poetry to fiction, using the same themes, in this instance the first-encounter theme. Thus, I view it as her survival instinct, hoping to migrate from poetry to fiction, specifically novel writing, using similar themes. It is also topical in that male writers used autobiography in the I-novel genre at the same moment in Japanese literary history. Notably, after accepting Tekkan's offer to publish her poetry, which involved internal geographical migration to Tokyo, Akiko became a renowned poet.

On the one hand, "Keshimochi" can be seen as Akiko's attempt to freeze the moment of her youth when Tekkan sought her out to elevate her poetry career, gaining attention for the story. On the other hand, Akiko may have wanted to confess that the liberty granted to the female narrator is not earned but rather given, even without her demanding it, a form of social engineering. In summary, this discussion highlights the interplay between Akiko's life and her writing, emphasizing the significance of her experiences in understanding the depth and nuances of "Keshimochi".

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Cultural Citizenship and the Arab-Muslim Immigrant Experience in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*



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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of cultural citizenship as it pertains to Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America, as depicted in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Through the protagonist Changez's journey from assimilation to disillusionment, the novel critiques the limitations of multiculturalism and citizenship in addressing the cultural alienation faced by immigrants. By analysing Changez's experiences of discrimination, identity crisis, and eventual rejection of American values, this paper argues that cultural citizenship offers a framework for understanding the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation in a post-9/11 world. The study adopted a qualitative interpretative research method since the data involved is textual. The analysis is framed by Aihwa Ong's theory of cultural citizenship to explore how Hamid's novel challenges dominant narratives of belonging and exclusion.

Keywords: *cultural citizenship, Arab-Muslims, immigrant experience, Mohsin Hamid*

Introduction

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks reshaped the socio-political landscape of the United States, particularly for Arab-Muslim immigrants who found themselves thrust into the spotlight of suspicion and discrimination. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* provides a nuanced exploration of this experience through the character of Changez, a Pakistani immigrant whose journey from assimilation to disillusionment mirrors the broader struggles of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America. This paper argues that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* critiques the limitations of cultural citizenship in post-9/11 America, revealing how systemic discrimination and cultural alienation force immigrants like Changez to reject

assimilation in favour of cultural preservation. By analysing Changez's interactions with American society, his identity crisis, and his eventual rejection of American values, this study highlights the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation in a post-9/11 world. The second novel by the author, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, was published in 2007, six years after the 9/11 terror attacks. Like Changez, the novel's protagonist, Mohsin Hamid was born in Pakistan and educated at Princeton University and Harvard Law School, where he graduated in 1997. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* won the Asian American Literary Award and the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award among several others, and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages.

Literature Review

The discourse on cultural citizenship and the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America has been a focal point in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Scholars have explored the intersection of identity, belonging, and exclusion in the context of the 9/11 attacks, which reshaped the socio-political landscape for Arab-Muslim immigrants in the United States. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* has emerged as a significant text in this discourse, offering a nuanced portrayal of the challenges faced by Arab-Muslim immigrants in navigating their cultural identities in a hostile environment.

Richard Gray's *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (2011) provides a foundational analysis of post-9/11 literature, categorising works into those that reinforce binary oppositions of "us versus them" and those that adopt a transformative approach. While Gray's categorisation of Hamid's novel as a transformative narrative is useful, it overlooks the novel's critique of global capitalism, which Mukherjee more explicitly addresses. Similarly, Sharmila Mukherjee's analysis of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights the novel's critique of American capitalism and its portrayal of Changez's transformation from a transnational collaborator to a cultural nationalist. Mukherjee argues that the novel underscores the destructive impact of global capitalism on non-Western cultures, framing Changez's rejection of America as an act of intellectual jihad against Western epistemologies.

Aldalala's exploration of the novel's re-territorialisation of the encounter between America and its Muslim "other(s)" further enriches the discourse. Aldalala emphasises the novel's use of the confessional narrative mode to humanise the Muslim protagonist, challenging the dehumanising stereotypes perpetuated by Western media. Hamid's novel, through its portrayal of Changez's experiences, dismantles these stereotypes, offering a more complex and empathetic representation of Arab-Muslim immigrants.

The theme of identity and identification in the novel has also been explored. Blum examines the role of Changez's beard as a symbol of his cultural identity and its

transformation into a political marker in post-9/11 America. Blum's analysis highlights the novel's critique of the social obsession with outward appearances and its implications for Arab-Muslim immigrants. This theme is further elaborated by Mohammad Jajja, who explores Changez's quest for identity and his eventual rejection of American values. Jajja argues that Changez's disillusionment with America stems from his realisation that his cultural and ethnic identity will always mark him as an outsider, regardless of his achievements.

In summary, the existing literature on *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* highlights its significance as a counter-narrative to dominant Western portrayals of Arab-Muslim immigrants. The novel's exploration of identity, cultural citizenship, and the impact of global capitalism offers a powerful critique of the socio-political realities of post-9/11 America. This paper builds on these insights, offering a deeper analysis of the novel's engagement with cultural citizenship and its implications for understanding the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants.

Negotiating Suspicions: Islamic Identity and Post-9/11 Politics in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

The Reluctant Fundamentalist tells the story of Changez Khan, a Pakistani university lecturer who used to be an immigrant in the United States of America. Set in a Lahore cafe, the novel takes the form of a conversational monologue between the narrator, Changez, and an anonymous American with military aspect and background (159). In the novel, Changez, the central character, narrates the experience of his encounter with America while he lives there in pre and post-9/11, and how his decision to leave America for Pakistan was made for him by the shift in social dynamics that the occurrence of 9/11 ushered into what used to be his erstwhile - i.e. pre-9/11 – settled, normal, and an enjoyable life in the US. After 9/11, however, his cultural-ethnic background as an (Arab) Muslim is thrown into a negative social prominence. This shift leads him into a series of unsavoury awareness regarding the socio-political realities of his society, prompting him to leave America for Pakistan.

According to Changez, the protagonist narrator, he immigrated to the US in his teenage years to study at the prestigious Princeton University. Coming from a genteel background that has fallen into poverty in Pakistan, he is a young, highly-driven and cultured boy who does everything in his power to be his best and attain success based on the culture of merit for which America is famous. Remarking on how his impeccable academic records and excellent personal attributes place him in good ground to succeed in America after his school year, he describes himself as “a perfect breast” (7). And success he does achieve in school, graduating top of his class and getting a highly-competed job as a financial analyst at a top corporate financial services firm known as Underwood Samson in New York's famous Wall Street.

His life immediately begins to take on the character of his dreams, as the prestigious job affords him the money to live comfortably and even send back home to help out his relations. The job also gives him access into the circles of highly successful people in the US, further enhancing his sense of accomplishment and acceptance in the American society. He begins to make friends in the city, eating out with his friends on the company's account and falling in love with a white American girl by the name of Erica – a member of the upper middle-class from the city's Upper East Side. This harmonious phase of his life terminates unexpectedly, as the occurrence of the 9/11 terror attacks in the US – perpetrated by people of socio-cultural backgrounds that are not dissimilar to Changez's – upsets the carefully balanced apple-cart of his life. After the failure of his initial attempts to use overwork to tune out the overbearing reality of the negative shift that becomes apparent in New York's post 9/11 social atmosphere, Changez comes to the stark realization fact that his erstwhile positive invisibility as an Arab-Muslim immigrant is gone. Welter of personal negative treatment on the basis of his culture follows. A naturally non-religious person, he finds himself being regarded and treated as a potential terror suspect in the places where he used to be welcomed in pre-9/11 realities. This experience leads to his disillusionment with America as a place of freedom, equality, and justice.

In the midst of this incipient disillusionment with his adopted home (America), he is sent on an assignment to Chile to evaluate a publishing firm about to be downsized. It is during this assignment that he makes the acquaintance of Juan-Bautista, whose influence on Changez causes him to make the decision to leave America for his native Pakistan. Juan-Bautista is an old employee of the publishing firm to be evaluated, and it is through him that Changez becomes able to put his relationship with America in perspective. Through his guided remarks, Juan-Bautista awakens Changez's awareness to the destructive impacts of American capitalism as it threatens the chances of survival of people with non-American ways-of-life and traditions. He likens Changez's job at Underwood Samson to that of the janissaries, a band of young Christian boys trained by the Islamic Ottoman Empire to wipe out their own civilisation. Through this analogy, Juan-Bautista succeeds in making Changez see himself in the armour of a modern-day Janissary of the Western empire, being used to wipe out every ideal, epistemology and civilisation (his own inclusive), that stands in the path of America's manic drive to Westernise the world in pursuit of its cold, soulless military and economic expansion.

This analogy, which Changez finds chillingly accurate in its application to the state of his cultural standing in the US, jolts him into his decision to reject America. His resolve becomes even more ardent when he considers the state of cultural tension that 9/11 has thrown up in his life in America, and the precarious situation of his native Pakistan that is about to go to war with India due to America's power-play. With the coming off of his "blindness" (106), and he abandons his post of assignment

in defiance of a job he now sees as a *janissarial* trap. On his return to the US, he is sacked by the company and prepares to leave the US for Pakistan. However before leaving, he experiences another unravelling of his dream of having a romantic relationship with Erica – his white American girlfriend who could never love him. She ends up irretrievably losing her touch with reality because of the love she has for a former white dead boyfriend by the name of Chris. By the end of the narrative, Changez leaves America thoroughly exasperated, and very angry. A traditionally polite, courteous, irreligious and transnational person in mindset and outlook, he becomes a radical political activist, educating the students he now teaches at a Pakistan university on “the imperative of disrupting and deconstructing the dominant epistemologies of Western capitalism” (Mukherjee, 4).

He becomes a Muslim radical, jettisons his transnational verve for a nationalistic jingoism, and embraces a historical narrative that runs along the line of purposeful comparison of Pakistan with America as regards social development and cultural accomplishment. Changez gives voice to this mindset when he makes the following assertion to his silent American listener: “And we did these things (building some architectural edifices) when your country (America) was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing at the edge of a continent” (117). The importance of this statement inheres not in its historical accuracy but rather in what it discloses about the internal working of Changez’s mind after abandoning America to live in Pakistan. It shows how far he has gone in discarding his liberal, transnational outlook to becoming a person that now takes pride in his ethnic identity.

All through the novel, the voice of the person Changez converses with is never heard directly, but the novel is filled with dramatic and suspenseful references, and purposeful omissions that are open to diverse conclusions loaded with important implications on the thematic object of the novel. An exploration of the issues thrown up in Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reveals the novel to be a masterpiece indeed. True to Gray’s (2012) categorisation, 9/11 is imagined in a “deterritorialised manner” in that it reflects the views of different cultures and “provide[s] an intercultural connection and... the possibility of social transformation” (83).

Hamid provides a more global hypostasising of the nuances and symbolic realities of the event, taking care to represent views and voices that are often outlawed in 9/11 narratives that adopt the binary us-versus-them stereotypical viewpoint. The novel is also unique in the way it re-territorialises the geography and nationality of the main narration, thus providing a counter-outlook to the ones available on official hegemonic centres of information about the event. By far, one of the most unique achievements of Hamid in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is the way it represents the issue of cultural citizenship and Arab-Muslim immigrant’s identity in the novel. The representation of this issue is explored below.

Changez and the Challenges of Cultural Citizenship in Post-9/11 America

“East is East, and West is West, and ne’er the twain shall meet”

Rudyard Kipling

Prevalent dispositions to the recounting and narrations of/about 9/11 and its aftermath have for far too often tended to focus, rather lopsidedly, on the throes that it occasioned in the lives the people *directly impacted* by the collapse of the twin towers and the psychological *damage* it visited on the American national psyche (Kaplan, 35). From the point of this essentially American narrative, the consequences of 9/11 are often formulated to be *realised* around events that are deemed to be catastrophic to America – such as the crash of “its global stock-market” occasioned by the collapse of the Towers, the loss of over 3,000 lives in Ground Zero, and the panic it caused in people’s everyday life and schedules.

The people who are implicated as masterminding the attacks, regarded from America’s viewpoint as “perpetrators” are rarely discussed except in terms laden with unconcealed hostility, animosity, and retributive fantasies. All of the people that fall in this category have Arab-Muslim backgrounds who state the Islamic religion as their motivation for the attacks. The direct victims are continually remembered as national heroes, saints, or martyrs while the Arab-Muslim perpetrators are cast in the garb of evil – routinely portrayed as psychopaths and similar pejorative terms.

Thus, because of the high emotional toll of 9/11 on America, and because of its matchless power in the media (electronic and print), the dominant narrative of the era-defining horror has been decidedly American - with the perpetrators cast as no-good, atavistic residues of a civilisation that is not only antediluvian and destructive, but unbearably primitive and violent. Such a civilisation, the logic of the narrative goes, merits no other response but that an urgent intervention for *modernisation* (Westernisation?) preceded by unpretentious destruction. Perpetrators of the attacks, in narratives from Western vomitories are taken to be “terrorists”. In the same breath, the virtues and qualities of the victims of the attacks are amplified or even over-invented in a way that excites the sympathy of the audience for them and anger at their fate (Furedi, 2015).

Through this narrative strategy, the American media has succeeded in arousing the most dreadful contemplation of everything nearly or remotely associated with the perpetrators (relationships, culture, lifestyles, and human beings) in the world. It has also helped post 9/11 American government to achieve a legitimisation of its overwhelmingly belligerent counter-response on the perceived “terrorists” (or their culture?) in their locales – mainly in the Middle East. Also, through the power of this dominant American narrative, the facts of the lives (culture, practices, lifestyle) of those implicated in the cause of 9/11 and the peoples associated with them not only became appropriated by a powerful American media, the chance of their history

being discovered with non-vested colouration of terrorism has become seriously jeopardised (Kaplan, 35).

Thus, America has succeeded in making not only a military counter-response to the people perceived to be linked to the perpetrators of the terror attacks but also a *cultural* one. This has been achieved by placing a huge question mark on the humanity of this group. Among the groups that most felt the rising tone of this question mark are immigrants of Arab-Muslim origins in the US, whose identity became swamped in contestations arising from the 9/11 terror attacks (Bilici, 17). As war raged with the Taliban on the mountains in far-off places in Fallujah and Kandahar, Afghan-Pakistan borders in late 2001, so were people of this ethno-tribal extraction on the *homeland* of the US were made to witness undiplomatic reminders of their new status as suspects and cultural outcasts on the grounds of their cultural linkage to the terror suspects. Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* confronts us with a way of (re)reading 9/11 that departs from the American version that has been explicated so far.

By providing this alternative view of events, Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* helps the reader to see and access the 9/11 tragedy from a new, and less-vested point of view. Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* achieves this by taking this historical event from the realm of mere personal tragedies of people's deaths and collapse of monuments into a realm of culture, to reveal a more nuanced and systematic paradigm of assessment of 9/11 from the viewpoint of cultural competition, domination, and clash of perspectives (Aldalala, 16).

The Reluctant Fundamentalist encodes 9/11 with a richer semantic potential, as it strips away the shallow, narrow, constricted, personal and reductionist logic it is burdened with through American anchorage to a deeper, more purposeful, clear-eyed, global, and impersonal (re)readings of the event. Rather than engage in the emotional template already laid out through the America's dominant media, Hamid explores a space, time, and voice that affords the reader to make up his own mind on what view to take as regards 9/11.

While the narrator does not deny the awful tragedy that the event represents, he digs deeper into the dynamics of America's cultural encounter with the Arab-Muslim peoples for possible explanations and understandings of the tragic event, and what could constitute the motivations for it. This approach, when compared to the one already discussed, affords the reader a more layered and mature look into the contexts that prepared the ground for the cataclysmic event and the socio-political realities its occurrence has given vent to in the world.

In most representations of 9/11 in Western media and authorship, e.g. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* or Claire Messud's *The Emperor's Children*, the beginning of the story is often September 11, 2001, when Islamic militants or terrorists hijacked two aeroplanes and rammed into the World Trade Centre and Pentagon (for no apparent reason other than that they are terrorists), and killed over three thousand *American*

people. In works such as these, America is always the provoked – the innocent, virtuous superpower that is wronged by Islamic militants.

Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* provides another side of this story, creating possible contexts that bring a complexity into the understanding the event. The novel locates 9/11 far from being an outgrowth of the sudden action of some bearded fanatical fundamentalists, but as an expression of a crystallised, long accreted anger at the high-handed way that America's economic and foreign policies have earned it from peoples of Arab-Muslim origin all over the world: "America *had* to be stopped" (125, italics in original). Providing this important context alone is one of the critical ways in which Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* enriches the discourse of 9/11 with regard to cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in the US.

In Pakistan's history, the name of the protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is no ordinary name. "Changez Khan" harks back to the historical founder of the people who today constitute a significant part Arab-Muslims, by the name of Genghis Khan. In his time, Genghis Khan ruled as one of the greatest Mongolian emperor who expanded the Mongol empire to cover the land area that is home to such countries as (Southern) Russia, Mongolia, including countries with Arab-Muslim populations like Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.

That the protagonist of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* thus shares name with such a great historical personality is no accident, but can be interpreted as an attempt on the part of the author to give the narration in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* a historical dimension. Hamid's choice of this highly consequential name reveals that the author intends to tell more than a personal tale in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, but rather, a history of the genuflections of peoples, countries, continents and civilisations of the Orient s it touches the Occident.

This is even grounded in another telling marker, as the name of the girl that Changez, the symbol of the Orient seeks in vain to befriend in his stay in the Occident is named "Erica". An examination of the name "Erica" shows that it is formed by clipping "Am" from "America" – the central setting of the novel, the location of the 9/11 terror attacks, and the host nation of the Arab-Muslim immigrants. And it is also from this America that the silent guest at the Lahore cafe, to whom Changez's speaks all through the novel, comes.

In the light of this reality, the lines of the Nobel Prize-winning Kipling come back to mind. Long before the occurrence of 9/11 begins to foment tensions between the East and West, the poet, himself an officer of the empire had penned these prophetic lines in which the poet-persona forecloses the possibility of mutual respect and equality between the two continents. And in this he foretells the futility that Changez's dream of mutual acceptances among the people of America comes to at the of his stay in the US. Perhaps Changez and Erica's fate is an accident. Perhaps Changez is too hopeful or audacious for the expectations that have been assigned the

people of his race from the East/Orient by the superior Occident. Or perhaps, it is just the way things are meant to be between the scions of the Centre and that of the Periphery ambitious enough to dare to alter their histories.

“Changez” and the Complicity of Innocence: Post-9/11 America and Feats of Paranoia

“But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath...” (83)

The appeal in the quotation above comes at a critical point in the confessional narration of the protagonist in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. It is made immediately after Changez, the protagonist, admits to the strange way *he found himself* to have reacted as he beholds the terror attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre. The part is quoted below to situate this statement in a more enlightening context:

The following evening was supposed to be our last in Manila. I was in my room, packing my things. I turned on the television and saw what at first I took to be a film. But as I continued to watch, I realized that it was not fiction but news. I stared as one and then the other of the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center collapsed. And then I smiled. Yes, despicable as it may sound, my initial reaction was to be remarkably pleased. Your disgust is evident; indeed, your large hand has, perhaps without your noticing, clenched into a fist. But please believe me when I tell you that I am no sociopath; I am not indifferent to the suffering of others. When I hear of an acquaintance who has been diagnosed with a serious illness, I feel almost without fail a sympathetic pain, a twinge in my kidneys strong enough to elicit a wince. When I am approached for a donation to charity, I tend to be forthcoming, at least insofar as my modest means will permit. So when I tell you I was pleased at the slaughter of thousands of innocents, I do so with a profound sense of perplexity. (82-83)

In many ways, this passage is the most critical to the narration in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and the most pivotal in the discussion of cultural citizenship and Arab Muslim immigrants in the context of 9/11 in the novel, for the urgency that is noticeable in this plea points to a crisis that is well-beyond the atmosphere of the Lahore café where the conversation takes place. Rather, it speaks to a desire to reverse the label of terrorism Arab-Muslim immigrants have become stamped with by the power of America's hegemonic media.

In the passage quoted above, we witness a conflict between the personal and social ideals of a person. Changez, an Arab-Muslim immigrant who is personally enthralled with the idea America's greatness as a place notices a crack in his socio-cultural attitude to the country. On seeing the destruction of the Twin Towers on television, he catches himself react gleefully at the expense of his “beloved” America.

The strangeness of this reaction – his being “remarkably pleased” (82) with the terror attacks is perhaps underscored by the way it elicited in him a “profound sense of perplexity” (83). The apparent contradiction between these two responses – between being a person “profoundly perplexed” and “remarkably pleased” by the same event points to a conflict at the character’s *id* (Freud, 28). In psychoanalytic theory, the *id* corresponds to the unconscious constituent of the human mind that serves as the reservoir of a person’s instinctual drives, biological urges, and affective modes (Freud, 28). Thus, Changez’s instinctual reaction of pleasure at seeing America hurt by the terror attacks reveals the deeper working of his mind to be a person who is at war with the idea of American culture even while he desires its economic fruits. This insight is important because instances abound in the novel where this sort of conflicting ambivalent attitude to America is manifested by the narrator.

A case in point is at the beginning of the novel where the narrator tauntingly announces to his listener: “Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America” (1). This statement raises a lot of question for the critical reader, as one may want to question why Changez supposes his wearing a beard would equate him to a hater of America in the mind of his listener. The explanation of this lies in no other fact than that the narrator has come to perceive America as a place where cultural intolerance to people with Arab-Muslim habits, like keeping one’s beard, has become the norm. Thus he expects his listener to be afraid of him *because* of his beard.

Despite his “I am a lover of America” announcement, however, one notices an undisguised intent in the narrator to emphasise his ethnic alliance over that which links him to America. An examination of the logic behind the possessive pronouns employed by the protagonist in describing Pakistan and America reveals this tension. Two separate sentences of Changez are analysed below for this observation: “A thousand of *your* compatriots were enrolled, five hundred times as many, even though *your* country’s population was only twice that of *mine*” (4, Italics ours).

A consideration of these quoted parts reveals, if only one thing, a deep chasm between Changez as a person and Changez as an immigrant in the United States. The workings of the mind that makes this sentence betrays a person who perceives himself as an outsider in America even while he tries to live the promise of unquestioned acceptance into the society he has immigrated; his is the mind of a person who never escapes a clear message of his own foreignness in the country that hosts him. This sense of outsidership is even more painful when one perceives that he indeed desires to belong to America, only that his *difference* from the landscape is amplified rather than minimised in the host society.

A testament to this truth can be found in the way he seeks to distance himself from America by his use of pronouns in the quoted part above. After living for four and a half years in a country, attending one of its best and most prestigious schools, finding employment in one of its most elite workplaces and even sharing an emotional attachment with one of its high-class citizens, one would expect some

choice of word from such an immigrant that signposts intimacy for such a country rather than an aversion for it.

This is not the case, however, with Changez, as his use of the pronouns “your” and “mine” in the quoted passage reflect. Instead, one sees an undisguised attempt by the protagonist to show that he never was under the illusion of belonging to America: “*Your compatriots*” reinforces the notion that the speaker does not consider the people he lives among during his stay in the US as those he feels close to or accepted by. In the same breath, he talks about people of his own country/cultural affiliation – appropriating them as *mine*. These revelations disclose in Changez a sense of being an outsider.

The accuracy of this observation is substantiated when one considers the semantic-consequence of the word “compatriot” employed by Changez in this passage. “Compatriot” is formed through the addition of the prefix “com” to the root - item “patriot”, which, as defined by Microsoft Encarta Dictionary 2009, means “a proud supporter or defender of his or her country and its way of life.” In this definition, the cultural implication of Changez’s reproach is uncovered. Had he merely said “A thousand of *your citizens* were enrolled...”, these pronouns could have been argued to be semantically neutral, but in the light of the cultural intent behind the use of *compatriot*, one senses that the narrator experienced cultural alienation in the post 9/11 America he discusses.

In the second sentence, Changez remarks: “...In return, we were expected to contribute our talents to *your* society, the society *we* were joining. And for the most part, *we* were happy to do so *I certainly was, at least at first*” (4-5, Italics ours). Again, the use of pronouns italicised in this statement betrays, not the view of an immigrant that is actively participating in his host society, but an observer with a fine mental separation of him *self* from the-goings on in his society. What makes this second quote even more interesting is the appearance of the pronoun “we”, which is representative of the immigrant population in the novel. The occurrence of “*your society*”, as does “*your compatriots*” in the first quote, lays bare the unvoiced unconsciousness of “*my [own] society*” and “*my [own] compatriots*” as different from “*your society*” and “*your compatriots*” (4-5).

So, also “society”, like “compatriots”, speaks of ethos, rules, peoples, conventions, and lifestyles – all elements of culture that must have reminded the narrator of “his own society”. It is thus clear that Changez manifests a tinge of cultural essentialism – a gigantic reversal from his hybridic ideals of pre-9/11 consciousness when his view of America as a perfect place still subsists.

The significance of these explorations to the cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post 9/11 America lays in the way the findings signpost the sense of loss, betrayal, loneliness, and discrimination that these immigrants experience in America. This is even more pathetic when one considers that they suffer these treatments in a nation that makes a claim to diversity and plurality of peoples.

Changez's smile as he watches the 9/11 attacks can be interpreted as a manifestation of his unconscious *id* overpowering his super-ego – the location where his unvoiced and unexpressed grievances at the unwelcoming post 9/11 America are harboured and tightly lidded.

One other angle through which the cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post 9/11 America could be explored is in the consideration of the symbolic potentials of the names of the important characters in the novel, especially Changez and Erica. All through the novel, Changez Khan – a name crafted from the anglicised pronunciation of “Genghis Khan” - the progenitor of a vast majority of the peoples on the Asian continent where most Arab-Muslim immigrants in the US hail from, experiences frustration in his desire to be loved by “Erica” - the white, upper-class American girl he is besotted to.

The name “Erica” is reminiscent of “America”. In fact, the name is formed by clipping “Am” from “America” to yield the name “Erica.” The implication of this finding is that Erica, like Changez, is not intended by the author to be seen as a mere individual character. Rather, she is designed to be related with and appreciated on the symbolic level of analysis. Erica, like America, is rich, white, Anglo-Saxon, irreverent, superficial, and powerful – the qualities of host nation to which the immigrants raise their imploring hands.

Despite the superficial acceptance between them, Changez, all through the novel, seeks Erica's love in vain. The reason for this is put down to the fact there exists no mixture of emotions or soul between the two. This is even made worse by the fact that the reason for this failure owes nothing to Changez's state of mind but rather to Erica's. Changez's many overtures to her are turned down, not because of the existence of another competing lover, but because of a sickly, dead, figment of a lover by the name of “Chris”. It must be stated that the name “Chris” is itself used with a symbolic aim in mind. According to Jajja (2013), “Chris stands for the American determination to stick to its cultural, historical and ideological past” (88). Without doubt, this reading of “Chris” as a symbol of Western cultural, historical and ideological past draws up the images either “**Christ**”/Christian religion or “**Christopher Columbus**” – the discoverer of America. Whichever among these two personages Chris is meant to symbolise makes the experience of the symbolic Changez unfavourable in his effort to woo Erica. If Chris indeed symbolises Christ/Christianity, then this symbolic potential acquires more significance as this religion constitutes the arch-enemy of the Islamic religion and worldview shared by the immigrant group that Changez represents in the novel.

Evidence of the deeper, symbolic conflict in the personalities and destinies of these characters can be found in the nuances of the shriveled intimacies between them. An instance is when the two of them attempt to make love after a night-out at Changez's place. This intimate act, symbolic of the ultimate expression of closeness and mutual, reciprocated affection between two people, does not become successful.

Changez confesses the frustration he experiences in trying to be loved by Erica at a point in the narrative: "...I was desirous of embarking upon a relationship with her that amounted to more than friendship, and *I felt in the strength of her ongoing attachment to Chris the presence of a rival---albeit a dead one---with whom I feared I could never compete*" (93, Italics ours). The eventual frustration that Changez feels at the end of his stay in America is presciently foreshadowed by the failure of this romantic dream with Erica – the two major characters that symbolise the two different cultures of the Orient and the Occident in the novel.

One other marker of cultural citizenship expressed in this novel inheres in the pain that [Arab]-Muslim immigrants in the novel suffered due to America's foreign policy. Changez catalogues what he perceives as the violent and high-handed way America relates with the world's weaker and smaller nations in the novel; nations that often turn out to be the hearth and home of these immigrants themselves. The out-working of this observation is the reason Changez decides to refuse working while on official assignment in Chile, where he accuses America of using India to browbeat his weaker Pakistan into subjection.

The first indication of this in the novel is encapsulated in Jim's carefree word of advice to Changez while they are on assignment for Underwood Samson in New Jersey. Despite Jim's good-naturedness and perceptiveness – qualities that make him perhaps one of the most likable characters in the novel, he displays an uncanny insensitivity when he refers to the part of the world where Changez hails from. Not only does he assume that everyone from the third world is "poor" (80-81), he views the entirety of the third world as a place doomed for atrophy and irrelevance:

The economy's an animal," Jim continued. "It evolves. First it needed muscle. Now all the blood it could spare was rushing to its brain. That's where I wanted to be. In finance. In the coordination business. And that's where *you* are. You're blood brought from some part of the body that the species doesn't need anymore. The tailbone. Like me. We came from places that were wasting away. (110, italics in original)

Such a completely offensive remark made so sanguinely betrays not an insensitivity that could be blamed on the character, but rather the one that implicates the prevalent cultural ethos obtainable in the society that produced the speaker. Reading this quote, one could get the sense that the speaker must have been raised in a culture that has instructed itself to consider every other culture apart from itself as inferior and poor. It could thus be argued that Jim's insensitivity here is an insensitivity that is not aware of its own insensitivity. In this chilling realisation then we are offered a look into the imperiousness that America exhibits towards immigrants of Arab-Muslim nations in the novel.

This mindset acquires even more significance when one realises its falsity in relation to the protagonist: “As I have already told you, I did not grow up in poverty” (81). While reflecting on Jim’s words – quoted above, Changez notes his resentment: “... but I was uncomfortable with the idea that the place I came from was condemned to atrophy” (110-111). From this understanding, one could thus forgive Changez for losing his temper when he declares to his American listener:

For we were not always burdened by debt, dependent on foreign aid and handouts; in the stories we tell of ourselves we were not the crazed and destructive radicals you see on your television channels but rather saints and poets and yes-conquering kings. *We* built the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens in this city and *we* built the Lahore Fort with its mighty walls and wide ramp for our battle-elephants. And we did these things when your country was still a collection of thirteen small colonies, gnawing at the edge of a continent. (115 -16, italics in original).

On many grounds, the passage above brings many points related to the fictional representation of the cultural citizenship of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post 9/11 America home, as it reveals the tortured splits in Changez’s sensibilities with respect to his host society. Just as the earlier consideration of the use of pronouns in this study reveals an intentional desire of the protagonist to distance his affection from America, the italicised pronouns in this quotation point to the same and more.

The semantic contexts of their occurrence reveal more than just a distancing of affection, but a stance-taking and an embracing of comparative historiography which degrades America’s cultural history and elevates that of people of Arab-Muslim origins and civilisation of the Indus River basin in Pakistan, and by implication, the Orient.

He rejects the prevalent knack of caricaturing people of Muslim lands as “crazed and destructive radicals” – a reference to the role of American media which are reflected as overly complicit in fuelling the hatred with which immigrants of Arab-Muslim origins experience in post-9/11 America. Changez challenges this caricaturing by stating that they are the exact opposite – “saints and poets and yes-conquering kings”. He outlines the historical achievements of his land of birth – the constructing of the Royal Mosque and the Shalimar Gardens at a time when America as a land was still engrossed with the first fitful breath of life as a nation. While reflecting on the technological advancements he notices in America, he again voices this thought:

Four thousand years ago, we, the people of the Indus River basin, had cities that were laid out grids and boasted underground sewers, while the ancestors of those who would invade and colonize America were illiterate barbarians. (38)

Concerning the wars that have resulted from America's high-handedness in its relation to weaker states, Changez lists the lands that have suffered as a consequence of America's might. These include Vietnam and lands of Islamic civilisation like the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Iraq. He also details the tension and war that almost began between India and Pakistan – a war he suspects is being orchestrated by America to force Pakistan to accede to its demands of using Pakistan as the base to fight the Taliban. Changez deems these power-plays of America as too humiliating and destructive to the peace of the world. Thus he states: "America has to be stopped... in the interest of humanity" (191). This important function seems accomplished in his *id* when the terrorists strike:

It seemed to me then-and to be honest, sir, seems to me still-that America was engaged only in posturing. As a society, you were unwilling to reflect upon the shared pain that united you with those who attacked you. You retreated into myths of your own difference, assumptions of your own superiority. And you acted out these beliefs on the stage of the world, so that the entire planet was rocked by the repercussions of your tantrums, not least my family, now facing war thousands of miles away. Such America had to be stopped in the interests not only of the rest of humanity, but also in your own. (190-191)

It is thus little wonder the reason why he smiles in his hotel room as he beholds the attacks on the TV screen in his Manila hotel room, remarking later: "...I was caught in the *symbolism* of it all, the fact that someone had so visibly brought America to her knees" (83, italics in original).

The discussion of cultural citizenship and Arab-Muslim immigrants in the political atmosphere of 9/11 reflected in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* would be incomplete without the mention of the character by the name of Juan-Bautista – the chief of the Valparaíso publishing company that Changez is sent to value in Chile. In many important ways, Juan-Bautista serves as the final glue in making the architecture of Changez's disturbed consciousness form into a radical whole, as his calculated and insightful remarks helped in catalysing the resolve of the already disenchanted protagonist, thereby lending both agency and urgency to his unfurling fundamentalism.

From the way Changez describes him, Juan-Bautista is an old, well-read man with a set-of-values that deeply contrast with the superficial pragmatism that fuels the energy behind America's "military-financial complex" (Mukherjee, 2) and which in turn fuels the soulless efficiency behind Underwood Samson's tenet of "focus[ing] on the fundamentals" (90). Thus, the first question he poses to Changez is whether it troubles him or not, to make his living by disrupting the lives of others as his job at Underwood Samson invariably forces him to do (171). Perceiving his troubled mind, Juan-Bautista invites the protagonist to a dinner where he educates him on the

destructive consequences of American capitalism on other worldviews. He tells him about the janissaries of the Ottoman Empire – Christian boys raised by the rival civilisation of the Ottoman empire, and trained to wipe out their own homestead in wars.

By telling Changez about the janissaries, Juan-Bautista helps him to see the aim of American capitalism on his own Islamic civilisation in Pakistan. By the virtue of his work at Underwood Samson, Changez sees how he is being made into a modern-day janissary to become “an officer of the [Western] empire” (179) to destroy the life-forms and civilisation of his native land, culture, and lifestyle. He loses his equanimity, and his decision to resign from his job and leave America becomes made for him at this point:

...Yes, my musings were bleak indeed. I reflected that I had always resented the manner in which America conducted itself in the world; your country's constant interference in the affairs of others was insufferable. Vietnam, Korea, the straits of Taiwan, the Middle East, and now Afghanistan: in each of the major conflicts and standoffs that ringed my mother continent of Asia, America played a central role. Moreover I knew from my experience as a Pakistani of alternating periods of American aid and sanctions that finance was a primary means by which the American empire exercised its power. It was right for me to refuse to participate any longer in facilitating this project of domination; the only surprise was that I had required so much time to arrive at my decision.

I resolved to look about me with an ex-janissary's gaze---with, that is to say, the analytical eyes of a product of Princeton and Underwood Samson, but unconstrained by the academic's and the professional's various compulsions to focus primarily on parts, and free therefore to consider also the whole of your society----upon my return to New York. Seen in this fashion I was struck by how traditional your empire appeared. Armed sentries manned the check post at which I sought entry; being of a suspect race I was quarantined and subjected to additional inspection; once admitted I hired a charioteer who belonged to a serf class lacking the requisite permissions to abide legally and forced therefore to accept work at lower pay; I myself was a form of indentured servant whose right to remain was dependent upon the continued benevolence of my employer. Thank you, Juan-Bautista, I thought as I lay myself down in my bed, *for helping me to push back the veil behind which all this had been concealed!* (177-178, italics in original)

As a consequence of this awakening, Changez becomes instantly changed, as he embarks on a re-definition of what he considers valuable or not. Where his highest dream used to have a high-flying career in one of Wall Street's cathedrals of finance, flaunting his expense account, and probably going to Harvard Business School (5), he begins to think less of financial reward and to dwell more on issues of his cultural identity.

It is perhaps then no surprise the revealing expression he used in the quoted part above, where he refers to his land of origin as “my mother continent of Asia” (177). The emotional expression contained in the orthographic item “mother” shows a new stage of maturity in Changez’s worldview. Here, Changez becomes a man who sheds his rationalistic armour for the gentle pulls of the heart to his emotional filiations and roots.

The result of such a transition from a man dominated by ambition – the result of logic - to a man that sets financial gains and power at naught in order to stand for the cause of defending the dignity of his demesne becomes underlined by the “unreasonable” choice he ends up making: provoking a sacking from his lucrative job, and thus having to leave his acclaimed city of possibilities – New York (179) to relocate to Pakistan, and take up a less financially-rewarding career.

In his bid to show his rejection of his erstwhile love for America, he begins to sport a beard - the identifying mark of a terrorist in America’s book of cultural intolerance. The reasons for this compete volte-face in Changez’s ideals can be located in the pains he suffers as an [Arab]-Muslim immigrant in America. Despite his willingness to be seen and thought of as a lover of America, he is rejected by the host nation, discriminated against, looked down upon, and ridiculed on account of his difference. And it is in this futility to be accepted into the ethos and *weltanschauung* of his host nation that the painful realities Arab-Muslim immigrants in America is underscored.

As a representative of the Arab-Muslim immigrants, the plights of Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* typify the pains that members of this immigrant community still face in America as a consequence of 9/11. In Post-colonial criticism, the experience of Changez mirrors the discrimination that citizens from the Periphery experience in relating with the Centre: a kind of imperialistic superiority adopted by global powers in interacting with weaker nations.

Conclusion

Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* offers a powerful critique of the limitations of cultural citizenship in addressing the experiences of Arab-Muslim immigrants in post-9/11 America. Through Changez’s journey, the novel highlights the tensions between assimilation and cultural preservation, challenging the dominant narratives of belonging and exclusion. By employing symbolism and a nuanced exploration of identity, Hamid underscores the need for a more inclusive understanding of cultural citizenship that recognises the complexities of immigrant experiences. By exposing the limitations of cultural citizenship in addressing the alienation of Arab-Muslim immigrants, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* calls for a reimagining of multiculturalism that acknowledges the complexities of identity in a globalised world. Future research could explore how other post-9/11 narratives similarly challenge or reinforce these dynamics.

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‘Location Dislocation’¹ in Salman Rushdie’s Novel *Quichotte*



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Abstract

This article explores how the concept of the *Third Space* might be applied to discuss the motif of the American road trip in Salman Rushdie’s novel *Quichotte* (2019). The term *Third Space* is used by multiple authors within the theory of post-colonialism with reference to the concept of liminal space; the works of post-colonial theorists Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha are taken as a theoretical basis of this work. In Salman Rushdie’s novel *Quichotte*, two protagonists of the story Quichotte and Sancho embark on a road trip across America in search of the Beloved. The internal struggles of the characters, their encounters of hostile communities along the way and searching for ways to adjust to the world are discussed through a lens of spatio-temporal transformations they undergo while travelling.

Key words: Rushdie, *Quichotte*, post-colonialism, *Third Space*, space, time

The post-colonial literary theory puts a lot of emphasis on the concept of place in (post) colonial literary texts. Multiple terms such as “liminal”, “third”, “in-between” are used in reference to the topic. As this essay employs the term the *Third Space* to refer to location in the post-colonial discourse, it will be discussed in more detail here. In his book *Thirdspace* (1996), the American geographer and postmodern political urbanist Edward Soja provides an extensive overview of the concept of *Thirdspace* discussed in the works of the most prominent theorists of postmodernism ranging from Michel Foucault to bell hooks. Soja defines the *Thirdspace* as “an-Other way of understanding and acting to change the spatiality of human life, a distinct mode of critical spatial awareness that is appropriate to the new scope and significance being brought about in the re-balanced trialectics of spatiality-historicity-sociality” (Soja 1996, 10). He claims that a certain set of attributes defining the concept reoccur in the texts of all major theorists of postmodernism, including

a knowable and unknowable, real and imagined lifeworld of experiences, emotions, events, and political choices that is existentially shaped by the generative and

¹ Rushdie 2019, 137.

problematic interplay between centers and peripheries, the abstract and concrete, the impassioned spaces of the conceptual and the lived, marked out materially and metaphorically in spatial praxis, the transformation of (spatial) knowledge into (spatial) action in a field of unevenly developed (spatial) power. (31)

What stands out in Soja's definition of the *Thirdspace* is its complexity as it incorporates elements that would otherwise be mutually exclusive as they form traditional binary oppositions. The theoretical framework which Soja uses to justify such a description of the *Thirdspace* is based on Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction which interprets the connections between concepts/signs as supplementary rather than excluding. Edward Soja as well as bell hooks, Homi Bhabha and multiple other representatives of post-colonial theory and literature rely on deconstruction, a method of research in conceptualising the post-colonial space. Edward Soja explains the approach the post-colonial critic uses to examine the concept of space:

It seeks instead a multiplicitous "alterity", a transgressive "third way" that is more than just the sum or combination of an originary dualism. At its best, such critical spatial thinking seeks to undermine its own authority by a form of textual and political practice that privileges uncertainties, rejects authoritative and paradigmatic structures that suggest permanence or inviolability, invites contestation, and thereby keeps open the spatial debate to new and different possibilities. (Soja 1996, 117)

The undermining of the authority, rejecting binary oppositions and introducing the element of uncertainty in a scientific discussion appear to be central to this approach to analysing narratives.

If Soja delineates the principles of approaching the *Thirdspace*, the works of Homi Bhabha give us insight into the inner workings of the phenomenon. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha points out that the appearance of the *Third Space* introduces an element of ambivalence in the established discourse which is characterized by "the historical identity of culture as a homogenising, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People" (Bhabha 2007, 54). Under the influence of the *Third Space*, the elements of such a traditional discourse are subjected to transformation.

Regarding the concept of the *Third Space*, hybridity is often considered to be a key to understanding Bhabha's ideas about this phenomenon. In *Changing the Terms* (2004), Michaela Wolf suggests that Bhabha introduces the idea of cultural hybridity as a cultural encounter "when *self and other* are inseparable from mutual contamination by each other. The colonial encounter is therefore embedded a priori in power relations, and requires constant awareness of the limits and possibilities of representation" (Wolf 2000, 114). Wolf explains that the moment two cultures collide,

hybridity emerges as not a single agent in this process remains the same after the interaction with the other. The duality of the binary opposition self and the other loses its meaning as both of its elements are affected by another and transformed (37). It is clear that the existence of hybridity is embedded in conflict as Bhabha describes "hybridity as camouflage, as a contesting, antagonistic agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement" (Bhabha 2007, 277). In short, hybridity, a product of the collision of two different cultures, emerges in the *Third Space* which enables it to transform both cultures affected by it through contesting the established norms which pre-exist the merger of the cultures. The process of transformation originates in conflict and opposition rather than peaceful coexistence; however, it produces novel meanings as a result.

The choice to discuss Salman Rushdie's novel *Quichotte* within the theoretical framework of the *Third Space* has been made following the discussion of Rushdie's works by Homi Bhabha. He identifies the writer as a representative of the concept of the in-between space. Bhabha writes that Rushdie "is the history that happened elsewhere, overseas, his postcolonial, migrant presence does not evoke a harmonious patchwork of cultures, but articulates the narrative of cultural difference which can never let the national history look at itself narcissistically in the eye" (Bhabha 2007, 241). Being a migrant who is caught between different cultures, who articulates his experience through a medium of English, an acquired language, making it his own enables Salman Rushdie to become a voice of cultural hybridity which functions in the *Third Space*. In my article titled "Home as a Liminal Space in Salman Rushdie's *Quichotte*", I investigated liminality as a set of features attributed to the *Third Space*. This essay continues the research of this concept with the view to the theoretical implication attributed to the motif of the road trip.

The description of the protagonist's travel starts with Quichotte rejecting a sedentary life for the sake of travel: "He no longer had a fixed abode. The road was his home, the car was his living room, its trunk was his wardrobe" (Rushdie 2019, 9). It continues with the detachment from people: "The truth was that he had almost no friends anymore (...) On his Facebook page he had 'friended' or 'been friended' by a small and dwindling group of commercial travellers like himself" (9). The final stage of the process includes disregard of societal pressures: "he had lost all personal ambition and curiosity, found big cities oppressive and craved only anonymity and solitude" (10). The road trip Quichotte embarks on serves a specific purpose in the process of alienation: "Invisibility is a thing he clearly wishes for, he wants to disappear, there too is the origin of his desire to follow a wandering star. I will diminish and go into the West and remain Galadriel. To be a person not seen, of no import, going where he will, remaining himself" (89). Thus, before the road trip Quichotte nulls his social connections and obligations, rejects societal norms to discover his true self through the road trip. Consequently, the introduction of Quichotte as a protagonist of the novel creates an image of a romanticized traditional

character of the American road trip who embarks on a quest to reinvent himself and who treats travelling West as seeking the expansion of personal boundaries as well as geographical (social and political) frontiers he feels pressured by.

At the start of the trip, it becomes obvious that Quichotte feels an urge for human connection. It is a son that he longs for to share his experiences with and teach life lessons. Miraculously, a son appears; first, he is only visible to Quichotte, but gradually he acquires physical characteristics that make him noticeable to people they meet on their road trip. The appearance of Sancho serves several purposes in the story. First, he provides a critical evaluation of his father's decisions and ideas, by engaging in conversations with Quichotte over the claims he makes about the society and human nature as well as the purpose of their trip. Secondly, Sancho supplements Quichotte, yet their duality is complex as initially they might be seen as two opposites: a youngster and an old man, one concerned with practicalities of life and another one being a dreamer, the son learning and the father teaching him.

However, the duality of their relationship is more ambiguous than it might appear at the start of their trip together. Although Sancho is both younger than Quichotte and fully dependent on him financially, he is the one who provides a down-to-earth evaluation of their American Dream in the fictional narrative.

The motif of the road trip has been widely discussed in the field of American studies. In a historical overview of the development of this trope, Gordon Slethaug maintains that it has been a part of the American narrative since Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" (1856) which established a set of motifs attributed to the trope such as an individual traveller, nature and culture as well as travel as a symbol of progress (Slethaug 2012, 18). Advancement of technology in the period of modernity transformed the trope by adding the motif of the automobile as a symbol of individualism and an ability to impact both the environment travel takes place in and the personal destiny of the traveller (25). The postmodern interpretation of the American road trip tends "to restore some of the romance of the road while still paying attention to contemporary social and economic shifts, without letting them overpower the narrative" (36). In addition to this, Slethaug mentions that the contemporary narrative about the road trip is more inclusive: it used to focus on portraying a white male protagonist in pursuit of the American dream; however, recently it tends to "address multiplicity, heterogeneity, self-contradiction, and self-difference – each establishing its own use with less dependence on conventional understandings of genre" (37). To overview the key aspects of the transforming trope of the road trip, it can be observed that the narrative about this type of travel preserves certain elements such as romanticizing the road, inclusion of the motif of the car to symbolise individual freedom. However, now it does embrace change through inclusion of more diverse characters and circumstances.

Regarding typical characters embarking on a road trip, Ronald Primeau suggests that travel is a solitary endeavour because of the goal the traveller pursues. In his article "On American Road Literature", he maintains that "most journeys are still undertaken not in groups but as a solitary escape from routine, an effort to clear one's head, or a quest for meaning in one's life" (Primeau 2013, 9). Although such a description is true about the majority of narratives on the topic, it must be noted that an addition of a travel buddy is not rare in such texts. Slethaug mentions the motif of "the transgressive buddy" whose role is established in Kerouac's *On the Road* (Slethaug 2012, 30). Over time the portrayal of a travel friend who does not comply with the norms of society is altered as the focus of narratives changes from drugs and rebellion to identity and family (35). Another type of character who appears in road stories is that of a fool. Origins of such a character are traced back to Cervantes' Don Quichotte, they are still relevant in today's fiction. To provide an example, in the article "Fools on the American Road: "Gimpel the Fool", The Frisco Kid, and Forrest Gump", Wendy Zierler discusses two films *The Frisco Kid* and *Forrest Gump* which feature a fool as the protagonist of the road story. To generalise the role of such a character, Zierler maintains that foolish characters typically have more intelligent counterparts to travel with and be introduced to the culture and landscape of the locations they visit. As far as his role is concerned, the gullible character acts as "a reactionary and a revolutionary, a keeper of the system and one who explodes all systems as imaginary and false" (Zierler 2012, 221). Hence, regarding protagonists in road stories, writers typically include a lone traveller who is on a quest to rediscover himself; sometimes he is paired with another character described as somebody that does not adhere to social norms or is considered to be a half-wit. This character functions in the narrative to reveal the state of the society both characters live in.

Critics writing about the postmodern road trip point out that the conditions of the trip often appear to be threatening. In contrast to the idealised and romanticized vision of the road trip in the 19th century, postmodern narrative reveals that the American dream is hardly possible for contemporary characters embarking on a quest to reach it. Skidmore discussed the road trip undertaken by Black Americans and claims that for people of colour "the implied capacity for mobility and autonomy on which a road trip ought to rely cannot be taken for granted" (Skidmore 2012, 135). Similarly, in the book *Empty Spaces: Confronting Emptiness in National, Cultural, and Urban History*, Martin Walter asserts that "the motif of the journey is not just a convenient means to move the narrative to another setting: it also introduces us to the unfamiliarity of (...) space, from which we can then establish a feeling of loss" (Walter 2019, 143). Another insight that is important for this argument is that "moving to the fringes is commonly seen as a form of securing the body, while urban settlements are often rendered as dangerous places" (143). Rushdie's novel *Quichotte* depicts a journey of two characters of Indian descent across America, from the city to the countryside and back. Quichotte, a city dweller, embarks on a journey to

conquer his Beloved by leaving the city, travelling through the valleys of self-discovery and returning to the city to face the object of his affection. The space he travels in reminds us of the postmodern space of Walter's and Skidmore's descriptions as it is unfamiliar and hostile to the protagonists of the novel. Throughout the trip Quichotte battles a feeling of loss by replacing his social connections with Sancho, a creation of his imagination. It is the elements of loss, its supplementation through creation and the hostility of the space that link the postmodern interpretation of the trope of the road to the post-colonial concept of the *Third Space*.

In the novel Quichotte starts his road trip by alienating himself from society through travel and society's point of view about them, thus, presenting a more mature and grounded understanding about how society works. It is Sancho who understands the importance of money and legal documents for him to become an independent person. He also correctly interprets social situations which can become unsafe for them, whilst Quichotte is lost in his thoughts and disregards the social environment completely. In contrast, Quichotte often appears to be unable to cope with challenges they face during the trip and often hides from making decisions in the world of fantasy provided by television. Cervantes's Don Quixote is the narrative which adds a character of the fool to the trope of the road trip. There Sancho represents the reason while Don Quixote is the one which is considered to be the fool. Rushdie's protagonists both have the features of the fool and the reasonable one. Quichotte is a dreamer and a marginalised character, but he is also a grown-up who provides financial stability to Sancho and aids in resolving issues they encounter throughout the quest. Similarly, Sancho lacks knowledge of the world as he is young and inexperienced, but he is able to decode social cues and guide Quichotte to making decisions when required. They both appear to have characteristics which are typical of the protagonist of the road trip and his buddy, thus, supplementing the qualities that each one lacks.

Despite the fact that Quichotte seems to have detached himself from society at the start of the trip, the introduction of Sancho as a character reinforces the importance of the social aspect of place in the narrative. What Sancho does first and foremost is create a connection between Quichotte, himself and society. However, the rapport appears to be fractured and ambiguous for both of them. Initially, Sancho is only seen by Quichotte, which results in people considering him to be insane for talking to thin air. As Sancho observes, "people look at him. That look people use on crazy people. Like he's talking to himself, and I want to yell out, see me. I'm standing right her. But to other people I'm, apparently impossible to sense. I'm what's the word. Imperceptible" (Rushdie 2019, 82). At the same time Quichotte deals with the impossibility of fitting in the society and embarks on his quest to resolve this issue. According to Sancho, "he wanted a quest. There are people who need to impose a shape upon the shapelessness of life. For such people the quest narrative is always

attractive. It prevents them from suffering the agony of feeling what's the word. Incoherent" (89). Imperceptible and incoherent are the features that characterize Sancho and Quichotte, two marginalized characters, on their road trip across America. The two qualities are revealed from different perspectives although both of them emphasize the fragmented nature of the protagonists. Sancho feels imperceptible in relation to society rather than Quichotte. The latter is immediately capable to acknowledge his existence and commence meaningful communication. On the other hand, to the rest of the society, Sancho is invisible, which affects both protagonists negatively: Sancho is unhappy about being invisible, hence, irrelevant; as far as Quichotte is concerned, his ability to see and communicate with Sancho puts him in a vulnerable position with respect to other people who regard him crazy and dangerous as he is seen to be talking to an invisible interlocutor.

Regarding Quichotte's feeling of incoherence, it manifests itself in his relations with Sancho and strangers they meet on their way as Quichotte appears to be unable to fit in: he speaks too loud in public spaces, his ideas and motives are not fully explained and seem to be strange and unsettling to Sancho. In rare moments when Quichotte decides to refer to his deeply buried past and chooses to express his ideas eloquently and provides well-grounded justifications for them, he offers a short relief from the stress of the incoherence of his everyday communication. The difference in the quality of Quichotte's communication seems to stem from the time and place he exists in or refers to. His past which includes his childhood in India and school years in Britain can be glimpsed in the sophisticated and eloquent language he on rare occasions resorts to. Quichotte's present life in the US is reflected in his fragmented everyday language infested with references to popular culture such as soap operas and TV series. The temporal-spatial element is introduced through the language Quichotte employs, but it is not restricted to it as throughout the road trip its significance is emphasized in multiple episodes.

At the beginning of the road trip, the perception of time and place the travellers have enhances their sense of alienation. Sancho remarks about the location they have selected for the start of their trip: "We're out here in the middle of nowhere, (...). There's nothing to do and no reason to be doing it" (Rushdie 2019, 97). However, it is in that location where Sancho becomes visible to everyone. His transformation from a monochrome phantom discernible only to the eye of Quichotte to a full-colour, high-definition teenager is described in technical rather than human terms. This description relates Sancho to a dream that Quichotte has had of becoming a father rather than the reality of the relationships between Sancho and Quichotte. The multiple references to TV and films locate Sancho in the present that Quichotte inhabits as a fragmented and marginalised traveller whose mind is clouded with the content of American TV and films. However, as far as time is concerned, Quichotte explains to Sancho that for him existing outside time has a purpose: "To be separated from the present, past and future is to entertain the eternal, to allow the eternal to

enter one's being" (106). Despite being drawn to timeless eternity, Quichotte embraces that the gift of becoming a father and resumes their road trip following a mapped route along the interstate.

The journey of Sancho and Quichotte is depicted through the alternation between private spaces the travellers create from themselves and public spaces. Their automobile becomes the safe space they can exchange their ideas in and shelter from hostile attacks of the locals. Traditionally, the automobile has been a crucial element of the American road trip symbolizing freedom and progress. However, it is not its speed but privacy the car grants that is emphasised in the narrative. Similarly, hotel rooms the travellers stay in ensure anonymity, safety and access to television as a key to understanding how to behave in the American society. While travelling, Quichotte often refers to American TV shows, series and movies to explain the models of behaviour that the travellers have to follow. Marginalized from the society, Quichotte turns to TV for advice how to function in the society he does not feel a part of. The role of TV as a prescription of "what is acceptable/off limits to say and do in public" (Ford 2012, 164) is taken to extreme by Quichotte who consistently refers to TV shows to provide explanation for real life events as other means of comprehending the world he lives in seem to be unavailable to him.

Throughout the quest Sancho and Quichotte undergo two transformative experiences, both of which are related to racial conflicts in public spaces which are shown as opposites of the private spaces the characters create for themselves. The first incident, a racist attack on Sancho and Quichotte in a local campsite, results in the detachment of Quichotte from Sancho and the disruption of spatial-temporal order. Sancho acknowledges that "after the confrontation at Lake Capote it's like the balance of his [Quichotte's] mind got disturbed. If he was at least partly clear-minded before, he's all unclear now" (Rushdie 2019, 131). What it means for Sancho is that he is no longer capable of accessing Quichotte's mind in order to understand his way of thinking. This change affects both of them as Quichotte starts driving recklessly thus putting them in danger; also, Sancho is unable to communicate with his father, which puts him in a vulnerable position. As a result, their road trip loses its purpose: "that's all there's going to be, the endless drifting and watching and no arriving" (131). The disruption impacts the world beyond the travellers, which Sancho identifies as "some error in space and time" (133). The transformation is first seen as local: "the world outside the motel room has totally ceased to be straightforward. (...) When I wake up in the morning and open the door of the motel room I can't be sure of which town I'll find outside, or what day of the week or what month of the year." (134-135) Further in the narrative the transformation seems to affect a part of the society: "maybe (...) this is the way things are these days in America: that for some of us, the world stopped making sense. Anything can happen. Here can be there, then can be now, up can be down, truth can be lies. Everything's nothing to hold on to" (138). Overall, the disruption of a personal quest results in detachment from people closest to one, loss

of the purpose of life, disorientation in time and space. On the other hand, a transformation of one story leads to the alteration of a larger community which is affected in the same way as an individual is: the logics and balance of their narrative is destroyed, which results in enhanced vulnerability and a sense of displacement.

The first altercation on the basis of race is quickly followed by another one. It not only affects the protagonists of the novel but also impacts other people. During a racist attack in a bar, Quichotte and Sancho are insulted by local men; however, it is other Indian people in the same bar that are shot at, and one of them does not survive. The incident is triggered by an exchange of the Indian guests in their native tongue. Language becomes a trigger of a conflict and a key to reducing alienation. Sancho recognizes the importance of language in the creation of detachment by devising a strategy to use it as a tool to reduce it. Addressing Quichotte, he asserts: "I want us to speak to each other in that language, especially in public, to defy the bastards who hate us for possessing another tongue" (Rushdie 2019, 151). Although at this stage it seems that Sancho views language as a means of resistance, the process of learning about the country through language proves to have multiple effects on the student and the world he functions in. The learning process enables Sancho to appropriate America as he feels that "to redescribe the country in their private language was also to take ownership of it" (152). Conversely, the English language inserts itself into Indian and Bambaiyya through the process of translation: "when there were shootings, heh learned that a gun was a ghoda, which meant 'horse', a bullet was a tablet, or sometimes a capsule. So English, in such mutations, found its way into Bambaiyya too" (152). The discovery of language as a tool to aid adjustment and inclusion re-establishes relative harmony between public and private spaces for both travellers. Sancho feels that "their linguistic act of possession made the country begin to make sense again. The random spatial and temporal dislocations stopped. The world settled down and gave Sancho the illusion, at least, of comprehensibility" (153). In general, it is through a native language as a tool to describe the world that the protagonists of the novel are able to reduce detachment and alienation from the American culture as well as merge their private *Third Space* with the public space outside of it.

The road trip of Quichotte and Sancho ends with them reaching New York, "an object of great desire" (Rushdie 2019, 154). At the beginning of the quest Quichotte leaves the city to find himself, while he returns to the city he has transformed: he has a son, an interpreter between him and America, he also has language as a tool to cope with the volatile and dangerous public space that needs to be entered for the quest to be complete.

In summary, in the post-colonial theory the concept of liminal space acquires multiple names, one of which the *Third Space* is employed in this research. According to Edward Soja, the *Thirdspace* is determined by several dimensions which include the historical, the spatial and the social and includes numerous elements such as real

and imagined, knowable and unknowable, abstract and concrete, etc. Although it might seem that the constituents of the *Third Space* include binary oppositions, Soja employs the method of deconstruction to analysing the concept, pointing out that the elements of the *Third Space* exist outside of the traditional hierarchy. It is disorder and openness that define the essence of the phenomenon. Another post-colonial theorist, Homi Bhabha, proposes that the *Third Space* is inhabited by hybridity which is always dual as it is contaminated by the Other.

The trope of the road trip which is selected for the analysis in this article has its unique set of features which include the images of the automobile, the frontier, freedom associated with driving and a male white protagonist with a friend who is either a misfit or a fool. Since the 19th century, the trope has undergone changes; the postmodern interpretation of the road trip includes more diverse characters regarding gender and race as well as a more negative portrayal of space which is shown as dangerous and unpredictable.

The analysis of the portrayal of the road trip in Salman Rushdie's novel *Quichotte* reveals that the narrative of Sancho and Quichotte's travel includes several traditional elements of the trope such as the automobile, the frontier and male protagonists. On the other hand, the interpretation of spatial-temporal elements within the trope of the road trip reveals certain unique characteristics attributed to the trope in the novel. Although the novel tells a story of two male protagonists, the aspect of them being people of colour is important as it triggers the main conflicts of the narrative. The relationship between them does not fit a traditional description in which characters exist in a binary opposition. In Rushdie's novel, both Sancho and Quichotte supplement rather than oppose each other, for example, although Quichotte is supposed to be his parent, Sancho often takes the role of a teacher or a mediator who has profound understanding how society works.

Space and time play an important role in the narration of the trip. Initially, Quichotte embarks on the road trip pursuing a goal of expanding his frontiers, leaving his past and society behind. On the other hand, he longs for company, for a son he could impart his wisdom to, which leads to a magic appearance of the son. Their trip together starts in the middle of nowhere where time has stopped, a perfect space for dreams to come true: the son materializes acquiring human features and Quichotte sees a sign signalling the start of the trip. Throughout the trip, Sancho and Quichotte transition from safe private spaces such as their automobile and anonymous hotel rooms to dangerous public spaces such as campsites and cafes.

It is in public places that both characters encounter racial attacks which lead to major alterations in time and space. The first racist attack they encounter disrupts the balance between public and private places. The world through a hotel window becomes unrecognizable, the comfort of the moving car no longer shelters the travellers from the craziness and aggression of the outside world. The change disrupts communication between the protagonists as well as between them and the

society. The second attack results in a death of a person. The incident both deepens the emotional turmoil and offers a solution. Sancho discovers language as a means to cope with the danger of the outside world, and Quichotte's lessons in Hindi and a local dialect of Bombay enable Sancho to appropriate the alienated American society. Sancho's linguistic appropriation of America stabilizes time and place which start making sense again.

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The Archetype of the Terrible Mother in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790)



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Abstract

Rooted in Jung's theories of the unconscious, and further developed by scholars like Erich Neumann or Northrop Frye, the archetype of the Terrible Mother appears to emerge with special intensity at times of trouble and social unrest to remind us of our deepest fears. This article explores this archetype within the pages of Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), examining the marchioness Maria di Vellorno as an embodiment of the evil stepmother figure, a common manifestation of the Terrible Mother archetype. By analysing the marchioness's controlling demeanour and the destructive attributes associated with the darker aspect of the Feminine, the paper reveals how Radcliffe's novel reflects the anxieties of late 18th-century England in the face of French revolutionary radicalism. The analysis highlights the Terrible Mother's links to social unrest and the triumph of English social order through the heroine's victory and the demise of the evil stepmother. The article contributes to understanding the psychological and cultural meaning of the Terrible Mother in literature and its portrayal of historical anxieties.

Key words

Ann Radcliffe, „A Sicilian Romance”, Terrible Mother, evil stepmother, gothic novel, archetypal criticism

Introduction

Carl Gustav Jung's exploration of mythology and its application in clinical practice in the early 20th century sparked extensive discourse on archetypes and their relevance across various disciplines. Archetypes have gained notable recognition in art and literary studies, serving as the source of the human spirit in all its forms (Neumann 2015, 17), a means to reveal the artist's unconscious (Storr 1983, 16). Therefore, an archetype is an unconscious 'spectroscopic band of peculiar formation of symbols' (Frye 1963, 11). These symbols are interconnected elements that merge to create patterns, which in turn define the archetype (1965, 4). The archetype would then take the form of a narrative, which would be the myth (Baudkin 1965, 8; Storr 1983, 16). This would mean that an archetype forms the foundational structure within myths, mythologies and narratives of all kinds: oral and written texts, pictorial, and an

endless number of them. Defined as 'the matrix of literature' by Frye, the archetype serves as the primeval wellspring to which literature continually returns (1963, 33).

As several scholars remind us, a ubiquitous archetype in all mythologies is the Great Goddess, or Great Mother (Jorge 2019, 57), which shows both creative and destructive tendencies (Rooks 2016, 122). Exploring mythological motifs dating back to the Palaeolithic era, Jung argues that the collective unconscious depicts the Great Mother as two distinct deities: one representing benevolent, nurturing and protective qualities – those we tend to commonly associate to "motherly love", a second one incarnating darker aspects, such as devouring, seduction and destruction (Rooks 2016, 122-3; Tausiet 2019, 58). Furthermore, building on Jung's premises, Erich Neumann (2015) also identifies two aspects of the Mother archetype: her positive and negative elementary characteristics. This paper will further explore the latter in relation to a Gothic masterpiece. Therefore, the Great Mother archetype is an inherent presence within humanity's unconscious since ancient times. It has appeared with varying degrees of recognition across diverse cultural expressions, often embodied as goddesses representing different forms of the feminine (Leeming and Page 1994, 3). Thus, the concept of the Great Mother archetype transcends physical manifestation, existing beyond the constraints of tangible form or specific temporal and spatial boundaries. Instead of that, the Great Mother is an inner image which is active in the human psyche (Neumann 2015, 33). This archetype's effect is discernible in the rituals, myths and symbols humanity still carries from ancient civilizations to this day (Neumann 2015, 3).

As Northrop Frye argues, each archetype – whether images or patterns – comprises two interconnected, if contrasting, aspects: the Apocalyptic or Ideal Aspect, associated with images of 'revelation' and the benevolent, or 'good', aspect of the archetype (Frye 2004, 31), and the Demonic Aspect, linked to images of downfall and the dreadful or 'terrible':

I was speaking about the structure of imagery [...] and was saying that the imagery tends to split into two opposed categories. One I'm calling the apocalyptic or the ideal, the one that's associated with the Garden of Eden, with the Promised Land, with Jerusalem and the temple, with Jesus' spiritual kingdom. The other I'm calling the demonic: it's what is associated with the heathen kingdoms of tyranny. (Frye 2004, 41)

The presence of these two archetypal aspects is evident in every image and symbol across most mythologies around the globe, reflecting humanity's collective unconscious (Tausiet 2019, 58). This suggests that imagery typically comprises both an Apocalyptic and a Demonic context, with very few images lacking either aspect (Frye 2004, 41). Such aspects align with Neumann's interpretation of two contrasting

archetypes: the Good Mother, which embodies a nurturing and creative feminine aspect of the Goddess, and the Terrible Mother, representing a destructive and aggressive side containing the negative feminine and masculine elements of the Feminine (2015, 21). These dual aspects of the Goddess figure illustrate the complex nature of divine feminine symbolism in mythology and psychology. Both the Good Mother and the Terrible Mother Archetypes would correspond, respectively, to the positive and negative aspects of the Great Mother (2015, 20). This is a uroboric primeval goddess originating from a primordial archetype that contains both the Good and Terrible aspects within herself, thereby creating a unified entirety:

A configured form of the Great Mother has emerged from the primordial archetype. Now an order is discernible in the elements. She has three forms: the good, the terrible, and the good-bad mother. The good feminine (and masculine) elements configure the Good Mother, who, like the Terrible Mother containing the negative elements, can also emerge independently from the unity of the Great Mother. The third form is that of the Great Mother who is good-bad and makes possible a union of positive and negative attributes. [...] Great Mother, Good Mother, and Terrible Mother form a cohesive archetypal group. (Neumann 2015, 21)

The human psyche would convey these fundamental archetypes through diverse symbolic representations, as the archetype's symbolism is expressed through specific psychic images that are individually perceived and vary for each archetype (Neumann 2015, 4). Thus, for instance, the Terrible Mother and the nurturing, kind Good Mother archetypes would manifest in different images, or as Frye would deem, in contrasting aspects of the same symbol. One not uncommon embodiment of the Terrible Mother is the ubiquitous fairy-tale evil stepmother, who is 'by far the most common of all the cruel relatives who persecute the hero or heroine' (Watson 1995, 258).

This paper will focus on analysing the stepmother of the Mazzini children – the sisters Emilia and Julia, and their brother Ferdinand – the marchioness Maria di Vellorno, in Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel *A Sicilian Romance* (1790). This analysis will provide insight into the character of the marchioness of Mazzini and her association with the Terrible Mother archetype through one of the archetype's most common embodiments, the figure of the evil stepmother. This paper will therefore focus on analysing two distinct traits found in all mythological figures associated with the Terrible Mother: the Terrible Mother's deadly and paralysing appearance, and the Demonic Aspect related to the *upper womb*, which carries all the destructive and negative female and male attributes of the Feminine, as mentioned above. This analysis will enhance our understanding of the Terrible Mother archetype in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* and its wider significance when one bears in mind Radcliffe's readership at the turbulent end of the 18th century. In doing so, this paper

will unveil the angst faced by the English public as they faced a dark future threatening their stable life, stemming from radicalism across the Channel. As the embodiments of this archetype emerge 'among those people who felt themselves utterly powerless before the voracious maw of an appalling war machine' (Schechter 1973, 253), Radcliffe will show the triumph of English social order over French revolutionary radicalism through the final demise of the evil stepmother in favour of the victorious heroine and her Good Mother (England) at a time of trouble and uprisings across the world.

As pointed out above, Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* is a keystone in Gothic literature, and a landmark in what is commonly known the Female Gothic: a tradition in which the male transgressor becomes the quintessential gothic villain, who wields his power as a patriarchal authority, abbot or family confessor, or some kind of tyrannical ruler (Rogers 2007, 38). This villain's sinister influence aims to "entrap the heroine, usurps the great house, and threatens death or rape" (Milbank 2009, 121). *A Sicilian Romance*, published in 1790, revolves around the events surrounding the fall of the old, feudal regime in the Sicilian house of Mazzini, with its symbolic abandonment of the medieval family castle, and the start of a new order with the rise of the Mazzini children, and the youngest daughter, Julia, in particular. After his wife's supposed death, the marquis of Mazzini marries again to Maria de Vellorno, who becomes the marchioness of Mazzini – and the novel's stepmother figure –, and leaves the family castle in Sicily with his new wife and son, Ferdinand. His daughters, Emilia and Julia, remain in the family castle and seat of their House under the care of Madame de Menon, an old friend of the late marchioness and mother of the Mazzini children. Eventually, following reports of supernatural occurrences and the death of Vincent, the marquis's loyal servant, the marquis and his entire household return to Castle Mazzini. Julia, the more spirited of the two sisters, falls in love with the Count de Vereza, Ferdinand's best friend. However, the marchioness, who is infatuated with Vereza, uses all her art of manipulation to attract the attention of the Count fruitlessly. Driven by jealousy towards Julia, she mistreats the sisters and conspires with the marquis to arrange an advantageous marriage between Julia and the violent, tyrannical Duke de Luovo, member of one of the most influential families across the sea, in Naples. Ferdinand urges Julia to escape her fatal destiny by eloping with his friend Vereza, but their plan is frustrated by the marquis, who seemingly kills Vereza and imprisons his own son, Ferdinand. Julia manages to run away from the castle, leaving Emilia to suffer confinement and suspicion, as the marchioness persuades the marquis of her involvement in her sister's disappearance.

The marquis's and the Duke's attempts to find and pursue Julia become complex, involving the Duke's temporary capture by a band of banditti led by his own

son, who had rebelled against his father's authoritarian and tyrannical character. In the meantime, Julia is granted temporary shelter in a convent with Madame de Menon, where she faces pressure from both the marquis and the Padre Abate, who compete for control over her. Eventually, Ferdinand finds and rescues Julia, revealing that Vereza survived his wounds. More typically Gothic twists ensue, including Julia being rescued from banditti by Vereza while she believes her brother is dead. After entering a cavern, Julia discovers her supposedly dead mother is alive, having been imprisoned for years by the marquis so he could marry Maria de Vellorno, the current marchioness. Following the characteristic feature of the Supernatural Explained that Female Gothic, and Radcliffe in particular, tends to adhere to (Botting 2005, 41-42), Radcliffe reveals that it was the old marchioness who was responsible for the ghostly moans in the castle's southern buildings, a common feature depicting what Deborah Rogers defines as "matrophobic Gothic" and whose core drama revolves around "identification with and separation from maternal figures" (Rogers 2007, 39). The marquis's murderous intentions and the marchioness's – Maria de Vellorno's – plotting are uncovered, leading to their own end. Out of embarrassment for having two living wives and fear of being publicly exposed he plans to kill his first wife to avoid scandal and more serious accusations of polygamy. In turn, the marchioness poisons the marquis after he learns about her infidelities and then stabs herself. After escaping the marquis's criminal plot, the family's matriarch is found to be safe and alive, hiding with Julia and Vereza in a lighthouse. The family reunites around her, leaving Sicily and the castle behind to start a new life in Naples.

The novel's gothic mood, brimming with some of the genres' devices such as the patriarchal castle, mistaken identities or banditti (see Botting 2005), would follow some of the darkest times in the history of England and Europe, with the aftermath of the French Revolution still vividly resonating in Radcliffe's ears as the Age of Terror in France was a pervading ghostly presence, dominating the public sphere and life (Butler 1989, 1; Michaelson and Moore 2022, 25), as the growing number of the so-called "Jacobin" novels published at the time indicate (Chew and Altick 2002, 1114-1115; Verderame 2012, 130). At the end of the eighteenth century, and barely a year before the publication of *A Sicilian Romance*, all of Europe was vigilant at the events taking place in France following the fall of the Bastille on 14th July 1789. In England in particular, responses to the French Revolution evolved from being "greeted with great enthusiasm" (Miles 1995, 58), as the herald of change – as did Radcliffe's dissenting intellectual circle (Watt 2014, 66), to fear and rejection as violence increased (Butler 1989, 3). Even if Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) published in the same year as *A Sicilian Romance* – began a "process of demonising radical politics" (Miles 1995, 59) that remained a minority by the time of its publication, it "achieved instant popularity, or notoriety, together with large sales"

(Butler 1989, 38) and soon unrest was felt across the Channel, where Britons felt the spirit of the Revolution could spread. This opened the way to a national anxiety reflected in the numerous volumes and political pamphlets with the Revolution at their centre (Butler 1989; Macleod 2007). Gothic production in the 1790s was quickly linked to the Terror to such a point that, as Robert Miles reminds us, “the currency of the smearing pun “the terrorist system of novel writing” [was] employed by reviewers during the latter half of the 1790s” (2006, 43). However, the feeding on this rather infamous reputation was both ways, as the Gothic also used the anxiety caused by the Revolution to fill pages and volumes with horrid imagery and terrifying tyrannical villains that would engross its readership in Britain; in Miles’ words, “the Gothic vogue fed on the revolutionary anxieties of its readership” (2006, 44). This follows Schechner’s view on the appearance of the Terrible Mother when a given society is at a time of trouble or social unrest (1973). It would, therefore, also explain the relevance of the marchioness’s actions, her selfish and violent behaviour, her crimes – adultery and the attempt to murder her husband – and the way she manipulates the marquis, and everyone around, in her own benefit. With the Terrible Mother’s demise at the close of the novel and the triumph of the enlightened heroine, Radcliffe, in her “teasing and elusive” fashion (Watt 2014, 80), appears to mitigate the social and cultural anxieties attached to this archetype, gesturing toward the possibility of transformation at a moment when “the mood on the radical side was unusually cheerful” (Butler 1989, 3).

As mentioned before, this paper will now focus on the first characteristic of the Terrible Mother to be analysed, which concerns the destructive attributes associated with the Feminine, and which will mark her appearance at the time of trouble Radcliffe’s contemporaries lived through. As moderate and cautious in her opinions as she could at first appear, Ann Radcliffe was fully conscious of the profound changes the Revolution could entail (Watt 2014, 81), echoing a nation’s anxiety in the face of a deep transformation and formidable challenges. This will show the marchioness as the terrible embodiment of the nation’s angst in front of an engulfing monster. As Neumann suggests, the uroboros is a symbol of the “psychic state of the beginning, of the original situation, in which a man’s consciousness and ego were still small and undeveloped” (Neumann 2015, 18), therefore symbolising the original, undivided cosmic ancestor who later separated into the Great Father and the Great Mother: ‘the most perfect example of the still undifferentiated primordial archetype’ (2015, 18). Within this primordial archetype, both the Archetypal Feminine and Archetypal Masculine emerged as distinct individuals, yet each retained elements of the other. For instance, the Archetypal Feminine “contains positive and negative male determinants aside from the predominant female elements” (Neumann 2015, 21), in greater or lesser degree. Among these elements the Terrible

Mother archetype embodies the negative aspects of death and destruction, along with an extreme – even violent – sexuality, stirring feelings of impotence – both psychological and physical – and forlornness in her presence (Neumann 2015, 149). This makes Terrible Mother embodiments take on imagery related to what Northrop Frye calls the Demonic Aspect, linked to instances of ruin, decay and the terrible (Frye 2004, 41). Thus, her symbolism predominantly draws from the inner experience, reflecting emotions of anguish, horror and fear of danger (Neumann 2015, 147), which would permeate the conscious world of those whose worlds seem to be about to collapse. As a result, the imagery linked to the Demonic Aspect of the Great Mother often features fantastic elements that do not exist in the real world. Consequently, the Terrible Mother often appears as monsters in myths and legends across different cultures, such as Kali in Indian mythology, the Gorgon Medusa and the sea monster Scylla in Greek mythology, the serpent-goddess Tlillan in Mexico (Tausiet 2019, 58), the Irish Mórrígan – the ‘great, phantom queen’ – in Celtic mythology (Aldhouse-Green 2015, 125; Ellis 1987, 173), or Hella¹, the dreadful daughter of the archdeceiver Loki, in Germanic mythology (Orchard 1997, 79). As Neumann points out, the dark aspect of the cosmic egg, symbolizing the Archetypal Feminine, “engenders terrible figures that manifest the black, abysmal side of life and the human psyche” (Neumann 2015, 148).

As mentioned earlier, one characteristic associated with this archetype is the petrifying gaze of these figures, which contrasts with the life-giving essence found in all living beings, serving as a dark counterpart to the nurturing womb (Leeming and Page 1994, 88). Drawing from this concept, the first mythological figure that springs to mind when considering the dark aspect of the Mother archetype is Medusa, one of the Gorgons from Hellenic mythology², who has the power to turn anyone who met her gaze into stone (Rooks 2016, 127). Greek mythology describes how Medusa’s gaze turns her victims into stone and, as a consequence, leaves them frozen and devoid of life. This transformation, marked by rigidity, is closely connected to the concept of death³ since Medusa’s petrifying gaze ‘belongs to the province of the Terrible Great Goddess, for to be rigid is to be dead’ (Neumann 2015, 166). In both a metaphorical and literal sense, the Greek myth of the snake-haired Medusa⁴ illustrates the connection between petrification and death (Jorge 2019, 60). Her victims are portrayed as

¹ Hella is the queen of Helheim, the underworld, in Germanic myth, and her name gave origin to the term “Hell” in the different Germanic languages, i.e. English “Hell”, German “Hölle”, Norwegian “Helvete”, among others.

² Eduardo Cirlot, in his canonical *Diccionario de símbolos*, deems the Gorgons, and Medusa in particular, as a prototypical Terrible Mother figure (Cirlot 2006, 225).

³ The Terrible Mother found in myths like those of Hecate or Medusa in Greece, Kali in India, or Tlillan in Aztec Mexico, is a deity associated with death and destruction (Jorge 2019; Tausiet 2019).

⁴ The snake’s negative aspect serves as a recurring symbol for figures representing the Terrible Mother (Rooks 2016, 127).

inanimate and inert, while her dwelling is rendered as the cold domain of death. David Leeming and Jake Page, in their exploration of the figures of the Goddess, offer an insight into the myth of Perseus, the son of the patriarchal god Zeus, and his confrontation with the fearful Gorgon. Tasked with the challenge to obtain the head of the snake-haired Gorgon, Perseus receives crucial aid from Hermes and Athena, which leads him to the island where Medusa lives and where “armed with Athena's bronze shield and Hermes's sword, Perseus eventually passed through rank after rank of inert, lifeless warriors standing like statues in the icy wind” (Leeming and Page 1994, 118), after which he beheads her. Yet, the deadly power of Medusa's gaze persists even after her demise. When the sun-hero Perseus returns home, he uses her decaying head to turn the king and his entourage into stone, effectively killing them (Leeming and Page 1994, 19).

Following in her mythological and witch-like folktale predecessors' footsteps, Radcliffe's marchioness does not only intrude into social and political spheres stealing “the embodiment of male authority” (Williams 2016, 92-93) traditionally reserved for and still dominated by men in the 18th century, but she also attempts at dominating and manipulating those around her, at the same time that she seeks male attention. As she enters the castle at the beginning of the novel, one can perceive how she controls the entire situation, from her husband, whose gloom “broke away in smiles of welcome”, to the numerous retinue that follow her and “whom pleasure attracted to her train” (Radcliffe 1998, 15). Her imposing, and voluptuous, appearance annuls men's wills to suit her plans, which is most noticeable in her influence on her husband the marquis, who she dominates through his passion towards her “so as to render him relentless in the pursuit of ambitious purposes” (Radcliffe 1998, 70). The marquis's leading role in his own dominions, or rather his submission to the marchioness's, is such that, after Julia's flight from her father's – and the marchioness's – plans to marry her to the Duke de Luovo, it is the marchioness who inflames the already tense situation and “orders all the habitable parts of the castle were explored, and she herself assisted in the search” (Radcliffe 1998, 72). The marchioness takes the leading role, even the hunting one, from her husband, who passively expresses his inflamed rage at Julia's breach of his plans. The marchioness becomes the head of the house of Mazzini, the leader of Julia's hunt and the one who takes over her husband's role as he moans for his loss in authority.

However, the Terrible Mother's traits go beyond her domination and active agency, as she shows an unyielding, emotionless demeanour reminiscent of the petrifying gaze Perseus encountered when he faced the terrible Gorgon. Throughout the narrative, the marchioness maintains an impassive, glacial disposition, revealing no guilt for her transgressions. This unwavering coldness echoes the lifeless, petrified state of the Terrible Mother's victims, as the marchioness remains unmoved by the

consequences of her actions. After all the persecution, both physical and psychological, she lead against Julia, spurring the marquis to treat his own daughter as a criminal and marrying her against her will (Radcliffe 1998, 60), the only regret felt by the marchioness is for the death of her adulterous love interest, Verezza, as he was supposedly killed by the marquis in a duel when he tries to elope with Julia:

When the marchioness learned the fate of Hippolitus, the resentment of jealous passion yielded to emotions of pity. Revenge was satisfied, and she could now lament the sufferings of a youth whose personal charms had touched her heart as much as his virtues had disappointed her hopes. (Radcliffe 1998, 70)

Yet, her nature makes her only feel for the incompleteness of her sexual desires, as she had not satisfied her wishes with the Count de Verezza, who “conducted himself toward her with frigid indifference” (Radcliffe 1998, 11) and had never shown to her any disposition to do so. Her lack of remorse makes her blind to reason and to own up to what she had done; instead, she “poured upon the defenceless Julia her anger for that calamity of which she herself was the unwilling cause” (Radcliffe 1998, 70). Moreover, the marchioness’s haughtiness in the face of evidence for her trespasses is such that, when the marquis discovers her infidelities, she is blind to proof and “boldly asserted her innocence, and instantly invented a story, the plausibility of which might have deceived a man who had evidence less certain than his senses to contradict it” (Radcliffe 1998, 188). Wielding her influence over her husband with cunning manipulation rather than overt force, the marchioness embodies the Terrible Mother archetype. Unlike the Gorgon’s petrifying gaze, her jealous eyes subtly erode the marquis’s willpower, revealing his moral and spiritual weakness. The marquis, rendered passive and effectively “castrated” by his wife’s machinations⁵, relinquishes control of the castle and family affairs, as the marchioness “had the direction of the whole [of Julia’s wedding]” (Radcliffe 1998, 65). In contrast, the marchioness assumes a dominant role, actively governing the household and orchestrates Julia’s marriage, demonstrating the power dynamics at play in their relationship.

The Terrible Mother archetype’s connection to death transcends the petrifying gaze explored in the previous paragraphs, extending into a symbolic representation of the upper womb through the metaphor of the lips. As every symbol has two embodiments in humankind’s imagery (Frye 2004, 31), a Paradisal Aspect and a Demonic Aspect, Neumann (2015, 165) articulates two profound representations of the womb. The Paradisal Aspect of the womb emerges as a lush, tender mouth, where

⁵ As Sarah Lippert suggests, mythical Terrible Mother figures’ ability to petrify or decapitate their victims could also be ‘interpreted in terms of castration’ (Lippert 2014, 249; Williams 2016, 91).

lips are metaphorically intertwined with female genitalia, symbolising the mouth as an upper womb – a sacred origin of life and wisdom. Conversely, its Demonic Aspect manifests as a destructive and deadly womb, archetypally portrayed through the haunting image of a mouth filled with teeth, known in symbolic language as the *vagina dentata*. This intricate symbolic duality reveals the complex nature of the Great Mother archetype, with its Good and Terrible Mother archetypal representations. Here, the same archetypal element can simultaneously embody creation and destruction, tenderness and terror, life and death. Thus, the lips become a powerful liminal space that represents the threshold between existence and non-existence, nurturing and consuming, in which the Terrible Mother takes the Demonic Aspect of the inert, barren womb. Embodying primal fears – like those aroused by revolutionary ideals across from revolutionary France – and the complex, often contradictory, nature of maternal energy, this symbolism emerges vividly across diverse mythologies. Greek mythology offers particularly rich representations of this archetype. Scylla emerges as a haunting figure for those who try to cross the sea – a beautiful woman with three sharply fanged hellhounds as her lower half, symbolising a devouring whirlpool of destructive feminine power. Medusa and her Gorgon sisters, as seen before, further crystallise this archetypal image, with their snaky hair, boar's tusks, beards and protruding tongues representing the Mother Goddess in her most terrifying manifestation (Cirlot 2006, 225; Leeming and Page 1994, 117; Neumann 2015, 169).

However, beyond the petrifying figure of Medusa, Indian mythology stands out as one of the most notable sources of the Terrible Mother archetype, splendidly personified by Kali, as she is 'dark, all-devouring time, the bone-wreathed Lady of the place of skulls' (Zimmer 1968, 81). Kali's connection to the Demonic representation of the *upper womb* is particularly evident as '[h]er teeth are blood-stained fangs. Rivers of blood flow from her; her stomach is a constant devourer of the equally constant plenitude of her womb' (Leeming and Page 1994, 24). Similarly, Kali appeared to the Indian mystic Ramakrishna, rising from the Ganges in a scene that intertwines life-giving and death:

One quiet afternoon Ramakrishna beheld a beautiful woman ascend from the Ganges and approach the grove in which he was meditating. He perceived that she was about to give birth to a child. In a moment the babe was born, and she gently nursed it. Presently, however, she assumed a horrible aspect, took the infant in her now ugly jaws and crushed it, chewed it. Swallowing it, she returned again to the Ganges, where she disappeared. (From 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna', quoted in Campbell (1973, 115) and Schechter (1973, 253))

This portrayal of Kali vividly captures the dual nature of life, where her *upper womb* simultaneously creates and destroys life, symbolised by her giving birth to a child and then consuming it with her mouth filled with sharp fangs, evoking the concept of the *vagina dentata* (Schechter 1973, 254). As Harold Schechter reminds us through Kali imagery, the Terrible Mother's image of the *vagina dentata* functions as a metaphor for collective cultural anxiety amid social, political and humanitarian crisis.

The motif of the *vagina dentata*, or barren womb in the marchioness of Mazzini might be compared to the vivid representations found in Medusa, Scylla or the Indian Kali. However, its underlying presence remains discernible. The upper womb symbolism, previously discussed as the origin of breath and life, contrasts sharply with the destructive aspect of the Feminine, embodied in the concept of the deadly, inert womb, a duality that reflects the complex nature of feminine archetypes in literature and mythology, who invert the nurturing aspect of motherhood into a destructive force. This transformation echoes the dual nature of creation and destruction associated with Terrible Mother figures and embodiments, like the evil stepmother or the folktale witch, or myth and literary figures like Medea or Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth (Bornham-Puyal & Martín Martín 2025, 53). In *A Sicilian Romance*, the underlying themes of terrifying feminine power resonate with the character's portrayal, albeit in a more nuanced manner. As we examine the marchioness's motherly role in the novel, we can notice how she represents the quintessential fairy-tale stepmother, even if at first encountering her stepdaughters, Julia and Emilia, she is given the opportunity to become the mother they did not have. As Julia sees the marchioness enter the castle accompanied by her retinue, among whom the girls' brother Ferdinand is, "her breast throbbed; her heart beat quickly with joy, and she lost her apprehensions from the marchioness in a sort of wild delight hitherto unknown to her. The arrival of the marchioness seemed indeed the signal of universal and unlimited pleasure" (Radcliffe 1998, 15). However, the marchioness shows her selfish, self-centred side, exercising her "ill-humoured caprice" (Radcliffe 1998, 115) upon the sisters, who she feels as a threat to her position within the family, and her love interest, Count Verezza. This is intensified as the "mother role" in the family has already been taken by the girls' nurse, who is discovered to be their supposedly dead mother's best friend. Julia and Emilia grow in their family castle in Sicily accompanied by Madame de Menon in a sort of Edenic setting away from their father and brother Ferdinand, and their stepmother the marchioness. Radcliffe unfolds de Menon's physical and intellectual nurturing qualities, as the narrator tells the reader that Madame de Menon "loved her young charge with maternal fondness" (Radcliffe 1998, 4). Therefore, the marchioness is introduced in the narrative as a potential mother figure who could bring life, albeit an imperfect mother, however, she soon comes across as the quintessential fairy-tale

stepmother, a fairytale embodiment of the Terrible Mother herself. The stepmother of the Mazzini children, the marchioness, is a woman whose womb not only fails to bring life but, instead, becomes a source of death and destruction.

In conclusion, the examination of the archetype of the Terrible Mother in Ann Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* gives a deep insight into the influence of mythological and legendary elements on literary works, and their relevance in understanding society's fears and anxieties. From the matrix of the Great Mother archetype, this analysis reveals the complex interweaving of archetypal figures such as the Terrible Mother in constructing narrative frameworks, demonstrating how ancient storytelling traditions continue to shape modern literature – from mythical monsters, through evil stepmothers to evil gothic *femme fatales*. By employing such archetypes, authors tap into universal human experiences, creating stories that resonate across cultural boundaries and explore timeless themes. One such theme is the angst felt in the face of an unpredictable future triggered by dramatic changes, such as social, political or economic revolutions. This analysis has explored the portrayal of the marchioness in *A Sicilian Romance* through the lens of the Terrible Mother. By employing archetypal concepts from Neumann, Frye or Tausiet, the destructive aspects associated with this figure have been highlighted, alongside the parallelisms between the marchioness of Mazzini and mythical embodiments of the archetype. Furthermore, the analysis has contextualised the narrative within the turbulent socio-political landscape of late 18th and early 19th century Europe, which had a strong resonance in England, giving a voice to that angst the English felt as they saw how a nation across the English Channel succumbed to trouble and terror. These implications – specifically, the emergence of Terrible Mother figures in times of trouble (Schechter 1973, 253) – have been further examined through the parallels drawn between the marchioness of Mazzini and mythological figures such as Medusa or Kali, fairy-tale wicked stepmothers, or literary embodiments of the archetype like Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. These address specific motifs linked to the Terrible Mother, in particular, her petrifying stare and presence, which may lead to a totalitarian control of her victims, and the symbolism of the *upper womb*, both associated with decay, death and destruction. This paper has essentially integrated literary analysis, archetypal theory and historical context to reveal how, by associating the marchioness of Mazzini with these powerful and often feared feminine entities, Radcliffe's narrative taps into deep-rooted cultural anxieties and universal fears, which she seems to appease with the embodiment of the Terrible Mother and the triumph of the enlightened heroine at the close of the novel. This correlation highlights how the Terrible Mother archetype still serves as a potent symbol of chaos, transformation and the darker aspects of the feminine psyche, as powerful nowadays as in ancient times, or as in the unstable England of the 1790s.

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Portrayal of Chinese People and their Chineseness: Contrasting Hollywood Blockbusters with Asian Media Productions



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Abstract

The Orient is often depicted as a dependent entity whose presentation is framed within a Western perspective. This paper explores the various presentations and perceptions of China, the Chinese, and their sense of Chineseness as shown in Hollywood blockbusters and Asia media productions. Through dissecting the media presentations of Chinese cultural identity, this paper raises the question of the possibility of delinking the East from Western monetary fantasies about the country. To achieve these aims, different genres across the media are discussed to determine whether Chineseness has been commodified. Specifically, would amalgamation of dissimilar Chinese communities appear? Are objective evaluations made in assessing the genuineness of these different Chinese communities while presenting their dissimilarities? Although Hong Kong is a Chinese city, this metropolis has developed unique and hybrid characteristics owing to its historical background as a British colony and financial role as a business hub. This paper investigates whether the exceptional features of Hong Kong and its people as shown from various media products can be differentiated from other Chinese elements.

Key words

orientalist perspective, Hollywood films, Asian media productions, Chineseness, Hong Kong

Introduction

As a pioneer who advocates the study of literary works in view of social and cultural politics, the eminent roles played by Edward Said (1935-2003) and his legendary work *Orientalism* (1978) remain exceptional. In explaining the relationships between Westerners and Orientals in the first decade of the twentieth century, he points out that “There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated” (Said 1979, 36). He further exemplifies the unequal power relations by saying that for the Orientals, it “usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power” (Said 1979, 36). Colonialism represents the

manifestation of Western desire in attaining wealth and power in the Orient. Other than being a prolific novelist, Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) was famously known as a Conservative politician who was twice British Prime Minister (Feb–Dec 1868 and 1874–1880). These multiple roles affirm Said's stance on the possible linkages between literary creativity and the corresponding social and political spectrums. During Disraeli's time in office, the British Empire reached the peak of its power. An emblematic cue of Disraeli's connection with the East in his political life was the purchase of the Suez Canal shares in 1875. In addition to settling a transaction of one hundred million francs, "[g]reat sums [had] to be expended on thorough and substantial repairs," as the Canal's entrance at Port Said was "in a critical state" (Fitzgerald 1876, 296-297):

There is an almost certain prospect of secure interest for the outlay, and there is an undercurrent belief that the shares would somehow secure the right of passage to India. But in this view the ownership of the shares is simply surplusage, as the right of way to India would have been claimed and asserted on broader and higher grounds. (Fitzgerald 1876, 296)

The benefits brought to Britain behind the tremendous sums of investment went far beyond the tolls. Besides securing Britain's colonial interests in India, the purchase of the Suez Canal shares also guaranteed the Empire's monetary benefits in the East. Therefore, the deal realistically actualized the Western invention of aligning the East with the promise of wealth.

Western fascination with China's profitable opportunities is a long-standing historical trend. It originated from Marco Polo's descriptions of the glamorous aspects of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) under the great Mogol ruler Kublai Khan (1215-1294). The history of modern China witnessed both internal weakness and disunity, in addition to growing external threats that violate territorial integrity. This political backdrop, together with the colonial framework, objectified China as a passive entity of Western fantasy. Stuart Hall (1932-2014) points out the inclusion of the Far East and China in the general understanding of "the Orient", though Said's analysis of its referent is mostly confined to the Middle East (Hall 1992b, 205). The situation of China in the late Qing Dynasty was characterized by various forms of foreign aggression and economic exploitation. As Hall reminds us that discourse "always operate[s] in relation to power – they are part of the way power circulates and is contested" (Hall 1992b: 205), this paper dissects whether the evolution of powers and the replacement of cultural colonialism by European imperialism in the succeeding generation result in a different Western discourse on China, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as the "continuing construction of the

subaltern” (Spivak 1994, 90). To avoid subjectivity generated by a biased gaze, a contrast over the presentation of Chinese people in Hollywood blockbusters with that of the insider-outside perspective as shown in Asian American writers’ and film producers’ works would be shown. An exemplification of Chinese people in Hollywood blockbusters enables exploration of whether the rise of China as a world economic power in the globalized age has reversed established perceptions of the West, and if the portrayal of China is still a prosperous career to those in the West. The discussion would therefore testify the applicability of Spivak’s concept on “strategic essentialism” as “peoples stand in the same relation to global capitalism and should respond to it in the same way” (Leitch 2001, 2194). Inspired by Hall’s theorization that the differentiation of “the West and the Rest” originates from stereotyping, “a one-sided description which results from the collapsing of complex differences into a simple ‘cardboard cutout’” where “[d]ifferent characteristics are run together or condensed into one” (Hall 1992b, 215), further investigation will be made to check if the outsider mode can effectively distinguish Chinese people of different communities. The discussion gives an overview of the presentation of China and Hong Kong and the traits of their people. To concur Hall’s reminder on the broad dimension of the East and his affirmation that “technologically speaking, Japan is ‘western’, though on our mental map it is about as far ‘East’ as you can get” (Hall 1992b, 205), a case study that features Japanese discourse on China is included in the discussion. In addition to Hall’s categorization of Japan as the West by means of its level of technological advancement, the choice of focusing on Japan among other Asian neighbors can be explained by the age-long complex and evolving relationships between the two nations. An examination on the distinction of China from its close neighbor and historical rival, Japan, in the final part serves to provide an Asian glimpse on the depiction of a frenemy relationship.

Amalgamation and Differentiation in Contemporary Hollywood Films

In the process of imposing contemporary values on global audiences, Hollywood films affect Western apprehension of Chineseness in the modern era with its tendency of misrepresenting China, Hong Kong, and their people. Still, Stuart Hall affirms the understanding of one’s identity through various forms of representation:

[T]o speak of identity as constituted, not outside but within representation, and, hence, of cinema not as second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists but as that form of representation which is also able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects and thereby enable us to discover who we are. (Hall 1992a, 106)

As a result of Hong Kong's position as a British colony (1841-1997), the major differentiations between Hong Kong and other Chinese cities in terms of the former's hybrid culture and multilingual environment have long been acknowledged by Hollywood productions. The success of Hollywood movies set in Hong Kong in the pre-multicultural era, such as *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955) and *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), immortalizes Hong Kong as a territory where East meets West through the depictions of interracial romance. Specifically, both films feature taboo relationships between white males who sojourn in Hong Kong and women of Asian descent. In *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955), the married American war journalist Mark Elliot undergoes a trial separation with his wife. During his stay in Hong Kong, he falls in love with the widowed Eurasian doctor Han Suyin. Other than Mark's marital status, the identity of Suyin's husband as a Chinese Nationalist military officer who dies in the Chinese Civil War means that her interracial relationship is destined to be opposed and condemned under the conservative framework. The forbidden romance between Mark and Suyin illustrates the necessary alignment of one's patriotic awareness with the corresponding love interest. While Suyin is portrayed as the embodiment of oriental femininity and professional prowess, Suzie Wong in *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) reinforces the Orientalist stereotype through depicting a Chinese damsel in distress awaiting a white savior for rescue. In this film, Robert Lomax is a middle-aged American who moves to Hong Kong to pursue his dream in becoming an artist. He then has an encounter with Suzie. That Suzie is both a prostitute and model of Robert's art piece jointly objectify her as a woman placed under male gaze. Daniel J. Huppatz delves into Hong Kong's local identity through the perspectives of design and heritage. He observes the ways that *The World of Suzie Wong* "helped forge a pervasive image of Hong Kong in the Western popular imagination" (Huppatz 2006, 67).

The portrayal of Western males' gaze upon Eurasian women in these films is a symbolic representation of the West's interests in the East. In the post-colonial age, several Hollywood blockbusters have chosen Hong Kong as one of their settings. Among them, *The Dark Knight* (2008) in the Batman series and *The Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014) aroused much attention. Different from their predecessors aforementioned, these films have focused on Hong Kong's iconic skyline. As a result, their plots show minimal connections with Hong Kong and its people. *The Dark Knight* follows the typical *Batman* convention that features Batman's intention to dismantle criminal enterprise led by the Joker. In addition to featuring the fictional Gotham City, the backdrop of the *Batman* series, *The Dark Knight* has several filming locations which include Chicago, London and Hong Kong. While this combination is a demonstration of Hollywood's recognition towards the sound financial position of

Hong Kong, the film's portrayal of corruption themes and Chinese involvement of organized crimes resulted in the ultimate decision of the Warner Bros. to avoid the release of the film in China. While this case exemplifies a failed attempt to profit from the East, *The Transformers: Age of Extinction* shows a successful Sino-American co-production. This blockbuster was jointly produced by Paramount Pictures and China Movie Channel, a Chinese government-affiliated production agency. Such a legendary partnership guarantees both global distribution and the selection of cast and materials that resonate with Chinese audiences. Specifically, the prominent Chinese actress Li Bingbing (1973–) plays the role of Su Yueming in the film. She is the CEO of a factory that manufactures artificial Transformers.

Although these films may finally reverse the Hollywood culture of objectifying the Orient, they tend to present the congruous nature of Chinese cities. Tammy L.H. Ho, president of PEN Hong Kong, initiates that the genuineness of Hong Kong landscapes diminishes in the Hollywood films of the globalized era. In anatomizing the conflation of Hong Kong and Shanghai in the propaganda of the science fiction film *Arrival* (2016), Ho comments that “It is as if all Chinese cities are generically similar and interchangeable” (Ho 2018, 54). The following example anatomizes the amalgamation of Chinese languages in *The Dark Knight*.

In a Hong Kong scene of *The Dark Knight*, the use of Putonghua in conversation by the local villain, Lau, aroused heated discussion. The scene depicts Batman's intention to arrest Lau in Hong Kong so as to bring him back to Gotham police. In *The Dark Knight*, Lau converses in Putonghua, whereas two other characters use Cantonese. It is uncertain whether this arrangement represents the combination of different Sinitic elements in Hong Kong. The Education Bureau in Hong Kong released in September 1997 new guidance for secondary schools on the medium of instruction, almost immediately after the handover of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to China. The guidance stated that “Our aim is for our students to be biliterate (i.e. master written Chinese and English) and trilingual (i.e. speak fluent Cantonese, Putonghua, and English)” (Education Bureau 2022). Cantonese is the native language used by the locals. In fact, many Hongkongers are disappointed that Cantonese as a distinctive feature has been overlooked and even grouped with the dominant Putonghua on the mainland. In the movie, the focus on skyscrapers may successfully illustrate the city's status as a world-class financial center. However, the uniqueness of local features is omitted.

Although it is the philosophy of movie makers to fulfill the dreams of the audience by turning impossibilities into realistic illusions inside a cinematic frame, Hollywood cinematography achieves success in the industry via the magic trick of transforming actors and actresses of various nationalities into Chinese or Hongkongers. For instance, actress American actress Jennifer Jones (1919-2009) is

casted as Han Suyin, a woman of Chinese and European descent, in *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*. Leung Wing-fai studies the representation of Asian identities in Hollywood and remarks that “there has been a history of Hollywood’s conflation of East Asian actors: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean actors often play a variety of Asian characters” (Leung 2012, 168). In the eighteenth James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997), Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh (1962–) plays the role of Wai Lin, a Chinese secret agent who assists Bond in destroying the triad-based conspiracy that affects world peace. In *The Dark Knight*, Singaporean actor Ng Chin Han (1969–) plays the role of Lau. Unsurprisingly, Michelle Yeoh and Ng Chin Han are both of Chinese descent. Michelle Yeoh also starred in numerous Hong Kong movies since her engagement in the industry in 1983. The appearance of Michelle Yeoh in this production paved the way for her subsequent roles in many other Hollywood blockbusters, such as *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (2008). She became the first Asian to be awarded as the Best Actress in the Academy Awards for role as the Chinese-American immigrant Evelyn Quan Wang in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022). There are also cases of casting non-Chinese actors in Chinese roles. Philip Ahn (1905–1978) was a Korean-American. He was often regarded as the first Korean-American film actor. He became the first Asian to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame posthumously in 1984. His roles can be seen in *King of Chinatown* (1939) as Robert Rob Li, also in *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* as Suyin’s third uncle in China, and well-remembered role as Master Kan in the television series *Kung Fu* (1972–1975). The versatility of Asian actors in global cinema the succeeding generations could also be verified through another Korean-American actor Sung Kang (1972–). While he is famous for his portrayal of the Korean character Han Lue in the *Fast and Furious* franchise (2001–), he also features in *9:30* (2004), a short film of 13 minutes as Chan Kin Fai, a man of Chinese descent; and as Kwang in the thriller *Weekend in Taipei* (2004).

Insider-outsider Dynamics in Asian American Works

Pheng Cheah suggests that “[w]e live in an era where nationalism seems to be out of favor” (Cheah 1998, 106). He adds that “[S]ince contemporary critics of nationalism regard it as a particularistic mode of consciousness or even a private ethnic identity which disguises itself as a universalism, cosmopolitanism is the obvious choice as an intellectual ethic or political project that can better express or embody genuine universalism” (Cheah 1998, 106). While the differences between Chinese Asians, mainland Chinese, and Hongkongers remain unnoticeable to global viewers, Hong Kong audiences hold a drastically different perspective on maintaining localism in the age of globalization. At the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference in

2018, the world-renowned martial arts superstar Jackie Chan expressed his view that there should not be any distinction between Chinese and Hong Kong films:

Now, we don't say whether a film is a Hong Kong film or a Chinese film – Hong Kong films are Chinese films as well. It's only about whether you are making local films – like in Shenyang you make Shenyang films, in Shandong you make Shandong films, many of them can't get out of Shandong or Chaozhou. (Cheng 2018)

This remark emphasizes how successful blockbusters are almost solely dependent upon the audience's size in generating box office revenue. Other than aesthetic contribution, the portrayal of local features is disregarded. Jackie Chan's remark immediately led to condemnation from Hong Kong filmmakers and ordinary viewers who support local film productions that illustrate Hong Kong outside a conformed Chinese framework.

Although many Hongkongers are descendants of Chinese immigrants who arrived during the Second World War or the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a strong sense of distinction exists between these second- or third-generation Chinese immigrants who are rooted in Hong Kong from those whose citizenship remains in China. While Hollywood producers may have ignored cultural and dialectal differences, American writers with Asian origins, such as Amy Tan (1952–) and Kevin Kwan (1973–), are relatively more aware of this distinction. Claire Jean Kim, specialist of ethnic-civic dichotomy in America, remarks that Asian Americans during the generation of *Suzie Wong* conceded their outsiders status under mainstream marginalization:

[T]he United States is the adoptive land of Asian Americans and celebrates Nancy Kwan's discussion of Asian Americans as "we" versus "them" (White Americans) in a way that powerfully inscribes Asian American "otherness." As always, relative valorization implies civic ostracism. (Kim 1999, 122)

A comparison of Amy Tan and Kevin Kwan's presentations of different Chinese people in their novels reveals the importance of securing the Chinese market. This is particularly true when Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians* (2013) has been adapted by Jon M. Chu (1979–), an American filmmaker whose parents immigrated to the States from Taiwan and Hong Kong, into a Hollywood movie in 2018. Adele Lim (1975–), a Malaysian of Chinese descent, serves as the co-screen writer of the film. The Asian crew in this American production emphasizes the importance of maintaining a worldwide reputation in making the East a sustainable career.

Both Amy Tan and Kevin Kwan apply insider-outsider dynamics in designing

their characters with varying levels of Chinese or Asian connections. In Tan's debut and bestselling novel, *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), one of the Chinese mothers named Gu Ying-ying (a.k.a. Betty St. Clair) is an immigrant from Wushi, near Shanghai in China. Similar to the experience of many new immigrants, Ying-ying faces communication problem as she is not proficient in English. This isolates her from her English Irish husband and mixed-race daughter, Lena. Ying-ying also fails to engage in the Chinatown neighborhood in Oakland, where most Chinese Americans speak a different Chinese language. Ying-ying's mother tongue is Mandarin, but "[w]here we lived and shopped, everyone spoke Cantonese or English" (Tan 1989, 117). As an insider of the Chinese-American community, Tan's careful observation and knowledge of the different varieties of the Chinese language help her provide a vivid and truthful evaluation of the hardships faced by Ying-ying in the foreign land. In Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy (2013, 2015, and 2017), many typical, if not stereotypical, characteristics of wealthy Asians are depicted. More than merely informing Western audiences about the speedy transformation of China into a country of enormous wealth through ridicule, the series contains careful observations on the dissimilar characterization of various Asians sharing the same Chinese ancestry. For instance, Kwan's sequel *China Rich Girlfriend* (2015) illustrates how a simple phrase referring to a hotel can be an indication of the speaker's origin:

"I'm surprised you wanted to meet here. Don't you think the tearoom at the Four Seasons is much nicer?" Valerie asked.

"Or even the Peninsula," Lester chimed in [...]

"The Peninsula gets too many tourists, and the Four Seasons is where all the new people go. The Mandarin is where proper Hong Kong families have been coming to tea for generations. My grandmother Lady Ko-Tung used to bring me here at least once a month when I was a girl," Corinna patiently explained, adding, "You must also leave out the 'Oriental' – we locals simply call it 'the Mandarin'". (Kwan 2015, 19)

Opened in 1928, the Peninsula has been an iconic hotel in Hong Kong since the colonial era. As the oldest hotel in Hong Kong still in operation, this legendary status enhances its popularity. While the prestigious position and historic background allow worldwide tourist attraction, its crowded state drives away many locals who really would like to have quiet and relaxing afternoon tea. "The Mandarin" has a humble façade. Although it is located in Hong Kong's central business district, its serene interior design offers its guests a luxurious retreat. The short conversations in Kwan's novel reveal the different identities of the three people involved, with the couple Valerie and Lester who recently come from China as elite immigrants and Corinna as a member of a pedigreed family in Hong Kong. The Hollywood movie

based on Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* premiered in 2018. Cultural reporter and writer Karen K Ho confirms that the East and its people have been commodified as a result of the overwhelming success of the novel and its film adaptation:

[B]oth for fans of Kevin Kwan's best-selling book series, which inspired the film, and for Asian audiences the world over who have waited decades to see themselves represented onscreen in all their diversity. Hollywood has grown increasingly dependent on Asian financiers and global audiences to turn a profit. (Ho 2018)

Twenty-five years after the release of the film adaptation of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* in 1993, *Crazy Rich Asians*, which features majority Asian cast, became a global hit. This phenomenon demonstrates that the East is still a promising career.

Chinese people and their Chineseness in Japanese Television

To provide a direct response towards the claim of categorizing Japan as "the West", and to comprehend how this maritime neighbor of China perceives China and its people in the recent generation, this part analyses the dynamics of Sino-Japanese frenemy relationship through a Japanese television drama. How the world perceives a country is highly related to its history and development. Before the 2022 Winter Olympics, Pew Research Centre conducted a survey on the global perception of China:

Most of the 17 global publics surveyed by the Center in 2021 had a negative view of China. Unfavorable views were highest in Japan, where nearly nine-in-ten adults (88%) said they had an unfavorable opinion. In many publics, unfavorable views of China were at or near historic highs in surveys going back to 2002. (Connaughton 2022)

As the participants were citizens of seventeen highly developed countries, a previous survey – the 2018 China National Image Global Survey – serves as a reference for the global image of China. In it, China scored 6.22 out of 10 in terms of its overall image. The survey comprised citizens from 22 countries regarding their impressions of China. Developing countries generally had a better impression of China than developed countries, and respondents from Japan showed the most unfavorable impression, giving the country a score of 3.7 points out of 10 (Center for Communication International Studies 2018). While Kevin Kwan presents super-wealthy Chinese as people who lead a lifestyle beyond ordinary imagination in his works, the following part explains how ordinary Chinese people are represented in those countries in which the respondents reported an undesirable impression of China.

As a close neighbor of China, Japan viewed this country as a model of learning long ago during the Tang dynasty (618–907) and later a target for annexation during the Second World War (1939–1945). The changing relationship between the two countries shows how Japan was initially fascinated by China's wealth and prosperity. For instance, monks, scholars, government officials, and artisans were sent on missions to China to enrich themselves in various areas. However, as China became weak and corrupt during the Qing dynasty (1636–1912), Japan joined the Western powers to exploit China. Sino-Japanese relationship in the contemporary era is characterized by close economic ties.

The discussion in this part intends to illustrate how a 21st century media production attempts to portray the complex Sino-Japanese relationships that blend friendship with outwitting acts in achieving a mutually beneficial equilibrium. The multi-layered relation between the two countries beyond the surface level is reflected in a 2016 Japanese television drama entitled *Naomi and Kanako* (ナオミとカナコ), produced by Fuji TV. This television drama features two notable Chinese characters. As the title suggests, the plot centers around two women named Naomi and Kanako, who used to be college friends. One day, Kanako confesses to Naomi that she is victim of ongoing physical violence. Kanako can no longer bear the abusive behavior of her husband. These two women then start to hatch a perfect plan to murder Kanako's brutal husband.

The first notable Chinese character in this Japanese television drama is Madam Li Zhu Mei, a migrant who runs a Chinese grocery store in Japan. Her first appearance is a very unpleasant one. She is presented as a greedy Chinese woman who steals an expensive watch from where Naomi works during a VIP function for a group of wealthy Chinese customers. The role of Li is played by the experienced Japanese actress Atsuko Takahata (高畑淳子). Despite Li's greedy behavior, she later becomes Naomi's friend and trusted advisor. Li's words inspire Naomi to be a tough, if not a cold-blooded, woman:

Naomi: Actually, I have a college friend who is suffering from family violence inflicted by her husband.

Li: Kill him!

Naomi: Eh?

Li: That man does not deserve to continue living. A man who beats his woman should be killed.

Naomi: But the police will arrest us.

Li: Then think of a way that you won't be caught.¹

¹ *Naomi and Kanako* (ナオミとカナコ), directed by Kô Kanai, Hiroki Hayama and Shunsuke Shinada (Fuji TV, 2016).

Li is portrayed as an ambivalent character. It is unclear whether she is a real ally of Naomi. From the feminist perspective, she is responsible for turning Naomi into a fearless woman to assist her friend in fighting against the tyranny of patriarchal brutality. From the legal perspective, her words are powerful enough to trigger a disastrous crime.

Another Chinese character in the same television drama is the illegal migrant Lin Hong Hui. Lin and Kanako's husband look alike, and indeed, both roles are played by the same Japanese actor Ryuta Sato (佐藤隆太). After killing Kanako's husband, Lin takes the former's identity for a while until his ultimate return to China and Kanako's safe departure from Japan. Lin's caring aspect sharply contrasts with the abusive nature of Kanako's husband.

The two Chinese characters, Li and Lin, jointly exhibit China as a nation of many faces. Specifically, China represents wealth by having a large consumer market awaiting top quality and premium products from Japan. China also provides cheap labor for its neighboring countries. The way in which Li stimulates Naomi's immoral aspect for the sake of her friend Kanako implies that tough actions may be necessary in order to achieve certain aims. The director leaves room for the audience to consider whether the presentation carries derogatory implications.

Concluding remarks

This article provides an overview on the presentation of China and Hong Kong, and the traits of their people in both Hollywood movies and other cross-cultural creative works from Asia. Each case examined here confirms how the East has always been a career for Westerners. Marco Polo's descriptions of the glamorous and fascinating aspects of the Orient as the object of Western fantasy, as much as Hollywood's visualization of the textual depiction of the Orient into images, have eternalized stereotyped perceptions in Western minds.

Modern Hollywood depicts Hong Kong as a city with skyscrapers without personality and photogenic residential estates. The sharp differences between China and Hong Kong remain minimal in Western media productions. The contrast between Hollywood's approach of collapsing various Chinese communities and the insider-outsider dichotomy of Asian American writers suggests that established Western conceptions are curbed by producers who could project more faithful reflections. Luckily, Asian American writers grasp the essential differences between the two, demonstrating the necessity of presenting the East using an insider-outsider perspective for a more genuine and faithful presentation.

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